

1

EASTER!!! 2013

John 20:1-18

(9:30 service)

What a difference a week can make!

Only a week ago we were remembering and celebrating Palm  
Sunday!

It was an incredible witness, that first Palm Sunday! A huge crowd  
shouting Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of  
the Lord!

Palm branches waved and were thrown onto the road in front of a  
humble man riding on a donkey.

Children sang and shouted and people lined the road to see him.

Hopes ran high!

Passover was coming---a day when the people remembered their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Hope rose in the hearts of the people that THIS Passover would bring deliverance from the oppression of Rome---that THIS man would be the Messiah who would lead them into freedom!

Mary Magdalene was there, that Palm Sunday. I'm sure of that. She was one of a group of women who travelled with Jesus and the disciples as he taught and healed people. So she would have been there.

She was more than likely a witness to most of the events of that long week after Palm Sunday as well, or at least she would have heard all about them from those who were there.

Maybe she even saw first-hand the religious leaders whispering together, glancing over their shoulders at Jesus, then leaning together, speaking more urgently.

But what I'm sure she couldn't have known is that those religious leaders met privately with Judas, as he arranged with them to betray Jesus, or that they probably also met with the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

She wouldn't have been in the Upper Room on Thursday night, at the Seder dinner at the beginning of Passover, but she probably had heard all about it.

The men would certainly have talked about it as they tried to make sense of it---Jesus was dead! Why did it happen? How COULD it have happened? What should they have done differently?

Mary would have heard all about the strange words Jesus spoke at the Seder---breaking the Matzah bread and saying “This is my body, broken for you!” and sharing the cup of wine, saying “This is my blood, shed for you!”

The men would have talked about it as they worked through their feelings---their failure to understand what Jesus meant. They would have beaten themselves up over failing to figure out what was going to happen! Especially when he said, “I will not do this again until the Kingdom of God comes.”

Mary might even have seen Judas as he left the house that evening to betray Jesus! She might have wondered where he was going and why. And if she did, she might have been wishing that she had stopped him somehow.

What a week it had been! To start off on such a high note! And now, it was over. Everything was over. And the men were too frightened to go to the tomb to anoint his body, so she was going to take care of it herself.

Someone had to. She was too grief-stricken to be afraid. And this was one last thing she could do for this man she loved so much.

So she went as soon as it was light outside! And as she went, she was too wrapped up in sorrow to notice the bright sunshine of the new day. The birds singing. The fragrance of the herbs she carried and the smell of the flowers along the path.

She was probably crying, head down, half-blind with grief and tears.

And when she got there----the stone had been rolled away!!

Startled, she didn't even look inside but ran and got Simon Peter and John.

The men came and went in and found that the tomb was empty! Empty except for the linen cloths that had been wrapped around Jesus' body and head!

Empty! The tomb is empty!

Say that with me! The tomb is empty!

They still didn't understand that Jesus was resurrected, but they could see that Jesus' body wasn't there, so the men left.

Mary stayed. She stood there crying. She looked into the tomb and saw, not Jesus, but two angels!

Not quite comprehending the presence of these two heavenly beings, she simply answers their question---“Woman, why are you crying?” by saying that “They have taken away my Lord, and I don’t know where they have put him.”

The tomb is ----empty!

Still crying, she turned around and saw Jesus, but through her tears she doesn’t recognize him until he speaks her name. Maybe that made her look up at his face for the first time, or maybe it was something in his tone, but then she knows it is him!

The tomb ---is EMPTY!!

And more than that

**CHRIST IS ALIVE!!**

Say that with me ---CHRIST IS ALIVE!!!

And Mary ran to tell the others----CHRIST IS ALIVE!!

And if Christ came back from the dead that day---if it is for real  
that

THE TOMB IS EMPTY!!

And CHRIST IS ALIVE!!

Then what?? Is this all just an amazing story? After all, we  
don't see Christ with our eyes or hear him speak with our ears.

So what difference does all this make to us today, in the 21<sup>st</sup>  
century, in the lives we live where we can read the Bible on the  
internet and have access to all kinds of different ways of thinking  
and believing,



when we have friends and neighbors who are good people of different faiths and there are a lot of Christians out there who seem to hurt more people than they help?

What difference does the resurrection of Jesus Christ make to

Diseases like the flu, e. coli, AIDS and malaria kill people every minute.

