

**April 12, 2009**  
**The Festival of the Resurrection**

*"The Tomb Is Empty"*

**MARK 16:1-8**

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*When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. <sup>2</sup> Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb <sup>3</sup> and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" <sup>4</sup> But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. <sup>5</sup> As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup> "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" <sup>8</sup> Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*

The Christians in Kenya have an interesting tradition for Easter morning. On Good Friday they construct a cave or designate an old mud hut building to serve as the tomb of Jesus. Worshippers wake up early on Easter morning and rush to the tomb to see who can be there first. One looks in, and then another. They start saying to each other, "He's not here! The tomb is empty." As others come to the tomb they shout, "He's not here! The tomb is empty!" They rush back to their homes to tell others the good news, "He is not there! The tomb is empty." They gather for worship and tell each other, "He's not there. The tomb is empty."

Empty? Usually that word spells bad news doesn't it? The fuel gauge shows empty and you are miles away from the nearest service station. The chocolate chip cookie tastes so good, but the carton of milk in the refrigerator is empty. You put the card into the ATM machine, but the bank account is empty. Someone once played a trick on me when I was about 8 years old. They asked me if I could point to my head and say the abbreviation for mountain. I was so proud to show them how smart I was that I pointed to my head and said, "MT." I still didn't get it until they laughed even more and said, "You just said your head is empty."

Today we celebrate the good news that the tomb which held the lifeless body of our crucified Lord and Savior is empty. The angel joyfully told the women, "You are seeking Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen. See the place where they laid him." What a huge difference this empty tomb makes for your life and mine. Look into the empty tomb and you will see no fear, no sin and no death.

**No fear**

Fear gripped the women who went to the tomb early that Sunday morning after Jesus died. They had been involved in taking the body of Jesus down from the cross. They saw

first hand the nail prints in his hands and feet, the large gash from the spear in his side, the places where the whip tore open the flesh on his back. They saw the blood stained rags that washed the body of Jesus, and felt the cold lifeless body of their Lord. Fear grips them again as they summon their resources and strength to finish the job of anointing the body of Jesus. "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" What would the Roman soldiers do to them if they tried to roll the stone away or even dare to ask them to help them roll the stone away? During the great depression President Roosevelt, FDR, tried to rally the American people with his famous words, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Don't say that to the women going to Jesus' tomb. Their fear was as real as the body of Jesus that they were about to wrap with spices.

What are you carrying in your basket this morning that brings fear into your life? Are you afraid of what the future will bring to our country or to your financial situation? Are you afraid of the next visit to your doctor and receiving a bad report? Are you afraid of losing someone you love? Are you afraid that the life you live for Jesus your Lord will not be as rich, and full and exciting as it could be? Are you afraid that someone you love is slowly slipping away from Jesus? These are all real fears. It would be cruel to say, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive. He lives and sits in power at the right hand of God to calm our troubled hearts. What did we just sing? "He lives to silence some of my fears?" No, we sing he lives to silence ALL my fears.

The women arrive at the tomb. They see the stone has been rolled away. Do they shout to each other, "The tomb is empty! He is not here! He is risen!" No, gut wrenching fear overwhelms them. They assume someone has taken away the body of Jesus. Mary Magdalene runs off to tell the disciples the bad news, "They have stolen the body of our Lord." The fears of these women were like shadows in the night, not based in reality. "Don't be alarmed. You are seeking Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they lay him." Remember reading to your children about the Bernstein bears. The daddy bear takes his daughter into the attic and with a flashlight casts shadows on the wall to show his little girl that her fears are not based in reality. I am surprised that the women did not immediately jump up and down for joy. Instead it says, "Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid." Don't be too critical of these women. How often have we not lived in fear, until the Holy Spirit does a reality check that convinces us Jesus, our loving Lord and Savior is alive fills our overcomes our fears.

