

“Come See the Tomb”
The Resurrection of Our Lord – April 1, 2018 - Mark 16:1-8 & John 20:1-17

Our Chancel Choir just wrapped the gospel story this morning with an invitation: ***Come see the tomb***. It is a holy tradition, this trek on Easter morning to be reminded once again of a yawning emptiness, a black hole, a place where something was, but now – is not.

But that is not what we are looking for today, is it? Today we might have come for something amazing. Some small reminder - that even though an empty tomb doesn't make any sense at all in the real world – it is exactly the thing that helps us *make sense* of the real world: a cross of execution, an entombment, and a missing body. What does this mean? Is it a metaphor for the future of a dying church or a great “who done it?” Is it the symbol that speaks to a decaying marriage or a diseased body? Is it the emptiness that sometimes overwhelms our lives -- or is it the beginning of something so new, so utterly out of the box that we must erase everything we have created and go back to the formless void of the story of Creation in our holy Scripture. What are you looking for today? A clean slate? New life? ***Come, see the tomb***.

And make no mistake, that tomb holds *so much more* than **nothing**. It holds our guilt, because we did a terrible job for God. When put in charge of providing hospitality to the *Word that became flesh and dwelled among us*, we killed him. When offered the very thing we spend our lives attempting to find, (love and acceptance) we resisted, we turned inward, afraid of things we did not control, or unwilling to humble ourselves enough to accept the gift of grace (undeserved mercy...)

It is so hard to let go of our own power. So, sometimes, God calls out power from unexpected places. God calls our little children, who much too soon move from **us** showing **them** the world and how it works, to grabbing our hands and excitedly proclaiming, “Come and see.” Or when folks accustomed to wielding the power get confused and complacent, God calls out high schoolers who until February 14 were more interested in what to wear, who to date and that math test, than standing in front of the world and speaking in their own voice of truth. Over the centuries God has called a stuttering Moses, Christian enemy #1 Paul, shepherds, lepers, tax-collectors, demoniacs, Greeks, Pharisees, fishermen and Roman centurions to deliver the simple truth of what they had seen. And today, it is the women who deliver.

And just so you are clear that the proclamation comes *through* these folks and not *from* these folks, take a look at how the first Easter was reported. If we compare Mark's women to John's Mary Magdalene we will have a hard time deciding what really happened on Easter morning (which by the way, is not the reason we study the Bible – for answers...we study the Bible to enter into the Questions.) Regardless, we know from Mark that *the women fled from the tomb seized by terror and amazement and said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid...*and yet John tells of Mary Magdalene, who became known as the apostle to the apostles, and was the first woman preacher to proclaim the Good News of Resurrection: ***I have seen the Lord***.

Maybe Mark's women told no one at that time, or the writer of Mark just could not bring himself to give women the title role, or perhaps they were so well-versed in their cultural norms that they spoke only to other women in public, and gave the great good news of Easter to their men to tell. The Bible doesn't answer that, it just leaves the open question, “If they said nothing to anyone, how do **WE** know the story?” Somebody said “yes” to God's call. Somebody told.

Somewhere in there is the truth you need to hear today. Somewhere within trauma, ecstasy, fear and joy is where God is calling you on this great Easter morning. So, ***come see the tomb***.

During the past 40 days of Lent, we asked you to participate in a dance with words. One Word, each week, as a reflection on that week's Gospel. Our words focused us, and even changed us, as we allowed those gospel stories to change and shape us. Looking back, those words themselves could be shorthand for the Christian life of faith: Wilderness + Surrender + Clear + Selfless + Thunder = Easter.

Seems we all begin our ministries the same as Jesus did – in a sort of **wilderness** (and isn't it odd that Jesus' discipleship to God starts in a physical wasteland and ends in the wasteland of what human hatred and fear?) We moved, then, to the call to "take up our cross and follow." That confronts us with the call to discipleship, which requires us to give up – to **surrender** ourselves.

Then we walked into Jerusalem with Jesus, and encountered a religious institution which needed some reformation. The Temple and its trappings had gotten in the way of the faith of the people, and Jesus' radical cleansing of the money changers and merchants at the Temple challenges us to **clear** out all those things that stand squarely between us and God.

