

"Why Are You Here? " John 20:11-18

April 20,2014

Easter Sunday (*Sunrise service*)

Why are you here? I know I'm not much of an early morning person. Maybe you aren't either. Why are you here...in this place...so early in the morning? What could have possibly dragged you out of bed with the nice warm covers and the pleasant sleep you were enjoying at this early dawn hour to be here? It might be curiosity about a service at sunrise. We are not often in church at this time. It might be a family tradition for this day in the year. Whatever the reason is, it is surely different than the reason which got Mary Magdalene and the other women out of their beds early in the morning on the third day after Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified and died to travel, not to a warm comfortable building such as this one, but to a cold dark tomb. Rather than asking, "Why are you here?", we should ask, "Why were they there?"

The women who were out before dawn while it was still dark on that Sunday morning were going to the tomb with no hopes or expectations. They were there out of a sense of duty. They had a job to perform. Since Jesus' death had occurred so close to sunset on the previous Friday, they had not had sufficient time to adequately prepare His body for burial. So, they brought spices to the tomb to finish the job as soon as they possibly could -- sunrise after the Sabbath and its prohibitions against work were over. They arose early and traveled to the place of Joseph of Arimathea's tomb for one reason and one reason only: to inter the body of Jesus of Nazareth -- nothing more and nothing less.

There was no sense of excitement or anticipation. They anticipated nothing out of the ordinary happening and there was no cause for excitement. Their friend, their teacher, the one they had hoped was the Christ, was dead. They were emotionally numb from the events of the past week - from the emotional high of the Palm Sunday parade to the emotional low of the arrest of Jesus, His public scourging at the hands of Pilate, and His death by crucifixion. There was only a sense of deep

and profound sadness which gripped them and could not let go. So deep was their sadness that, when they arrived at the tomb to find the stone removed from the entrance, they assumed the worst - the grave had been violated and the corpse of Jesus stolen- which only added to their grief.

But what the women ended up getting from their predawn excursion was something beyond anything they could have anticipated, hoped for, or wished. It was so great that they could scarcely believe it even while it was happening. They assumed the extraordinary to be the mere ordinary. Mary Magdalene, overcome by grief and weeping, saw two angels in white sitting in the tomb, but she wasn't fazed. When they asked her why she was crying, she apparently assumed they were mere men and answered, "They have taken my Lord away and I don't know where they have put him." She then turned and saw Jesus standing there before her and he asked her the same question. She assumed that he was just the gardener and answered in the same way.

Those who think that Jesus' followers were so hopeful of a resurrection that they invented it or so expecting Jesus to be alive that they deluded themselves into seeing Him couldn't be more wrong. They were there expecting a dead Jesus. It wasn't until Jesus revealed herself to Mary that everything changed. Jesus called her by name, "Mary" and everything was different.

The sadness and grief was replaced by joy and elation. It wasn't simply because her good friend who was dead was now alive. It meant that everything that He had taught, everything that He had promised, and everything He had come to bring was true. The Kingdom of God, of which He had spoken so often, was now a reality.

But rather than a kingdom characterized by military force which brought about economic and social good or even just some future heavenly kingdom fit only for those righteous enough to attain it, this was the rule of God which was in effect here and now. It came into being through the forgiveness of sins earned by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God upon the cross and was open to all by faith in Him.

It is a kingdom marked by the spiritual good which it bestowed upon its members -- a new and right relationship with God as Father, rather than as Judge. Unlike other kingdoms, this kingdom

would never end, but its occupants would live forever because Jesus had conquered death. His promise, "Because I live, you will live also" was a reality.

All of this came to fruition because Jesus stood there, alive and triumphant over sin, over Satan, and over the power of the grave. That is what they received for coming to that place - the tomb - at that time - early in the morning. They received their living Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and that - rather than their emotion, their obligation, and their performance of a duty - made their journey to the tomb a life changing experience.

It is the same for you and me today. We may come to this place, not only at sunrise on Easter, but every Sunday, out of a sense of duty. We come because we have to. We come because we think we have to perform our religious duty by being in attendance at a worship service. There is no sense of excitement or anticipation of what we will find here. We may arrive here saddened or burdened by the cares and troubles of our lives like those women did. Or, our emotions may border on the apathetic.

But, like the women, what we end up getting from our excursion here is beyond anything we could anticipate, hope, or wish. We, too, have an encounter with the resurrected and living Lord Jesus Christ. Like the women, we mistake the extraordinary encounter for a mere ordinary encounter. We hear words from the lectern and the pulpit. We see bread and wine on the altar. Nothing special here. Our grief, disappointment, depression over our outward circumstances blinds us to anything special here.

But then, like Mary Magdalene, Jesus calls us by name. In Holy Baptism, we receive the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit upon us and He calls us personally to be His child and an heir of His kingdom. This opens our eyes. Everything is different.

We hear the Word differently -- no longer as just the word of man, but as the voice of our living Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We see the elements on our altar differently -- no longer as just bread

and wine, but as the very body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ given to us in a real and special way to eat and drink in faith.

Our sadness and grief are replaced with joy and elation. Our disappointment and frustration are replaced with satisfaction and hope. It's not just because we've heard a miraculous story of a corpse being revived to life again. It's because all that He taught, all that He promised, and all that He came to bring is true for us.

We have victory over sin through the forgiveness which He won for us by dying on the cross and has distributed to us in the water of Holy Baptism, the word of Absolution, and the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

We have a right relationship with God through that forgiveness and possess a peace that passes all human understanding, that peace which the world cannot give. We have victory over death when our time comes through the resurrection which Jesus achieved for us by rising from the tomb to life this day.

Why are you here today? Why am I here today? It's not because of tradition. It's not because of duty. It's because Jesus Christ rose from the dead and is alive with us today. We receive His gifts of forgiveness, life, peace, and salvation, not only on Easter Sunday, but every Sunday because every Sunday is a remembrance and celebration of Easter Sunday. So, come back again and again and again to receive those gifts won by your Lord this day. *That's why we are here. That's why we have come. Amen.*