

"The Tomb: A Place of Victory "
Luke 24:1-12

March 27, 2016

Easter Sunday (*Festival Service*)

Our congregation has been on a journey during the past 40 days of Lent. We visited the places of Jesus passion. We went to a parade to see people welcome Jesus as King. We went to an upper room to see Jesus celebrate the Passover meal with His disciples and to establish a new meal – the Lord’s Supper for His future disciples. We journeyed to the Garden of Gethsemane to see Judas betray Jesus and then to the court(house) yard to see Peter deny Jesus three times. We traveled to a trial to see Pontius Pilate condemn Jesus to death on a cross. Finally, we journeyed to GOLGOTHA to see Jesus die on that cross.

Some of you traveled with us all the way and saw all those places. Some of you did not and saw none of them. Today, in our church service, we travel to a place all of us will visit for real someday. Our final journey is to a TOMB – a grave.

A grave is place of death. We don’t like graves. They make us sad. When we visit graves, they help remind us that dear friends and family – mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, and others have died and are gone.

A grave is a place of defeat. We expect to live forever. When we are kids, we don’t even think of dying. When we are young, we do stupid things – drive wild and fast, text while driving, eat JUNK food and don’t exercise. Why? We don’t expect to experience harm or die. As we get older, we slow down and our bodies break down, but we still expect to live. Death and the grave shows we have failed. When we challenge death, we always lose.

A grave is a place of fear because it is a place for all people. You don’t need to come to church or read the Bible to know that. Our life experience tells us that all people die. Have you ever met a person who never died but lived on? No! Never! The Bible does tell us the reason for death. The Word of God says, “The wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23) When we break the Law of God in any way – by thinking, saying, or doing anything that is wrong or by not thinking, saying, or doing everything that is right – we earn death as a punishment from God. Think you’ve avoided sin because you are so good? The Word of God says differently, “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) Experience tells you the same. Have you ever met a perfect person? You may have met very good people but never a perfect person.

So what do we do? We can try to ignore death, hoping it won’t happen to us. But death still happens. We can try to avoid death and not talk about it. Have you noticed how many people have no funeral service or have “celebration of life” instead? We don’t want to think about death, thinking that will help. We can try to overcome death with medicine and technology but that eventually will not stop death. All our efforts fail. This means that no matter who are you – faithful church member, occasional church attender, or non-believer, you will die. Your cold stiff body will be put in a grave.

But we do not visit OUR graves today. We visit Jesus’ grave – HIS TOMB. His grave is very different than ours. And that’s not because His is a cave and ours are burial places – both are for dead bodies. In fact, Jesus’ tomb had Jesus’ cold dead body in it on Friday afternoon. The women went to Jesus’ tomb early Sunday morning assuming that Jesus’ corpse was still there. But when the women arrive at the tomb, it is very different. Jesus’ corpse is not there! The tomb is empty!

What had happened? What would YOU think if you went to a friend’s grave and found an empty hole? The women were perplexed. Then they saw two men in dazzling apparel – angels. Now they are afraid. The angels ask them, “Why do you seek the living one (person) among the dead (people)? He is not here, but is risen.” Jesus is not dead. He had not lost. Death had not won. Jesus had won. He had defeated death. Jesus is alive!

That is why we come here today. That is why we are happy and celebrate! But what exactly is the reason for our joy? What is the reason for our celebration? Are we simply excited to witness and look back on a wonderful miracle – a dead man becoming alive again? That is exciting but not a real

reason for us to celebrate. Are we simply happy for Jesus in the same way we are happy for a man who wins a million dollars in the LOTTERY? That's good for him but doesn't help us.

The angels remind the women (and us) that this is not a surprising event. This was planned. Jesus had told the women and the disciples many times that He would get crucified and will rise from the dead to life on the third day. Jesus would die voluntarily as the sacrifice and payment for all sins and for all people. This means God has removed your sin and my sin and forgiven them all. God exchanges your sinful for Christ's perfect life. All of your guilt, all of your shame, all of your fear and worry are gone. We have a right relationship with God through Jesus. We have His love, His care, and His perfect peace for our lives.

All of that is well and good but it's not all. Some people are satisfied to feel happy and be at peace in their lives. God offers so much more to us because Jesus rose from the dead. In our epistle reading for today, Paul says that if we hope (faith) in Christ for this life only, people should feel sorry for us. Why? Paul says, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Jesus has died and has risen from the dead. That's exciting and wonderful but He is not the only one. He is only the first one.

Paul goes on to say, those who belong to Christ will rise from the dead when Jesus comes again. We are born, belonging to Adam. We have inherited sin, death, and hell from Adam. When we are baptized, we are joined to Christ – to His death and to His resurrection. We have inherited forgiveness, resurrection and heaven from Christ. Jesus' death becomes the reason for the forgiveness for our sins. Jesus' resurrection and empty grave become the reason for our resurrection and our own empty graves.

This is the reason for our joy on Easter. This is the reason for our celebration. It is not because of baskets full of colored eggs and candy. Those things are fine and fun. We rejoice and celebrate because of something that will be empty – our own graves. We will die and our bodies will be put in graves, but they will not stay. When Jesus comes again, our bodies will be raised to live again. Our bodies will be transformed to be like Jesus' glorified and powerful body. Our bodies will never die again but live eternally with Jesus and all of God's people in heaven.

Do not let sin or guilt depress you. They have been forgiven and removed because of Jesus' dead body on the cross on Good Friday. Do not let death and the grave make you afraid. They have been defeated because of Jesus' living body NOT in the tomb on Easter Sunday. God has changed the meaning of the tomb from a place of defeat to a place of victory – HIS and yours as well. Amen.