The question that came next was hidden in the words, "God so loved the world." How can God love us, in the face of what we've done? Why would God love us, when we are so clearly distracted by so many things? Because that is who God is, **selfless**. There is no self in God, so God loves... So, what would it mean for us to crack open our hearts just a tiny bit, to let God's love for us seep in?

Finally, the **thunder** of God's voice claiming his Son and declaring the glory of what he will accomplish. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground" and gives itself to the process, there can be no fruit – in nature, *New Life is merely composted death* (Anna Carter Florence) and you cannot have Spring without summer, autumn and winter. But, we are still scared to death of death.

Words matter. Maybe we should ponder the idea of a "New Death" alongside "New Life." For because of God's love, death is never the end. Death begets life. Death is the stuff of new life. So to put the cross in a larger perspective: Jesus death on cross as the beginning of a revolution, a planting bursting through the earth to seek the sunlight. The cross begets an empty space that God will use to fashion a fresh start, "a new creation – where everything old has passed away and everything has become new." (2 Cor 5:17 paraphrased.) Salvation is wholeness, peace and compassion.

We have come to see the tomb. And now God calls out the power of new voices to speak the Easter Truth – your voices - in new ways and in new situations. The invitation this morning is for you to say - for the love of God - "yes." And I promise, you may see humanity, even yourself, at our worst, but you will also get to see God at God's absolute best. For you are also living an amazing journey with God where every difficult moment is accompanied by God's grace, and the strength of God to navigate difficult relationships, heart-breaking encounters, disappointments, angst and anxiety, and your very own weary soul. Just when you have reached the end of your strength, God's strength takes over.

At the end of the day, God doesn't call us because we are wonderful, or smart, or gifted, or worthy. God calls us to reflect the light of Christ - to everyone – those who like us, those who hate us, and those who are indifferent to our presence. All the while we point beyond ourselves to the God who loves, no matter what. *The role of every single Christian is a call into – a life of total surrender*, one of great challenge and greater joy and we get to see both, up close and personal. For the God who calls you promises to go with you even in the most unclear and empty places. Maybe you can't do this. That's okay. Because God can.

And good for you, because you know that – and we’ve seen the work that you do with your hands, and heard the stories of how you have been changed when the Holy Spirit used you. And all in all, that should be enough.

Did you ever think about why we “hunt” Easter eggs? Just a momentary pleasure or sweet treasure? Or is there something more? While the **egg** was a symbol of Spring, and the rebirth of the earth long before the time of Jesus, the **Easter egg** was defined by early Christians as a symbol of the resurrection of Jesus: the **egg** a small representation of the tomb from which Christ was raised. The place of rebirth of the earth, and new life. How fitting then, that women delivered the Easter Good News.

No matter what you think happened on the cross – Atonement for our Sins, the promise of Eternal Life, a Cosmic Win of Good over Evil – understanding it probably doesn’t matter **as much** as knowing the Jesus died by human hands because God emptied himself, and took the form of a slave: a human life. He chose to live as we live, and thus, he chose to die as we die...and in doing so, he redeemed the whole human experience: he redeemed our sinful natures, he saved us from the effects of evil on our souls by showing that God is all about love (and so much less about punishments.) He promised us to be with us always, which means that not only will God be with us, but conversely, that we will be with God. Forever.

And if that were not enough, if God’s human journey in Jesus were not enough, upon the verdict of the end of life, God said, “Not so fast.” I created life out of the dust of the earth. And I can call forth new life from places you cannot even imagine. I AM the Lord your God...always with you, having been you, knowing all of you, and claiming for you an endless love that has been from the beginning, and will be forever. Come See the Tomb. It’s empty. Now let’s do something new. Amen.

Pastor Susan Langhauser - Advent Lutheran Church, Olathe, KS.

Resources: *Father Marcus Reflections* (6/9/2018 blog); “Easter Egg Hunt” Wikipedia; *One Word (that will change your life)* Jon Gordon, Dan Britton and Jimmy Page (2014); Anna Carter Florence and Susan Candea quotes on death/salvation.

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord";
(and she told them that he had said these things to her.)

Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was

very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."

So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

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