

Leaving the Tomb 4-12-20

This Easter Sunday is a memorable one. It is the first in many of our lives that we have not attended church. We cannot look and see the new Easter outfits people purchased to show off on this happiest day of the Christian year. We cannot shake hands with the people sitting next to us. We are unable to watch children search for Easter eggs and squeal with excitement over what is inside. Easter baskets with big chocolate bunnies may not be in every home this Easter morning, but the one thing that is still present and will always be present is Christ. Our Easter today is different for certain. It will not be one spent with extended family and friends to have a wonderful meal. It will not involve travel or beautiful music from the choir, organist, praise bands and pianists who practiced weeks if not months to perform for this most special of Sundays. Yet, Christ is with us.

This will be your at home version of Easter Sunday's sermon. I have saved the one I was going to use for the day we reopen, for the day we will leave our homes which many have come to think of as a bit like a tomb. Yes, there are many more walls, floors of wood, linoleum and vinyl, windows to allow the sunshine in or to view the rain. Yet, all in all, the entire world has learned a bit, just a bit, what it is like to be a shut-in. Our time though is temporary, being stuck inside the homes we once enjoyed coming home to. We will emerge from our homes again and soon, we hope, back into the hustle and bustle of our lives. Yet, for now, just for this time we are doing things we never thought would get done. The "honey do" lists are being completed. The spring cleaning has begun and continues, even the windows. We are getting done all the jobs we put off doing for time or just because we hate to do them. Perhaps, it is a sign that we need to take time to look at the things we do and the priorities we held before and reimagine them as we would a major home renovation. Our lives are be revamped daily as we

strive to continue with some forms of normalcy yet venture into the unknown and for some it may be a learning experience.

The disciples learned plenty from Jesus while he walked and talked with them. He was always teaching them new things, things about God and heaven, things about themselves they never realized. We too are learning things about ourselves we had not known before. We are learning life can be different, and we will survive. We will even survive without our daily coffee runs or fast food endeavors. We will survive somehow with less money for those unemployed. We also will show kindness in ways we did not think still existed not just here in our town, but all over the world. Large manufacturers are switching from alcohol beverages to alcohol sanitizers and wipes in their productions. People are caring for others, outside of their friends and family, and generally finding ways they can help the people both highest and risk and those who simply are alone and need a voice to comfort them.

Jesus knew how to comfort people. He did it in a calm and gentle voice. He suffered in great agony and allowed the will of his father in heaven to be done. He was anxious as we are right now and in fear for the pain on this human form he dwelled within would cause great difficulty to get his mission on earth accomplished. Our missions go on despite being asked to stay inside our homes. Our lives go on, and some of us may need some extra kindness shown to them in this time. Some neighbors may be in need and a thoughtful question or two is needed to be sure they are really as okay as they claim to be.

Jesus was dead. The disciples brave enough to remain outside saw it happen. Mary, the mother of Jesus, wept and cried out loud bitterly at the foot of the cross when her son breathed his last breath. John, the youngest disciple, was given charge of Jesus' mother despite other siblings to be her caregiver. It was a great responsibility for a young

man, but to take the care of the Messiah's mother was a precious thing to bear. We have responsibilities as well, and each of them should be considered not a chore, but a precious undertaking and done out of love not just responsibility. Mary Magdalene, who was as much a part of the disciples as was possible, was distraught. She followed Jesus and loved him as much as a woman could love a man. There was so much pain during the past five days in this portion of the book of John, that it was a wonder anyone was able to record it all so we could read about it now.

How we deal with our own sorrows and pain are individual. Some people "tune out" and become almost in a vegetative state because they just allow themselves to shut down. Others become charged with anger during grief and will scream and shout at anyone who tries to distract them from that grief. Yet others switch modes and try to help those they can get past the initial shock. I guess we are all a bit in shock right now as our lives have changed. Our grocery store missions, and they feel like that to me, are ones of apprehension and organization. We get in and get out of the stores quicker than ever before or we should. We feel blessed when we find the staples, we took for grant it like the golden rolls of bathroom tissue. Cleaning products are selling like none before.

The followers of Jesus still had work. The women took care of coming to the tomb this day to anoint the body with more perfumes to continue to preserve it as there was no other way for them to do so. The body was simply encased in linens and laid on a slab in the tomb, then a large rock was rolled in front of it to seal it. This was not an Egyptian death or the body would have been embalmed, the organs removed and placed in a jar, and then perhaps the body would have been placed in a sarcophagus and even further into a pyramid if it were a person like a king. Jesus was a king to the people. He was labeled "king of the Jews" but his domain was not on earth, and never had been intended to be there but in heaven. In John, it is only Mary Magdalene arriving at the

tomb, seeing the stone was moved away. The strength to have moved that stone was not a simple feat. It would have taken many strong men to move it as it must have taken to place it. Yet, all Mary saw was the tomb had been opened.