I am holding in my hand a picture of Jesus the Good Shepherd carrying a lamb that he has rescued in his loving arms. This picture is done in needlepoint. If I were to open the back and show the underside of the needle point, it would be a jumble of knots that make no sense. When tragedies and troubles come to us, and they will, we may find ourselves carrying our basket of troubles and filled with the fear that there is no way that these troubles can possibly turn out to be blessings for us. Then we hear the angel say, "Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He is not here! He is risen."

The loving Shepherd who promises to carry you through the problems of life is not lying dead in the tomb. He is alive. He is able to work out everything, even bad things for our good. There are thousands of promises in the Bible such as Isaiah 41, "Fear not, I am with you, will strengthen you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Because

the tomb is empty not one promise is an empty promises. Martin Luther was fond of comforting himself by inscribing the Latin word, "Vivit" (He lives!) on his desk and walls of his study. Vivit! He lives and because he lives, we can live without fear. "He lives to silence ALL my fears."

## **No sin**

Look into the tomb. Look again. There is no evidence whatsoever of the terrible ravages of sin that claimed the body of Jesus on the cross. The angel tells the women to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus still wanted them as his disciples, even though their lives had been ravaged by sins of denial and unfaithfulness. "But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him just as he told you.'" Peter, Jesus wants to see you. Peter proudly boasted that if everyone left Jesus, he would always be faithful to the end. Peter the rock became soft as one of those little marshmallow peeps that we eat as Easter time. Peter cursed and swore that he never knew Jesus when asked by a maid if he were one of Jesus' disciples. Peter wept bitterly because he was ashamed of the way he turned his back on Jesus. "Peter the tomb is empty, and Jesus wants to see you and the other disciples who were unfaithful to him."

Have you ever been ashamed of something you said to someone you care about, your mom and dad, your brother or sister? Have you been ashamed that you enjoyed listening to some gossip about someone at work? Have you ever been ashamed of evil thoughts that enter your mind that would shame hell itself? Then look into the empty tomb. Jesus is alive. The work of paying for all sin has been accomplished. Jesus even kept the nail prints on his hands and the gaping wound in his side to give us the peace of knowing our debt has been paid in full. No one can drag charges against us on the day of judgment even though we deserve to be declared guilty and be a cast off forever. Romans chapter 4 assures us that Jesus was "delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification."

I am holding in my hand a plastic Easter egg. If we could truly know our own heart and write down all the things we do wrong in one day on little slips of paper, there is no way we could put enough slips of paper into a little egg like this, even a large egg like this. Instead of thousands of little pieces of paper with our sin written on it, this egg is empty (show empty egg). The tomb of Jesus was empty. Colossians 2 tells us, "He forgave us all our sins having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us, that stood opposed to us." Some of you have seen a substantial reduction in your Individual Retirement Account this past year, but dear friends, your Individual Redemption Account has not changed. You have a guaranteed lifetime withdrawal benefit based on the empty tomb. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from ALL sin. The empty tomb guarantees that fact for you and me today, the next day and forever.

## **No death**

Finally, there is no death in the tomb of Jesus. The angel tells us this morning, "He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him." Look at the place where the dead body of Jesus was laid to rest. Oh, the grave clothes are still there, the smell of spices is there, but there is no evidence of a dead body. The new tomb still smells like a new tomb.

Someday our graves will be empty along with the people we love who have died in Jesus. Listen again to these comforting words from 1 Corinthians 15: "We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and the mortal with immortality." What if this were the day that Jesus chose to return in glory? The trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised, and we will be caught up in the air to be with the Lord forever with real resurrected bodies in the place Jesus has prepared for us.

In 1965 the famous English statesman Winston Churchill died. Dignitaries came from 110 nations to attend the funeral service at St Paul's Cathedral in London. Churchill wrote his own funeral service. It was short and the name of Churchill was never mentioned in the service. As the casket was being escorted down the aisle, a trumpeter played the taps, similar to what is played at military funerals today. But then another trumpet played the sounds of reveille, the trumpet sound for getting up in the morning. It was Winston Churchill's way of confessing to the whole world that someday his tomb would be empty. "He is not here! He is risen! The tomb is empty!"