

Easter Sunday March 27, 2016

The Gospel of John opens with the text we hear so often at Christmas, “The light shines in the darkness, and the light did not overcome it”. On Easter morning, we finally realize exactly what John meant in the words we speak as we celebrate the coming of this great light. It is only after the darkness of Good Friday, the darkness that hung over the land, the darkness that we felt in our hearts that we truly understand what the Gospel writer was trying to say. On Easter morning we finally realize that even as Christ was crucified, even as Jesus died and laid in the tomb, even as it seemed that the light of the world had been extinguished forever, never to shine again, the darkness did not overcome it. The darkness of the world, has been overcome by the light, and that is why we gather, to celebrate Easter not only today but every day, as the reality that we now live in. We celebrate the never ending Easter morning, that does not come once a year on the Church calendar, but is the new Creation that we live within forever. We come to the tomb with Mary, to celebrate at the first dawn, on this first day of the week, the first day of our risen Lord’s reign. So as those who have been filled with joy at the discovery of the empty tomb, as those who have been filled with life as we went to a place of the dead, let us hear the Good News, let us marvel at our risen Savior.

When we come to the tomb with Mary Magdalene, she is alone and it is so early that it is still dark outside. At the cross, the masses were gone, and we found only a few women and the disciple John. In the shadow of the cross, it seems that Christ’s followers are down to one, lonely Mary, making her way to the tomb alone. As she approaches the entrance of the tomb, we have no idea what she was hoping to find. Had Mary ever heard Jesus’ three day promise, did she understand it any better than the others, or does she expect to only find a corpse? But whatever she expects to find, Mary is the only one left who wills to be as near to Jesus as she can be, even

if that means sitting alone outside a sealed tomb. But that is not what she finds, she discovers that the stone has been moved away, and immediately she takes off running. Without looking any further, Mary is moved to witness to what she has seen. She goes to Peter and John, and she says to them “they have taken the Lord out of the tomb”. In this moment of panic, in this moment of uncertainty, this is the first time that someone in the Gospel of John identifies Jesus as Lord. Even as Mary tells Peter and John that the body has been taken, even when she is describing the lifeless body of Jesus, He is Lord Jesus. Even as the scene still seems to be clouded in darkness, even as none of them seem to understand, Jesus is Lord. Before we even know what lies ahead, Mary powerfully declares that Jesus is the Lord. The One who she believes is dead, is not a failed Messiah, or a teacher, but is the Lord, my God, this is who Jesus is, and for the first time ever this is Mary proclaims Him to be.

Suddenly John and Peter take off, we have no idea what they were doing or where they were, but filled with emotion, and probably confusion they run towards the tomb of their Lord. When they get there, they find a few pieces of cloth that were on Jesus’ body. And through these few pieces of cloth in an otherwise empty tomb, they are moved. They become the firsts to look upon the empty tomb and say, Jesus has truly been raised from the dead, He really is Lord, death really has been defeated. And the Gospel of John continues to show us these few bits of cloth, this empty tomb so that we can look inside and believe in the resurrection of our Lord. So that from this place of death and decay, we might find life, we might find simple but deep faith in a moment that stands at the center of history, in a moment that changes everything we understand. We entered this scene with the rising sun and a lone woman, and as the two disciples leave this place, we get the smallest hint that something has changed, that there is something more than the meaninglessness of life.

Paul describes this, the combined event of Christ's death and resurrection, the Christ event, as terminating the old, and inaugurating something utterly new. It is so much more than simply the resurrection of an innocent man, it is the victory of God's grace. The world that we knew, the world that filled us with fear and despair, that world is no more. Nothing is left untouched by this event, it is all made new in the salvific work of Christ. We have been freed from death's dominion, we have been freed from sin's reign, the entirety of Creation has been changed. We were crucified with Christ, we have laid in the tomb with Christ, completely devoid of life, and by God's grace we have been raised with Christ. Through Christ, we do not simply have hope in life beyond death, we have hope for life that cannot be put to death. Gone is the life of struggle, of worry, of wandering, because we declare that in the death and resurrection of Christ, we have been sufficiently saved, that the world we knew is dead, nothing has been untouched in this all encompassing moment. That is the change that the disciples see as they leave the tomb, they step out into a world that is so different, even as things look exactly the same, even as our lives still seem so much the same, we declare that our God is alive, and has raised us up to life.

As the two disciples leave, Mary stays behind, weeping. Finally as she cries, she looks inside and sees two angels, who ask her "Woman why are you crying". Filled with emotion, she explains to them, that the Lord she desperately wants to be near to, even if He is dead, has been taken away and she does not know where He is. After she says this, she turns around and sees Jesus, but through her tear filled eyes, in the dim, dawning light she does not recognize Him. And He repeats the same sympathetic question to her, "Woman why are you crying", adding "whom are you looking for". Thinking that He is just the gardener, Mary tells Him that she just wants to know where her Lord is, so that she can bring Him back here. As she says this, the

Good Shepherd calls to His sheep by name, He simply says Mary, and she knows His voice. When she hears her own name, spoken by her Lord, her Teacher, by the One who she passionately wanted to be near even as He laid in death, she experiences profound grace and is transformed. Her grief and her pain are silenced as Christ speaks her name. While the previous scene left us with only a few pieces of cloth, in this moment Mary is able to hear, to see, to embrace our risen Lord.

The God that was seemingly taken away from us on the cross, is a living presence, one we can know, one we can even touch. But as much as she would love to cling to Jesus and never let go, Jesus tells her, He is ascending and she must go. She must go and be the first to announce to the disciples, to announce to the world what she has seen, what Christ has told her. That He is going to the Father, who is now our Father, to our God, and we must go out to share this simple truth, that we have seen the Lord. We must share the Good News and the joy of the resurrection, that we have seen a great light, a light that has overcome the darkness of death, a light that shines out into all of our lives.

We gather here this morning to celebrate this great light, which has overcome the darkness of the world, the darkness of our own lives. And we announce to the world that God's grace has been poured out, that the Lord you can see and hear, and even embrace has died, and we died with Him, and He has been raised, and with Him, we have been resurrected. The world we once knew has died on the cross, Christ has died once for all, and in Him we are alive. We rest on the sure knowledge of the resurrection, knowing that we are not the same as when we entered the tomb looking for our Lord. We leave the tomb with this one message, this message that fills our lives with unending joy, by this one message every dark corner of our lives has been illuminated by God's abundant love for us. Christ is risen, He is risen indeed.