Road rage and car chases are so common they hardly get noticed any more.

Random acts of violence seem far more prevalent than random acts of kindness.

People shoot police officers and veterans and passersby.

I could go on and on, but you know all of this. We are bombarded by bad news 24 hours a day from multiple news sources. There is no escape from it.

So where is the living Christ in all this? Is there any evidence that the tomb is still empty? The cross is still empty?

What if every time we heard of someone suffering, of someone hurt or killed or stricken with serious and fatal illness---

What if every time something bad happened to the innocent and the good in this world----

What if every time anyone hurt another human being----

What if every time we fail to demonstrate love toward our neighbors----

What if, when any of those things happen, we imagine them happening to Christ himself?

What if every time one of those terrible, hurtful, killing things happened, we see that we are putting Christ back in the tomb, back on the cross?

This is not as farfetched as you might think.

Because the reason that Christ made the choice of going to the cross---and it was a choice, you know. He could have stayed out in Nazareth and not gone to Jerusalem. He could have called on the angels to rescue him. He could have chosen to fight, like we often do when confronted with violence and lies.

The reason he walked right into the arms of the ones who killed him, did not defend himself, and gave himself up for us, sacrificed himself----

He did it to show that whatever suffering and pain and atrocities we go through, he knows what it's like!

He understands every bit of our pain, BECAUSE HE HAS FELT PAIN!

He understands what it's like to be a victim of bullies and injustice, BECAUSE HE WAS.

He knows what it's like to be hurt and bruised and beaten,  
even by the people you love, BECAUSE HE WAS!

He even knows what it's like to die, BECAUSE HE DID!

Everything we go through, Jesus has been there. He  
understands. It's not just a matter of empathy. It's more than  
solidarity.

He was human like us,

And because he went through the worst that humanity had to dish  
out and he came out the other side, alive and whole---SO CAN WE!!

Jesus showed us how to live, and he showed us how to die---  
returning evil with good, meeting violence with nonviolence, losing  
our lives so that we can find them again----

The tomb IS EMPTY!

CHRIST IS ALIVE!!

Every time we hurt one another

Every time another child is taken

Every time violence occurs

Every time someone dies of a preventable disease

Every time someone is bullied or abused or oppressed or  
killed

Every time something happens that ends up on the news---just  
another sensationalized story

Every time we suffer pain

**Because WE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST-----**

Christ is put back on the cross, suffering and dying

And he is put back into the tomb.

BUT WE KNOW that

THE TOMB IS EMPTY!!

CHRIST IS ALIVE!!

So how does that happen, when so many bad things happen  
and we keep putting him back into the tomb?

And the answer has to be, as a matter of logic---

That we keep taking him down off the cross and out of the  
tomb as often as we put him up there and then bury him again!

And how do we do that? After all, we are not angels! We are not God. We don't know how to resurrect anyone from the dead.

Or do we??

What if---since all the evil things, all the bad, violent things we do to each other keep putting Christ back on the cross, back in the tomb---what if every time we care for one another, every time we treat someone with understanding and tenderness,

Every time we hold someone who is in pain

Every time we pray for someone who is suffering, someone who is dying,



Every time we smile and laugh together

Every time we stand up for the marginalized

And feed the hungry and give to the poor

Every time we do what Jesus would do!!

What if all the good things that we do for others are as though  
we do them to Jesus himself---

After all, he said, "If you do it to the least of my sisters and  
brothers, you do it to me."

And in doing the good that we do----what if

We tenderly take Jesus down off the cross

And roll the stone away so that he can come out of the tomb?

If we think of everything we do that way, how many of us will think twice before hurting someone, before denying someone the help they need?

How many of us will begin to see ourselves as forgiven and reconciled to God?

How many of us will become more like Christ?

None of us want to crucify Christ. None of us want to leave him in the tomb.

And this is what can transform the world---that if we see that we serve Christ by serving others, we will open our hands and our hearts more often ---- and wider, without judgment or conditions, but only because we are disciples of Jesus Christ, God's beloved children.

So let today be the day you commit yourself, or recommit yourself, to serving Christ, to being a better disciple who walks more perfectly in the footsteps of Christ!

Let today be the day when you firmly and fully believe that

The tomb IS EMPTY!!

CHRIST IS ALIVE!!!

Hallelujah!

Amen!