

"Those Who Went to the Tomb"
Matthew 28:1-10

April 20, 2014

Easter Festival

Christ is risen! (copy: He is risen indeed, alleluia!) During our Lenten journey, we considered various groups of people who were near Jesus' cross. We have considered their experiences, as well as their attitudes and actions; their fears and faith (or lack thereof). Today, on this most holy day, we will bring back one of those groups for an encore: (who?) the women – Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome. These women faithfully stood near the cross as Jesus died. These women were also the first to go to Jesus' tomb on Easter Sunday.

Their journey began with sadness. Jesus was their friend and teacher. They thought He possibly was the Messiah. He talked about bringing in the Kingdom of God with forgiveness and eternal life for all. But now Jesus was dead. Jesus had predicted His death and resurrection – three times. He had said that the Gentiles would mock Him, spit at Him, beat him, and kill Him, but, three days later, He would rise from the dead. Did the women not believe that or did they forget that in their sadness? I don't know. Theirs was a sad journey – a journey to finish burying Jesus' corpse.

Their journey was interrupted with fear. First, they were afraid that they couldn't enter the tomb because of the huge stone in front of it. "Who would move it?" they worried. Then, they were afraid because they felt an earthquake and saw an angel. Finally, they were afraid because Jesus' body was not in the tomb! It was gone! The angel said that Jesus had risen and was alive. But I'm sure they were confused. They left the tomb with fear and great joy.

Their journey ended with joy. As they were running back to inform the disciples, Jesus met them. They saw Him alive – not a ghost, not a dream, but a flesh and blood person risen from the grave and alive. They were overjoyed that their friend and teacher was alive. But there was more! Now, they knew this was the Messiah, the Savior of the world. The Kingdom of God was here! God would grant forgiveness for all sin because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross! Death would no longer be a barrier! God would give eternal life because of Jesus' resurrection from the dead!

We might be a bit jealous of those women and their experience. Wouldn't you like to journey to Jesus' tomb and experience that joy? You can! You don't need a time machine to help you travel back through the years. Your baptism does that for you! Your baptism brings you to His death, His burial, and His resurrection!

Going to a grave is always sad. Death is sad because a friend or family member is gone. It is also frightening to remember that all of us will die and be buried. The Bible says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," and "the wages of sin is death." Religious people will die. Non-religious people will die. People that come to church every Sunday will die. People who never come to church will die. Good people will die. Bad people will die. All people will die because all people sin.

That has already happened for those who have been baptized. The book of Romans says, "All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death." (Rom. 6:3) On Good Friday, Jesus went to the cross with a purpose (reason). Jesus did not get crucified because the soldiers were strong and He was weak. Jesus voluntarily went to the cross to offer His life as the sacrifice for all sin and to earn forgiveness for all. When you are baptized, you share His death. Your sins were crucified there. You share in His burial. Your sinful self died and was buried with Jesus in the tomb.

But that's not all! There's more. Romans goes on to say, "just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his." (Rom. 6:4-5) On Easter, Jesus rose from the dead with glory and power, defeating death and hell. When you are baptized, you share His victory. You have experienced the resurrection. God has given you new life, the same as Jesus. Sin cannot condemn you. Life cannot overcome you. Death cannot hurt you. Hell cannot have you. You have risen from spiritual death and now have new life.

When Jesus rose from the dead to life again, everything has changed. Jesus was different. He was no longer dead. He was alive, nevermore to die again. The women at (near) the tomb were

now different. Before Easter (Sunday), they were sad, afraid, and hopeless. After the resurrection, they were joyful, brave, and had hope for the future.

We are different, too. Every single person who has been baptized into Christ is different. Before Easter, we were sinners on the way to death and hell. We have shared Jesus' death. Our sins are gone – nailed to the cross with Jesus and washed away. We have shared Jesus' resurrection. We have new life.

Sometimes, we think that just means we will go to heaven when we die. That is true, but there is so much more. When the Scriptures says that “we, too, may live a new life”, that's not just for the future. That's for right now. We don't celebrate Easter for one day. We live Easter every day.

We gather together in God's house every Sunday so that we might live Easter every week. We come here like the women on the road from the tomb. We hear Jesus speak through the Scriptures to forgive us, comfort us, and encourage us. We bow before Him in worship like the women did. We lay hold of Jesus like the women did. His body is given to us to eat. His body is given to us to drink. Our faith is strengthened as we get a taste of the feast waiting for us in heaven.

We live every day with hope. Our future is sure. A new life is waiting for us in heaven. Death is no longer a barrier for us, but a gate through which we enter into heaven. Therefore, we are free to live new lives already now. Sin no longer controls us. Guilt no longer burdens us. Death does not frighten us. We are free to live – serving God by serving each other in love. We are free to enjoy God's good gifts here for a short time and eagerly anticipate (wait) to enjoy even better gifts in heaven for all eternity.

The last group for consideration in this Lent and Easter season really is you. In our baptismal journey, we have come to the cross and we have come to the tomb. We share the benefits of Jesus' death. God has forgiven us and accepted us into His Kingdom. We share the benefits of Jesus' resurrection. God has resurrected us to live new now and to live in heaven eternally. So, enjoy your Easter celebration today because of that and live out Easter every day because of that. Amen.