

Easter Sunday Sermon March 2008
(*Drama of Matthew 28:1-10, John 20:18*)

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No doubt it was dark that morning they arose...these two Mary's would grab their garments and spices for Jesus burial and head out to his tomb outside the city.

We can only image their walk on a dusty road as the sun probably began to rise...still a bit dark but with the hope of light. Yet even the brightest sunrise would still cast dark shadows for them, as darkness has remained hovering over their souls.

All practical purposes would tell us, clearly these two Mary's would still be in the guise of post-traumatic stress disorder with perfect memory of Jesus violent, long, and brutal death. After all these two Mary's *were there* not only for his death, but also in his life.

They had seen it all -- they had seen Jesus as teacher, friend, healer, and their Lord. They had witnessed everything he went through. They were there when he healed the sick, spit in mud to make a blind man see, fed 5000+ pp on scraps of bread and fish, and above all they were there when he raised another, Lazarus, from the dead.

They were there for his crucifixion, they heard him cry out ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI -- MY GOD MY GOD WHY HAS THOUGH FORSAKEN ME" ...and they saw his head fall as he cried, "IT IS FINISHED."

And then...with no expectation of yet another miracle, they were there, the first to find the empty tomb.

Given their love for Jesus, one would think these two Mary's would be too grief stricken to even get out of bed. On the other hand, given their love for Jesus, one can understand that it was their love that drove them to do just that and go and prepare his body for burial. It's not specifically mentioned, but no one else does step forward to do the job. Now that the Passover is over, these two Mary's could proceed: Their spices and cloth were to wipe the blood from his brow, his beard, his legs, his sides, and his body. These two Mary's would be the last ones to touch his face and close His eyes.

Then as they were nearing the tomb, it dawns on them, "*How are we going to move the stone to get inside!?*" Not something they thought of until now. Not to worry,

their great love for Jesus is nothing compared to God's great love for them, for us.

"AND SUDDENLY THERE WAS A VIOLENT EARTHQUAKE, FOR AN ANGEL OF THE LORD CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN AND, GOING TO THE TOMB, ROLLED BACK THE STONE AND SAT ON IT."

What do you think they thought in that moment!? What do you think they thought when they saw that the tomb was empty! What do you think the Roman soldiers thought! I would have done anything to be a Morning Dove perched in a tree nearby that morning!

So, what's it gonna be now??.the two Mary's maintaining a rational person's belief of the impossible *or* the two Mary's suspending all rational and trusting God who makes *all* things possible.

Perhaps in this moment it's all coming back to them...after all, they were told by Jesus' of his predicted death and resurrection. He said, *"The Son of Man will be handed over to sinners who will nail him to a cross. But three days later he will rise to life."*

How could they not have remembered **that** marvelous promise?!...Had they taken his word for it they would have been looking for a resurrection. Hmm, now's when the two Mary's become each one of us, don't they?—we can't even really (in all fairness) ask those questions of them, can we? No.

We too are guilty of forgetting God's promises. All of us at times function in our lives as if the resurrection is simply a story
-as if the resurrection *really* has no tangible effect on our lives or our spirit,
-or as if the resurrection was a one-time event...in Jesus, yes, it was
- but every day, every week, we experience our own crucifixions, and without fail (and I'll speak for myself) I fail to remember that always, always, resurrection will follow my crucifixions...will follow our crucifixions. That's God's promise to us.

Always, always, we live crucifixion **to** resurrection. It's everywhere. We tend to call it blessings-in-disguise. It's everywhere. Even the four seasons reflect it.

And God's promise to us in the resurrection is that when our crucifixions come (yours and mine), when we're pierced and weak and bloody emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically, we're called to lay those at the foot of the cross, to leave them there—to help others put them there and leave them there—to get off

the cross we're on, and to enter then the still healing silence of the tomb, a time to pause and breath, to forgive and pray, and then to rise up again.

Jesus' empty tomb is *all of our* empty tomb. In other words, Jesus resurrection **is** our resurrection. It says loud and clear, never will death be death, literally nor figuratively. Never will death itself have power over us, whether we're talking about a physical death—like when the Apostle Paul tells us this in ICor 15 that death is not death and that we will all not die, but we will all be *changed*—nor, never will death have power over us figuratively such as emotional, psychological, or spiritual death. In Christ we're already resurrected literally and figuratively. This is beyond a “think-positive” mentality, this is a “it's already yours, live into it,” mentality.

I know this can be difficult to understand. I remember when the light-bulb went on for me...it was in reading scripture, where Jesus finally makes it to Bethany where Lazarus' has already died; and Mary and Martha, Lazarus' sisters, basically say to Jesus, “*what took you so long...he's been dead four days...had you been here you could have saved him,*” etc... but then Mary all-of-a-sudden seems to come to her senses and says, “*oh my gosh, what am I saying??...you're the Christ, and God will grant you whatever you ask of Him*”

Then Jesus tells her, “Your brother will rise again.” (John 11:23) And she basically answers, “Yes, I know, I know he will rise again in the resurrection of the last day,” which was the belief in their Judaic custom.

And Jesus replies, “I AM the RESURRECTION” ...it's here, I *am* the last day, it's fulfilled. And of course, through Jesus, God raises Lazarus.

“I AM THE RESURRECTION” he said. Jesus wasn't just *resurrected*, he **is** the Resurrection. Jesus as the resurrection is like water is to the ocean,
-is like what stone is to the mountain,
-is like what blood is to your body.

You can deny being aware of it, but *it can never deny you*. It's within you, it's of you, it's now, it's always. The resurrection is yours to have, to keep, to live into...freed of sin, freed of guilt, because when he died *so did* our sin. God made it so that sin is not sin and death is not death. We are an Easter people, always living, always to be loving.

I end this morning with a little girl's revelation. A family in the church asked me to talk with their young daughter who was struggling with the notion of death after

experiencing more than one death in their family within several months. She and I took a walk, she asked to go to the cemetery, so we did. We walked and talked for quite some time and then she wanted to stop right where one of her loved ones was buried. Her precious little voice asked me again to explain what happens when we die and where heaven was, and how would she know if her loved one was there.

I told her I believed there are two places we live, either we live here on earth for whatever amount of time (and that's between you and God) and that we have lots of wonderful people to live here to help remind us of God;

and then we can live in Heaven, but there we don't need our bodies so we give them back to the earth.

Her response was "out of the mouths of babes" ingenious, she said, "So what you're telling me is that we're always living." "Yes, Honey, we're always living. And Jesus helps us in both places.

Let us pray: Life Giving, Forgiving, and Merciful God, we give you thanks for the life and love of Jesus Christ. We give you thanks for his perfect relationship with You that reconciles us. As we celebrate the Resurrection we pray for Your Holy Spirit (your life in us) to gently conform us closer and closer to Your image, that we may radiate Your glory here, and in all the places where people's lives are still affected by the powers of death and sin. Help us *be* your Easter people...hear us as we pray the prayer Jesus taught us...Our Father...