

He is risen! He is risen indeed!

We had a record breaking Sunday, 103 people in church! We thank the Lord for bringing all those souls to hear his wonderful message of hope through Christ's resurrection. This coming Sunday, March 30th, we will be having our Easter Egg hunt for the children during Bible study. Hope to see you soon!

Easter Sunday, Year A
Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
John 20:1-8
Pastor Paul Horn

March 23, 2008

Faith

Crossroad 9 – To and From the Tomb

I. See How People Come to the Empty Tomb

- A. With Grief and Sorrow
- B. With Guilt and Shame

II. See how People Leave the Empty Tomb

- A. With Grace and Comfort
- B. With Gladness and Celebration

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” ³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.

Dear fellow champions basking in the spotlight of Christ’s victory of death:

What would you say is the life-changing event in your existence on this earth? As good Lutherans you would say, “Well, Pastor, my baptism of course, when the Holy Spirit brought me from death to life.” Some of you might have been thinking, “My marriage changed my life.” Others might have said, “The birth of our child or children. We have new responsibilities and priorities.” For those of you who have been in war, the things you’ve seen and done may have affected your outlook on life. Maybe a trip to far away country, being immersed in its culture had an affect on you. Maybe meeting your idol or someone you’ve looked up to has changed your life. Even the death of a loved one or friend has a powerful effect.

This morning, the Holy Spirit will say to you through his holy Word that there is one event in particular that has changed your life forever. Today, you came to church to celebrate that life-changing power of the empty tomb, didn’t you? The way that we are

going to do that this morning is by contrasting how people come to the tomb and how they leave the empty tomb.

The past six weeks during our midweek Lenten services, we have followed Jesus on crossroads, paths he walked the week before he died. This morning our crossroad is a bit different. We won't be walking with Jesus, but rather with Mary Magdalene and Peter. Mary was the first to arrive on the scene. Much has been speculated about Mary and her relationship to Jesus, including some scandalous rumors. Scripture simply tells us that Mary was part of a group of women who followed Jesus on his journeys and provided for his needs and supported his ministry. There was a reason that Mary in particular was such a devoted follower. Scripture tells us that Jesus had cast seven demons out of her. Jesus' power had changed her life. So, she wanted to show her gratitude by following him.

Mary's devotion did not end when she witnessed his body hanging limp on the cross. In the late afternoon hours on Good Friday, Mary and the other women watched carefully where Jesus was buried. They wanted to return so they could pay their respects and give their Teacher a proper burial. Saturday must have been a long and depressing day. I'm sure that Sunday morning at day break, when Mary plodded along with the other women to the tomb, not much was said between them. Mary's disheartened thoughts were compounded by the reality that she and the other women might not be able to pay their last respects to their dear Lord because they didn't even know if they would be able to roll the large stone that barred the way. And just when it seemed that things could get no worse, they did. When Mary arrived at the tomb, the stone was rolled away, but Jesus' body was gone. For Mary, this poured salt into her emotional wounds. Listen to her grief as she reports to John and Peter, **"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him."** Flooded with grief and sorrow, all Mary could do was sit outside the tomb and drench the earth with her tears.

How about you? Did you come to the tomb today with grief and sorrow? If you're honest you have to admit that there's a little bit of Mary in you today. Don't the holidays stir up the grief and sorrow you felt as you laid a loved one to rest in a grave and walked away with an overwhelming sense of loss? Like Mary, do you feel that things in your life have gone from bad to worse? You're not sure if you can make the mortgage payments, you're behind on your credit card payments, you owe for taxes this year and you're not sure about your job security. Your loved one's health has gone from bad to worse and you're not sure how this will turn out. Or maybe it always seems that something new is wrong with your body. Maybe, like Mary, you've had your dreams destroyed and your hopes dashed. We've all had the joy sucked right out of us at times. Our trip to the tomb this morning is like Mary's, filled with grief and sorrow.

Mary wasn't the only one who traveled to the tomb that Sunday. After hearing Mary's report, Peter raced to the tomb. Peter's heart was also filled with grief and sorrow. Personally, I think that Peter took Jesus' death harder than anyone else. He had lost a good friend who had spent the last three years of his life mentoring him, explaining wonderful spiritual truths. But Peter also had a large, heavy anvil of guilt and shame

hung around his neck. He had left his Savior's side after promising allegiance to the point of death. He was the one who buckled under the pressure of a servant girl's interrogation, and denied knowing the One who knew him so well. Imagine the knife that pierced Peter's heart when he heard that rooster crow, or when he was on the receiving end of Jesus' disappointed glance. Peter did not walk with Jesus, even though Jesus let him walk on water. Peter wasn't there to comfort Jesus' mother, even though Jesus had once healed his mother-in-law. Peter went to the tomb with guilt and shame.

