

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

Easter Sunday – 9th April 2023

John 20:11-18

OUTSIDE THE TOMB

For the last two thousand years Christians have greeted one another each Easter Sunday morning with the cry, ‘Christ is Risen’, and the response, ‘He is Risen Indeed!’ Even when the church has been persecuted, from the early church in Rome to just a few years ago in communist Russia, and even in parts of the world today, we hear stories of Christians risking their lives by making this public confession of their faith. And we can understand why they do it. In the face of hardship, despair, and hopelessness, this is the day which reminds us of God’s great victory over not just death, but over everything which threatens to defeat or get us down in life. That’s why this morning we join with all those people over the last two thousand years who have made that bold proclamation, ‘Christ is Risen, He is Risen Indeed!’

How different though our joy and celebration is to how Jesus’ followers greeted that first Easter morning. Think first about the week they had just had. On Sunday they had been a part of a triumphant procession into town, with what seemed like all of Jerusalem turning out to welcome Jesus as a triumphant king. During the week though Jesus hadn’t done Himself any favours. In a situation that was already tense He had further upset the establishment by both His words and His actions. And then, *that* night. What had started with a quiet meal with His closest followers, had ended in betrayal, arrest, and a trial in which no-one in authority wanted to convict Him, but no-one also had the courage to set Him free. It had all finished with Jesus dying on the cross; a man they knew to be so good, being executed in a way which was reserved for the worst of

criminals. And because it was the eve of the Sabbath, His followers had had to quickly take down His body and bury it without it being properly prepared. And then, in their grief and in their fear, all those who were followers of Jesus had locked themselves away.

So, we come to this day, Easter Sunday morning. Mary Magdalene is the first to go the tomb. Finding the stone rolled away she runs and tells Peter and John, and they run, find the tomb empty and the burial cloths left behind, and go back to tell the others. But Mary stays there, and she is crying. After everything else she has been through this week, surely this is the last straw. She can't even prepare Jesus' body for burial, because someone has moved it away. Mary looks into the empty tomb, and even though she sees angels there, she also sees only hopelessness and despair. Her world has ended. Nothing is as she thought it would be.

The problem though, is with where Mary is looking. Where is she looking? Inside the tomb. And even though the body is gone she still doesn't see reason for hope there. But then she looks outside the tomb, and she sees Jesus. At first, she doesn't recognise Him, but when He says her name she immediately knows who He is, and what a turnaround in her reaction and how she is feeling! Inside the tomb is empty; empty of hope, empty of life. Outside the tomb is the joy of the risen Jesus. This morning we don't worship that the tomb was empty, but that Jesus is alive! This was news that Mary had to take straight back to the disciples. She couldn't hold it in. That one encounter with Jesus changed not just how she viewed this week, but her whole life! What a change, looking outside the tomb she has gone from hopelessness and despair to now celebrating the joy of the resurrection.

How are we living, where are we looking? It can be hard for us not look into the tomb, can't it? We have the things which happen in our lives; the things which worry us, the things which concern us, the things which upset us. Maybe conflicts with family or friends, pressures or stresses at work, worries about the future for ourselves or others. Perhaps feeling the loneliness of someone who is no longer in our lives, or concerns about the sickness or other worries someone close to us is going through. And what about when we turn on the news or look at a newspaper or read it online, there are plenty of things trying to make us worried there, to, aren't there? So, while today we greet each other with the joyful cry of the resurrection, does this cry always stay with us each day in our lives?

Like Mary, we can also look outside the tomb, not just on Easter Sunday morning, but every day. Just as Jesus called Mary by name, He also calls each one of us. He calls us in our baptism, when He put His name on us. He calls us through His Word, telling us how much He loves us and all the things He has done so we can be with Him. And He calls us in Holy Communion, when, as we come forward, we are reminded that Jesus gave His body and blood on the cross, 'for you'. What did this news do to Mary and the disciples? It changed them and their lives from that point on. They now knew that there was nothing they faced that God wasn't with them, helping them, caring for them. Looking outside the tomb we see the Jesus who calls to each one of us, who says, 'I love you, and I will never leave you'. And, just as He said to Mary, He now says to us, 'I have also opened the way for you to come back to my Father'. Jesus rising from the dead means that our relationship with God, the relationship which was broken way back with the sin of Adam and Eve, that this relationship can now be restored. That's what Easter is all about. That's why we make this cry so triumphantly.

That's why it's important that not only is the tomb empty, but that Jesus lives outside the tomb. That's why we can be certain that Jesus comes to us in all of those things which threaten to drag us down in our lives.

This encounter of Jesus and Mary on that morning of the first Easter Sunday gives us such a strong picture of what Easter means in our lives. With Jesus being alive and outside the tomb, we also now have the certainty of hope and new life forever with Him. Once they knew that not only was the tomb empty, but that Jesus was alive, Mary and the others could go out and boldly live in and share this good news. This Easter morning may the joy of this news also come to you. May it give you hope. May it make you sure of God's forgiveness. May it remind you that in Him there is life forever. May it help you know that He also calls each one of you to Him. And may it mean that rather than being pulled down into whatever tombs may threaten to drag you in at various times, that with Him you may boldly live in the joy and strength of this new life every day. Christ is Risen. He is Risen Indeed. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Do you have traditions for how you celebrate Easter Sunday? Any special memories from Easters in the past? What is especially significant to you about this day?
- For Mary, everything would have suddenly hit her when she found the tomb empty, and most likely thought Jesus' body had been taken away. Are there times when everything seems to pile up on you, perhaps you feel unable to cope? What/who helps you to get through those times?
- The good news of Jesus' resurrection changed everything for Mary, just like it changes everything for us. Reflect on how different our lives are now, how we can face life with confidence, how we know God is with us in everything, because we can look at the risen Jesus outside the tomb. How does this good news change everything?

Pray: thank God for the good news of Jesus in the resurrection. Pray that we remember and hold on to this good news whatever we face in our lives.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
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