

Easter Sunday – April 21st, 2019
Acts 10:34-43; Ps 118:1-2, 14-24;
I Cor 15:10-26; John 20:1-18

Christ is risen! (**He is risen indeed!**) Today we celebrate the heart of the Good News: Christ rose from the dead the third day after he was taken down off the cross and laid in the tomb.

The Apostle John opens the story this morning in the dark. Mary Magdalene walks alone to the garden tomb – before the women came to prepare the Lord’s body. Did Mary go to pray at the tomb – restless and grief-stricken? The Holy Spirit called her there. What a shock to find the heavy stone rolled away from the entrance! She begins running – headed back to that upper room where the disciples have been hiding from the temple authorities.

When she gets to Peter and the others she blurts out: **THEY HAVE TAKEN THE LORD OUT OF THE TOMB, AND WE DO NOT KNOW WHERE THEY HAVE LAID HIM.”** (v 2) She is making a couple of crucial assumptions that are not correct. In any cemetery, we really do not expect a grave that was closed standing open. That’s creepy. The dead should stay dead, right? First, she assumes

Jesus is dead. Second, she assumes that the notorious “they” have stolen the body.

When Peter and John (who calls himself “the other disciple”) hear what Mary is telling them, they race one another to the tomb. They are excited. Mary has come running to them. Now they run to see. John is younger than Peter. He wins the foot race. But he stops short at the mouth of the cave. The tomb is carved out of the living rock there in the garden. You see an example when you visit Jerusalem. John bent down and looked into the tomb. He sees the linen wrappings, but he waits. Peter comes running from behind and plunges into the tomb.

Peter has always been known to fire first and then take aim. He always says the first thing he thinks of. He always acts hastily. But this morning we hear an important detail that helps him and the others sort out what has truly happened.

John reports that Peter 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. John reports that when he went into the tomb and witnessed what Peter found first – he saw and believed. Joseph of Arimathea (the owner of the tomb) and those with him Friday afternoon had begun the traditional embalming process of spices and linen wraps. The women planned to come after the Sabbath to complete the preparation of Jesus' body.

John gives us these magnified details. He tells us “as yet they did not understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead.” John may be referencing Daniel 12:2: MANY OF THOSE WHO SLEEP IN THE DUST OF THE EARTH SHALL AWAKE, SOME TO EVERLASTING LIFE, AND SOME TO SHAME AND EVERLASTING CONTEMPT. (c. 530 BCE) These witnesses see that Jesus' body had escaped with the linen wraps still intact, they concluded that Jesus' body was not stolen, but risen right up off the stone slab. After this they went back home, John tells us. But Mary lingers. She stands weeping. Then she bends over and looks into the tomb. She is still struggling with her idea that Jesus' body has been taken. And there are two angels in white perched where

Jesus had been lying. One sits at the head and one at the foot of the slab. It reminds me of the Ark of the Covenant that sat in the holy of holies in the temple! It is a holy and joyous sight! They ask her, “Woman why are you weeping?” Mary says, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” That is her story and she is sticking to it. But she cannot keep saying that! She would have to discount what the other disciples have learned. She would have to rub her eyes and say, “No such thing as angels.” People do that, you know. She hears someone, turns her head and sees some man standing there. And this person repeats the angels’ question, “Woman, why are you weeping?” To look at this person, she must remove her gaze from the tomb and follow the sound of the voice. I wonder why she does not recognize the voice. He asks, “Whom are you looking for?” Here we go again. She supposes he is a gardener and says, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Then Jesus says, “Mary!” At last, Mary Magdalene turns all the way around – the tomb is behind her and who is before her but her Lord, her Teacher, Jesus himself.

Mary has forgotten why she was weeping. She has seen the Lord – she stands in his presence. This moment is a taste of the final victory: The resurrected Lord in the world – glorious – alive with eternal life. All creation will see this on the last day in its fullness.

Just as the tomb is behind Mary – the tomb is behind us. This holy moment recorded in the gospel sheds light into all our lives. The fear of sin and death – the grave clothes – the cold oblivion of burial is behind anyone who believes in the risen Christ. Turn to him! Turn away from death! Cancelled sin – eternal life now – accept the gifts he gives. John has faithfully recorded the evidence and the wonders of the first resurrection day. The apostles traveled the known world teaching and preaching this gospel: Christ is the “one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.” (Acts 10:42)

Paul, who saw the risen Christ maybe two or three years later, brought a deep knowledge of the Old Testament to the moment of his conversion – the moment he turned to Christ. He taught the church at Corinth: *If corpses can't be*

raised, then Christ wasn't, because he was indeed dead. And if Christ weren't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever. It's even worse for those who died hoping in Christ and resurrection, because they're already in their graves. If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot. But the truth is that Christ has been raised up, the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries.

There is a nice symmetry in this: Death initially came by a man, and resurrection from death came by a man. Everybody dies in Adam; everybody comes alive in Christ. But we have to wait our turn: Christ is first, then those with him at his Coming, the grand consummation when, after crushing the opposition, he hands over his kingdom to God the Father. He won't let up until the last enemy is down—and the very last enemy is death! (1 Cor 15:16-26, The Message)

Today, “consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ.” (Ro 6:11) Turn to him and live. Christ is risen! **(He is risen indeed!)** Amen.