Now many must have labeled Mary Magdalene as a hysterical female and it says in the gospel it was dark out, and as we know the night changes perspectives on things. Perhaps she was not seeing what she was now running to Peter to report. Peter was with the other disciples, the loved one whom John notes to be himself. So, two men are always better than one and unfortunately for the time their opinions would mean more than that of ten women, let alone one bereaved woman who so desperately wanted Jesus alive. The disciples entered the tomb, found the linens which had Jesus body in them so carefully wrapped and prepared for death and the decaying of the body. Then it says they simply returned to their homes.

Mary did not return home but stayed at the tomb. Perhaps she was too grief struck to move. Suddenly there were two angels in the tomb, and they asked Mary why she was crying. She told them what she assumed, that someone had stolen the body of Jesus and who knows where they had taken it. The angels told her that was not the case at all. So, she turns and yet another man stands before her and asks her once again, why are you weeping? Men, if you don't get why we women cry, we don't need you to ask us that question because we think you should already know why. This man asking this time was Jesus, but she certainly did not expect him to be there because she just saw the empty tomb and who was he anyway? He also asks whom she is looking for.

Now, this was a nice plot of land the tomb was in, because it had belonged to another named Joseph from Arimathea who had great wealth. Only the wealthy could have a tomb for burial such as this, more similar to a mausoleum present day. It would have had flora around it and Mary gets the idea this man was the gardener. Now in the

mysteries, sometimes it isn't the butler or maid who have committed the crime, sometimes it's the gardener and he was her primary suspect at the moment. Yet, he speaks her name softly, carefully, lovingly and she knows it is Jesus himself standing before her. He has breath and substance and life flowing through his body. He has risen, risen indeed. She immediately thereafter runs to tell the disciples the good news, and there is where my sermon I wrote for Easter takes off.

We can imagine the response, the looks, the questions those disciples put Mary through when she arrived with her news. She was probably accused of fake news before that became a modern term. Perhaps they didn't say it, but the disciples would not have believed Mary yet two of them, Peter and John would be able to confirm the empty tomb.

Now our homes should still be places we love to come home to, and one day when we are back to our normal activities, we will love our days off so much more, once again. Right now, this is Easter Sunday, today, not next week, not really when the churches reopen for services although we will celebrate it then as one celebrates a belated birthday or postponed event of some other type. Yet, this is our day, the biggest of two in the Christian year. Sure, we may not have the things we normally have on Easter. There weren't palms last week for Palm Sunday either, but it happened. We still have this joy that remains with us today and always – we serve a risen Savior, Christ the Lord, and hallelujah to that! Corona-19 the words once unheard of are now on every tongue. Let these words replace those if at least for today in not just us, this church, but all peoples' tongues everywhere – Christ the Lord is Risen today. We may not be in the sanctuary to sing that song or the others we reserve for today, but we will sing it one day again and very soon. We will gather together on that first Sunday back to church, it is my prayer, in greater numbers than we have seen for some time. My message will then be the one intended – “Go and Tell”.

You need not wait for that day, because only God can enter that service date in His calendar. Tell others today, via email, e cards, You Tube, Skype, and the good old telephone that Christ has risen. We do not serve a dead god, but a risen savior. Go tell it to everyone who has ears to hear. Jesus died for our sins. He is not dead and is still in the world battling this virus right along with us. And on that day, and it will probably be a Monday, because government starts on that day for their week – we will leave our personal tombs whatever they may be that is if you look at your home that way or your mental state. We will leave that place and once again see others, touch others, go about our normalcy or what will be our new norms. Yet, in all the excitement savor the excitement of this day, this Easter Sunday, and tell the world Jesus loves you, he died for you, and he rose again giving us a clean slate and a renewed purpose.

Take the opportunity to thank God that day as you should every day. Take the chance to tell others it was God who got us here. Tell the people you meet Jesus loves you. We will not forget this time, but so many have forgotten or never knew about the purpose of Easter. That has to stop! Tell others, spread the joy and peace and love that Jesus Christ has given to all of us. Do it, and praise God for it is from God that all our blessings flow! Amen.