

**Easter Sunday
March 27, 2016**

"The Tomb Is Really 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.

Christians living in a small village in Kenya have an interesting way of celebrating Easter. On Good Friday they designate one of the mud huts in their village to be the tomb of Jesus. Early Easter morning they run to the mud hut that represents the tomb. The first person to get to the tomb looks in and then says, "He's not here!" Another person looks in and sees, "He's not here!" And so it happens with others running to the tomb. They look in and say, "He's not here!" Then they run to tell others, "He's not there! He's not there!" Joyfully they proclaim to each other, "The tomb is empty!"

Today we celebrate the fact that the tomb is empty, not just empty but really empty. Usually the word empty does not have a pleasant sound to it. The gas tank is on empty. The milk carton is empty. The checking account is empty. But today, on this glorious morning we celebrate the fact that the tomb of Jesus Christ our Lord is empty. It is really empty. This empty tomb means a life filled with blessings for us.

No more fear

Because the tomb is empty we do not have to be afraid. Fear certainly gripped the women who went to the tomb early that first Easter morning. "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." They went to the tomb in the deepest, or earliest part of dawn because they were afraid they could not finish wrapping the dead body of Jesus.

Can't you see them working into the late hours of night getting the spices and linen clothes ready to take to the tomb? Fear grips them as they think of the mutilated and bloodied body of Jesus hanging on the cross. Fear grips them as they think about going to the

tomb. Who will roll away the stone? Will they let us finish wrapping his body? And then there is the greatest fear of all, the fear that Jesus is not who he said he was. How can he be our Lord and God and Savior if he is dead?

If we were trying to measure their level of fear as they make their way to the tomb, I believe we would have to put the meter at "10." The fear becomes even worse as they see the grave opened up and the body of Jesus missing. Mary Magdalene does not even bother to look into the tomb. Her heart is pounding in fear as she runs to tell the disciples they have taken away the Lord's body and we do not know where it is. Fear increases even more when they come face to face with two angels who gleam like lightning. It says, "In their fear, the women bowed down with their faces to the ground."

Now it is time to take away their fear. What a privilege it was for the angel to tell them good news, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen." They were looking for a dead body. They were carrying spices and linen clothes to finish wrapping the body of Jesus. They should have stayed up all night making the best meal possible to celebration a resurrection morning with their risen Savior. They should have been singing as loudly as they could the words of the great Psalm 118, "This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it,"

The angel, God's messenger, has the right words to help these women remove their fear. "Remember what he told you while he was 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.'" Fear begins to melt away as they remember the words Jesus had so clearly spoken to them. Yes, dear Christians, the tomb is empty, really empty. You can see the evidence. The body is gone. An angel tells you Jesus has been raised to life. You have Jesus' own words that he would be crucified and be raised to life again on the third day. Friday, Saturday and now it is Sunday. Jesus kept his promise to rise on the third day. Everything he said about himself is true.

Are you ever afraid? What if the next president of the United States cannot lead this country? What if you cannot pay your bills? What if you receive a bad report from the doctor? What if you lose someone you love? The worst fear to come to any Christian is the fear that comes with doubt. What if what I believe is not true? Stoop down. Look into the tomb. It is empty. Jesus kept his word. He is alive. He is exactly who he says he is. Martin Luther had a favorite Latin word that he liked to carry with him to help him during times of temptation and doubt in his life. It was the Latin word, "Vivit" which means "He lives." Because he lives you know that nothing in all creation will ever separate you from the love of God that exists in Christ Jesus your Lord.

No more sin

Because the tomb is empty, really empty, we have the evidence we need that assures us our sin has been paid in full and forgiven. Let's go back to the words we have before us to see what happens next. "When the women came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others with them who told this to the apostles." These are the women who faithfully followed and served Jesus. These are the women who stood beneath the cross

of Jesus while the disciples ran away in fear. These are the women the Lord chose to be the first to discover the tomb was empty. They tell the apostles and others exactly what they have seen in the empty tomb and what the angel had told them about Jesus.

Do they accept what the women tell them? No, they do not. "But they did not believe the women, for their words seemed like nonsense." Please, dear disciples, don't dismiss the words of these women as "nonsense." I know they are excited. I know they are talking a mile a minute. Don't be like the two disciples who were walking with Jesus on the way to Emmaus. They said, "In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us they had seen a vision of angels." Why didn't they run to the tomb and check it out as the women had done? Why didn't they listen when they told them exactly what the angel said about Jesus' words that he would rise from the dead on the third day? Their sinful hearts kept them from seeing that the empty tomb was real and Jesus was alive. If only the resurrection were more real to us every day of our lives here on this earth.

Peter knows what he has to do. He runs to the tomb. The man who cursed and swore that he never knew Jesus is willing to risk his life to see for himself what they said was really true. "Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened." The Greek word that is translated as "wonder" is the word *thomazo* which has the thought of wondering at something in amazement. John tells us in his account that when he saw this he believed. There is something about the placement of these linen clothes and the neat folding of the piece of cloth that was placed over the head that sent a powerful message to anyone who looked into the tomb. The tomb was empty, really empty, not because grave robbers had stolen the body of Jesus, but because he had been raised to life again just as he said.

Look at these grave clothes left behind. Listen to the words of the angel. Listen to what Jesus said would happen. Here you have the supreme forensic evidence that Jesus did everything necessary to make total satisfaction for every sin you have ever committed. I cannot do it by myself. I do not have the power within me to do anything to make up for the past sin in my life. They are many and so are yours. God will only accept me on judgment day if I am pure and clean and holy in his sight. My best efforts in life to improve myself cannot even wipe away one small bad thought or one little thing I failed to do as I should.

You know what Jesus did for you. You know all your sin was placed on him and he suffered in your place just for you. But how do you know that he did the job right? He did the job right because his heavenly Father raised him from the dead and with that resurrection he justifies us and declares us not guilty. If one small sin of my past was not paid for completely, the Father would not have raised his Son to life again because a perfect and holy God can only accept that which is perfect in his sight. Don't let your sinful nature or some evil spirit and some false teachers tell you this is too good to be true. The empty tomb, the grave clothes left behind, the words of Jesus that he would rise on the third day shout out to you that full satisfaction has been made. Romans 4:25 says, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification." The tomb is empty, really empty. My sins are gone and so are yours. We have peace with our God.

No more death

Because the tomb is empty, really empty. Death will not be the last chapter in your life. You have the hope of being raised to life and living forever with your risen Lord. The angel told the women, "He is not here; he has risen!" The Greek word for resurrection is anastasis. It is a combination of the word to stand and again. Because Jesus was raised to stand again, those who believe in him will stand again on the last day. How can we celebrate Easter without hearing these words of hope from 1 Corinthians 15? "Listen, I tell you a mystery; We will not all sleep, but we will be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye and the last trumpet." The dead will be raised. We will have glorified bodies to live forever in the place Jesus has prepared for us.

This means we know what will happen to the bodies of our loved ones who died in Jesus. I know the bodies of my parents are lying in the ground in church cemetery where generations of my family are buried. I know that on the last day they will be raised up again and given glorious bodies. My cousin Lynn Schroeder was laid to rest in that same cemetery a few years ago. His wife Rachel was visiting the gravesite. She sent a text message to my sister. "At the cemetery in Ixonia. Your parents are doing well." You can say this about your loved ones who die in Jesus. They are doing well. They are doing well because the tomb is empty, really empty, and someday our tombs will be empty, really empty. Christ is risen! Amen.