

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
March 23, 2008

An Easter Victory

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for our sermon this morning is the Gospel which was read earlier.

Darkness. Ask a child what they're afraid of and more often than not, they'll tell you that they are afraid of the dark. The darkness can elicit many feelings. You hear a strange sound in the dark and you wonder what is lurking. Your eyes play tricks on you, showing you things in the dark when they're not really there.

On this particular day, a Sunday, Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb of Jesus in the dark. She needs to feel that connection to her dead Savior. She is grieving at the loss of a loved one, just as we would. Somehow, when we stand at the grave of our loved one, we feel that connection.

That is the feeling that Mary Magdalene needed; connection to her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. However, when she arrives she cannot receive that feeling of being connected to Jesus because He is not there.

Many things have taken place in the last week. Christ has been betrayed, mocked, sentenced, crucified and has finally died in what seems like a matter of minutes. All that Christ stood for was now gone, hope buried behind a stone. Now after journeying to the tomb, Mary Magdalene sees that the stone is no longer in its final resting place. She dare not venture into the tomb because of the darkness, in fear of what may or may not be there. That is why she races to get Simon Peter and the other disciples. *“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”*

When everyone arrived again at the tomb, it was an awkward moment. The stone was too large for one man to move; it would have taken several large men to move it. What had taken place exactly? The grave of Jesus had been disturbed and His body has been taken. Killing Jesus wasn't enough. Now someone had to desecrate the body; they couldn't leave Him in the nice tomb of Joseph. But notice what it is that she says. She still refers to Jesus as "*the Lord.*" Although Mary Magdalene thinks Jesus is dead and all His work has been for nothing, she cannot do otherwise than still call Him "*the Lord.*"

When Peter and the other disciple arrive at the tomb, they find it just as Mary Magdalene had described: the stone was rolled away. When they entered the tomb, they found the linens they had wrapped Jesus in. The sight riveted John to the spot as he hesitated at the entrance and peered in. Peter didn't stop but went right inside and studied the scene intently. The linen cloths are lying there; the face cloth neatly folded by itself. Grave robbers went to a lot of work of tidying up behind themselves after stealing Christ's dead body. Again, what is the purpose? Jesus Christ is not the Son of God. If He were, He would not have died. The fact that there is no body means nothing at all. The only thing that matters is that Christ is dead and therefore, cannot be who He said He was: the Son of God.

Having seen the stone rolled away from the tomb, having seen the burial linens disturbed, having seen that Christ's body was gone; there was nothing left to do except to return home. The reason why everyone left: "*they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.*"

In all that is reported in our text, there is just one little expression of faith. It is reported that John, after he entered the tomb and observed the linen cloths and the face

napkin carefully placed separately, believed. This is the one word of faith mentioned in our text. The text explains that the lack of faith in these disciples was because they did not yet know the Scriptures, that He must rise from the dead. Even though Jesus had clearly predicted His resurrection on the third day after His death, it was reported at that time and became evident on Easter Sunday morning, that they understood none of these things; this saying was hid from them, and they did not grasp what was said. Thus, Peter, John, Mary Magdalene and the others did not have a spectacular celebration of the resurrection, but went back to their homes.

Why are you here this early Easter morning? Are you here because of an empty tomb? Are you here because of a risen Christ? Peter and John did not understand that Christ must rise from the dead. After the last three years, being with Jesus, seeing all that Jesus had done, hearing all that Jesus had spoken, they didn't understand what Christ's purpose was: to defeat sin and death on our behalf. Even for us at times, we fail to understand that Christ had to rise from the dead. [“Because He is now risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity, all who believe in Him will overcome sin and death and will rise again to new life.”](#) The Scriptures point us to His resurrection. They spell out the meaning of Christ's resurrection for us, as well as the event. It provided a forceful demonstration of Christ's deity. It announced our justification. We know that we shall follow Jesus in rising from the dead. Our faith is sure since we have a living Savior.

While John and Peter had left, Mary remained. She couldn't bring herself to leave the tomb. If ever there was a time for Christ to be present, now would be it. She was in a state of mourning because her Savior had been killed. Sitting outside the tomb

where He laid would bring comfort to her, knowing that He was inside. But now seeing the stone rolled away, the empty tomb brought only fear and uncertainty to her. She stayed and wept uncontrollably.

Seeing two angels appear in tomb must have been startling, to say the least. She would have expected to see her Lord and Savior, if the stone had been rolled away. Now that the stone was rolled away, it wasn't Jesus that she but an empty tomb. Now two angels appear in a tomb where a dead Man should be. How could Jesus be gone and these two angels appear in His place?

These angels, along with the linen cloths, serve as witnesses of the resurrection. The linens were two earthly witnesses while the angels serve as heavenly witnesses to attest the Lord's resurrection to men. Heaven and earth unite in the tomb of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is there to see it.

Heaven and earth unite for us this day also. We come together, united as brothers and sisters in the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We worship today with one another, members of the Church Militant, as well as [“angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven,”](#) all those who have died in the faith and have joined the Church Triumphant.

On this Easter Sunday, we, with the resurrected Jesus Christ, who instituted His Supper for us on Maundy Thursday, who gave His very life for your sins and mine on Good Friday, who descended into hell on your behalf, rise again to new life, with sins forgiven, are free to enter the gates of heaven as children of God, brought with the blood of the Lamb. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus until the day of the resurrection, amen.