

March 31, 2013
The Festival of the Resurrection

“Surprise: The Tomb Is Empty”

LUKE 24:1-12

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” ⁸ Then they remembered his words. ⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

A girl was celebrating her birthday with her kindergarten class. In the middle of the room was a large present. She opened it and out popped a big surprise. It was her daddy home from deployment in Afghanistan. The look on her face as she sees her dad is priceless.

We never grow tired of the surprise that our heavenly Father has for us when he raised his Son Jesus from the dead. An elderly lady told her pastor that her favorite worship service was Easter morning because all the people had smiles on their faces from ear to ear.

This morning, with the help of the Holy Spirit we want to relive that amazing moment when the women looked into the tomb and saw that it was empty. We have a smile on our faces from ear to ear as we hear the words, “He is not here! He is risen!”

The woman were not planning to be surprised

The women who went to the tomb were not planning for a surprise. They were overwhelmed with sorrow and preoccupied with putting the final spices and linen clothes on the dead body of Jesus. “On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.” All four gospel accounts record that the women left early for the tomb. There was hardly any light in the eastern sky as they made their way to the tomb.

The night before, they busily prepared more spices and linens for the body of Jesus. Everything they did was focused on a dead body. There was no hope for a big surprise even though Jesus had clearly stated he would rise again on the third day. The account in Mark tells us they were worried about getting into the tomb. They asked each other, “Who

will roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb?"

There are no surprises when it comes to the reality of death. All of us will some day die. The Lord told Adam and Eve that if they disobeyed him by eating from the tree they would die. Adam's sin has been passed down to all of us. Romans 5 tells us, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned." Death comes to all people. Here is an obituary page from the newspaper. One person never makes it past 50. Another person makes it past 90. The book of Hebrews tells us, "Man is destined to die once and then comes the judgment." Only in Christ Jesus do you have the hope of being raised to life again on the last day.

What a surprise waited for them as they came to the tomb. "They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus." It was not a good surprise for the women who had forgotten Jesus words about rising from the dead on the third day. Mary Magdalene doesn't even go to the tomb. She assumes the worst. She runs to tell the other disciples they have stolen the body of Jesus. They look in the tomb and see that it is empty. All that is left in the tomb is linen clothes with the spices and the head piece that was neatly folded. Jesus left clear evidence that he had risen. His body was not stolen from the grave. He left them a surprise and they did not see it.

Have you ever thought about how much linen and spices were used to wrap the body of Jesus? It tells us in John that Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy five pounds. That has to be at least three five gallon pails. Think of the huge amount of expensive linen that was needed to wrap the body with the spices. When Jesus rose from the dead, he left it behind. When Peter and John went to the tomb it says they saw the strips of linen lying there. Jesus left them a surprise but they failed to see it.

The angel has a surprise for the woman

In his grace and mercy our loving Lord and God will not let these women leave this tomb without see what really happened. He sends two angels to help them overcome their doubts and fears and confusions. "While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground.." The Lord could have sent angels to take on the appearance of ordinary human beings. Instead, the angels' clothes gleam bright like lightning. Lightning once struck the chain link fence in our backyard when we lived in Tucson. It was like a hundred thousand flash bulbs going off at once. These angels reflect the glory of God. The women fall with their faces to the ground. If an angel suddenly appeared to you, you would find yourself reacting in the same way. Sinful and unrighteous people always have this reaction when they come face to face with God's glory. Remember the fear of the shepherds when God's angel appeared to them and announced Jesus' birth.

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here! He is risen!" You don't go to a cemetery to visit people who are alive. You go to a cemetery to pay respect to people who have died. Last summer we went to my nephew's wedding. On Saturday they celebrated the wedding with lots of dancing. The next day, we went to worship at

the church were generations of my family have worshipped. After the church service we went to the cemetery where my parents and other relatives are buried. The angel asks the women why they came to visit someone who is dead when that person is alive. They should have worked all night to prepare baskets full of food to celebrate Jesus resurrection. Picture a basket with the finest Santa Maria strawberries, and cinnamon rolls made of the highest quality Durham wheat from the high plains of Colorado, coffee fresh ground and brewed. Spare no cost. You are having breakfast with your risen Lord!

All of this should come as no surprise. The angel tells them, "Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee; 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Look at all the evidence that Jesus is alive. The tomb is empty. The grave clothes are left behind. The angel tells them he is risen. And then they are reminded of the words of Jesus that clearly predicted that he would die and rise again on the third day.

The women cannot keep this good news to themselves. You can never keep the good news of Jesus resurrection to yourself. They run to the disciples and tell them that Jesus is alive. Strangely the disciples do not accept the testimony of these women. It says, "Their words seemed to them like nonsense." We are puzzled and even perplexed that it takes so long for Jesus' beloved disciples to grasp what has happened. Then we look at our own lives and realize that there are days when the resurrection of Jesus is not as real to us as it should be.

We are told that Peter got up and ran to the tomb. The gospel of John tells us that John also went with him. They see the strips of linen cloth lying there. They see the headpiece neatly folded. Later that day, in the evening they will have the surprise of their lives when Jesus appears to them and shows them nail prints in his hands. They will be overjoyed to see the Lord.

The Bible is a book full of surprises. We read the first chapter and stand in awe of how God created the world out of nothing. We read the history of God's people and see how they were surprised by their God when he divided the waters of the Red Sea and gave them manna from heaven. In the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, we are amazed and surprised at how carefully and thoroughly our God takes care of our problem of sin.

If there is one thing in life that does not surprise us, it is our daily struggle with sin. Adam's sin was passed down to us. We struggle with the sinful nature every day. Even on a day such as today evil thoughts can enter our minds and hearts. What does surprise us is how completely our Father takes care of sin for us. On Good Friday we see the sin of the world placed on Jesus. We see him become sin for us. We see him punished in our place so we can be forgiven. On Sunday morning we see Jesus rise from the dead. With the resurrection we have the assurance that our heavenly Father accepted the sacrifice Jesus made. Romans 4:25 says he was delivered for our offenses and raised for our justification. The resurrection is supreme forensic evidence the Father accepted what Jesus did for us.

Because of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, there is a big surprise waiting for us when Jesus returns in glory. When Jesus comes in glory he will raise us to life again. Even if Jesus returns in glory before the end of this day, your loved ones who died in Jesus will

not miss out on his glorious return. 1 Thessalonians assures us "We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." It even goes on to say that we will not precede those who have fallen asleep in Christ. The dead in Christ will rise first and then we will follow after them to greet the Lord in the air.

Because Jesus is alive, you can face every day of life on this earth secure in his love for you. The little girl was surprised when her daddy jumped out of the big box she thought was a birthday present. Jesus lives to surprise you with his love every day. This past week one of the men in our Santa Maria Terrace Bible study spoke about Jesus rising from the dead, and how nothing will ever separate us from his love. Then he began to quote portions of the last part of Romans 8. "No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Tomorrow and the next day and every day of your life the risen Lord is there to surprise you with his love. The tomb is empty. He is not here! He is risen! May that surprise be with you every day in your life. Amen.