Is it any different for you? Maybe this is the first time you've worshiped in weeks or months and you feel guilty about your irregular worship life. Or maybe like Peter you pledge your loyalty to your Savior with your lips and then with your life you say something entirely different. You hypocritically judge others for their sinful lifestyles yet you yourself do the very same things. You praise Jesus one minute and with the same lips use his name to curse. Maybe you lie awake at night, tormented by your less-than-stellar performance as a parent, a student, an employee, as a church member or as a pastor. Maybe every time you see a cross it points you to Good Friday, and it shakes its finger at you, "Your sins did this to your Jesus." And you feel guilty for your jealous and greedy thoughts, or for that grudge you hold against someone else. Like Peter, your trip to the tomb is accompanied by guilt and shame.

You and I may come to the tomb with guilt and shame weighing heavy on our hearts, but the empty tomb allows us to leave this morning with grace and comfort. Let's go back to Peter. Consider how the heavy burden of guilt must have weighed him down. After realizing his sin, the Bible tells us, "**He went outside and wept bitterly.**" (Matt 26:75) But then God used the empty tomb to comfortingly address Peter's guilt. First of all, listen to the message God's angels had for the women at the tomb, "**Go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee.'**" (Mk 16:7) "Hey ladies, make sure you tell my friends I will see them soon, but specifically, make sure Peter knows." Scripture tells us that before he ascended into heaven, Jesus sat on the shores of Galilee with Peter and personally reinstated him as his apostle. How awesome! Here you have Peter, a guy who more than once turned his back on Jesus. Yet Jesus went out of his way to say, "I forgive you for denying me." What great relief Peter must have felt to have that burden lifted from his soul!

You and I come to the tomb with guilt and shame yoked around our necks – for our sporadic worship habits, for our denials of Christ, for our faithlessness in our God-given responsibilities, for our hypocritical living. Yet, you will leave the empty tomb without guilt and shame. The empty tomb declares you innocent of these sins. Paul in his letter to the Romans wrote, "**He was delivered over to death because of your sins, and was raised to life because of your justification.**" (Romans 4:25) Christ received the just punishment your sins earned you in your place: death. To prove that he accomplished your declaration of innocence, his body and soul left his grave three days later and appeared to his friends to reassure you that he is your Living Redeemer.

Doesn't that make you glad? More joyous than knowing you filled out your NCAA brackets with wisdom and skill? Of course! This joy is the other the life-changing power

of the empty tomb. Look at what it did for Mary. There she sat, sobbing, feeling that life was over, her dear Jesus was dead and now his body had been stolen. But when Jesus appeared to her, her tears of sorrow turned to tears of joy. **“Teacher!”** she cried, as she grabbed onto his feet. Only until Jesus said so did she let go. Then she ran to the disciples, **“I have seen the Lord!”** (John 20:18) What’s better yet is that her grief and sorrow only lasted about 40 hours, but her gladness and celebration would last an eternity.

As you look back on your life I’m sure that you’ve experienced sorrow and grief for more than 40 hours. But Jesus’ empty tomb turns that grief and sorrow into gladness and celebration. The empty tomb validates his promise, **“Because I live, you also will live.”** (John 14:19) That’s the power of the empty tomb. It changes our perspective on life, on sorrow and grief. They’re temporary. The apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans said, **“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us.”** (Romans 8:18) The empty tomb guarantees that you will walk away from this life of sorrow into a new life where there are no more tears, no more pain, no more sorrow, no more death. When we step back and realize this is the big picture, it changes our perspective on life.

To illustrate, I’d like you to look at one of my favorite Easter paintings. It’s printed on the front of your service folder. It’s a picture of the cross viewed through the doorway of the empty tomb. Let’s remember to look at the cross from this proper perspective. If it’s viewed by itself, it is simply a reminder of the seriousness of your sin. Sin causes death. But if the cross is viewed from the empty tomb, we see it for what it really was – a necessary step for Christ, to get into the tomb, dead and lifeless, so that he could walk out of it again, your living Savior! That’s why the empty tomb is your most powerful life-changing event.

For that reason we again say today, **“He is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen!”**