

“LOVE BROUGHT THEM BACK”

Matthew 28:1-10, Easter-A, April 16, 2017

The Sabbath had come and gone (Mark 16:1). It was now Sunday morning at dawn. It was the first day of the week and—St Matthew tells us—that **Mary Magdalene**—and the **other “Mary,”** that is **“Mary the mother of James and Josés”** (27:56, 61), **came to the burial place of Jesus to look at the tomb.**

Matthew mentions only **two women being there** that first Easter morning, but when we read St. Mark’s Gospel and St. Luke’s Gospel it becomes readily apparent to us that Matthew is **abbreviating his account of the resurrection**—somewhat—to focus our attention squarely on the **EMPTY TOMB** and the **ANGEL’S PROCLAMATION: “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here! For he has risen as he said” (Matthew 28:5-6)!**

In not sharing with us all of the **unnecessary details** of that first Easter Sunday, St Matthew would have been in **complete compliance with the directive of Sergeant Joe Friday**—in that old television series back in the 1960’s entitled: **DRAGNET. Sergeant Friday always told people when he was interrogating them—especially—women: “STICK WITH THE FACTS, MA’AM! PLEASE, JUST STICK WITH THE FACTS!”**

Mark, however, adds another woman to our growing list of women disciples who made their way down to **“Joseph’s Lovely Garden”** at the **CRACK OF DAWN** that first Easter morning. Mark tells us that **“Salome” (16:1)** was also there. And **Luke, the beloved physician, adds one more name to our growing list of women-disciples that morning too!** He tells us that **Joanna** was also **there (Luke 24:10)** although I doubt it very seriously that any of these dear women who were there in the graveyard that *first Easter Sunday—were in any way “bright-eyed and bushy-tailed,”* given the **set of horrendous circumstances** they had each been forced to experience—with the **horrible week that was now behind them!**

Nor is there any discrepancy among the four evangelists as to what time it was that the women folk actually arrived down there at Jesus’ tomb.

- Matthew tells us it was “at dawn” (Matthew 28:1).
- Mark tells us it was “when the sun had risen” (Mark 16:2).
- Luke tells us: “It was at early dawn” (Luke 24:1).
- John tells us this journey took place “while it was still dark” (John 20:1)

Here the **LOGICAL EXPLANATION** becomes that it **was still dark when these women, set out on their special mission to finish anointing Jesus’ lifeless**

body with oil and spices, since the time that had been allotted for them to do this had been cut short by the **fast approaching Sabbath Day** on that first **Good Friday!** These women were intent on doing this, hopefully, to **prevent the rapid decomposition** of our Lord's body (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1).

Mark tells us that it was on their way down to Jesus' tomb—that these women all seemed to have had **some sort of collective “epiphany!”** Suddenly, this **special entourage of Jesus' women disciples, to use an old expression: “Must have woken up and smelled the coffee,”** because all of a sudden they **simultaneously became greatly worried about that huge stone**—that **Joseph of Arimathea had had rolled** in front of what many people that day surely believed would have no doubt been our Lord's final resting place!

Just when they began to ask one another out loud: “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb” (Mark 16:3)—they must have also made a turn in the path on their journey to the cemetery—that **suddenly brought the tomb of Jesus—into their full view**—only to see, quite shockingly, and to discover that that **heavy stone had already been removed (Mark 16:3).**

It had been **rolled away—not so that Jesus could get out**—but so that they **could look into that cave and see that our Lord's slain body was no longer there!**

What had happened? Matthew, just like Sergeant Joe Friday on that old television show “Dragnet” -- is the only Gospel writer who actually solves the mystery for us! He tells us that there had suddenly been a **violent earthquake**, because an **angel of the Lord had come down from heaven, who then stepped forward and who having rolled away the stone from the tomb—sat upon it!**

The reason for the earthquake was the descent from heaven of God's special messenger, an angel. From the original Greek text it seems that this angel must have first stepped forward and taken that enormous stone completely out of its groove! Then he *turned it over on its side before he sat down on it!* In many artists' renditions of our Lord's resurrection, that heavy slab is *lying flat on the ground and the angel is sitting upon it to symbolize Christ's triumph!*

Concerning the angel, St Matthew tells us that his appearance was like lightning and his garment was as white as snow! For fear of the angel, the Roman guards shook and became like death men! This would lead me to believe that they these soldiers, these supposed **“SECURITY GUARDS,”** had become unconscious when they fainted—the same response that some people alive in the world today would simply classify as their having **“passed out.”**

The angel's words to every one of those women there that day—even as these are the angel's words to you and me today is: **“Don't be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified!**

And in the original Greek text the word **“YOU”** is in a very emphatic position: **“YOU,”** that is yes, **“YOU, YES AND I MEAN YOU,”** don’t you be afraid. **“Don’t you be like the Roman guards who were here who have now suddenly either passed out or scattered in every which-way-possible!”**

While LUKE AND JOHN tell us that there WERE TWO ANGELS PRESENT THERE THAT FIRST EASTER MORNING—Matthew’s Gospel—again omitting any unnecessary details—SPEAKS OF ONLY ONE ANGEL BEING there that morning—which leads us to further believe that while there were two angels there—ONLY ONE OF THEM SPOKE the necessary message to these frightened women. And what was the message: **“Don’t be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said!”** And there is no indication in our text that the angel was exercising the **kind of sarcasm we sinful human beings may have expected! That angel doesn’t say: “The Lord is arisen just as he said: again—and again—and again—and again!”**

And then the angel gives these brave women disciples four commands; four commands that the Easter Angel gives to you and me still today: **“COME, SEE, GO, AND TELL!”**

“COME!” The first of the angel’s imperatives was “come.”

This was an important statement because much might have hindered the women from coming. The place itself might have hindered them. They were in a graveyard early in the morning. They might have said to each other, **“Let’s go back home; it’s not safe here!”** Or **“Let’s come back when it is brighter and there are more people around!”**

Our God still says **“Come and see!”** today—but he doesn’t invite us to a tomb that was hewn out of a rock 2000 years ago. He invites us to come to that place wherever the Holy Spirit assembles people around the Gospel. He invites us to read the Scriptures: St. John wrote, **“These things are written that you too may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you might have life in his name” (John 20:31)!**

“SEE!” The second imperative was: “See!” The angel said, **“Come and see the place where he lay!”** What should we see when we look into the tomb?

First, we would see in Christ’s grave the CONDESCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST! Jesus was not a man for whom death would have ever come naturally! People die eventually because: **“The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23),** but Jesus was born into this world without sin and he never sinned!

Secondly, we should see the horror of our own sin, for it was our sin that put the Holy Son of God there! The angel told these women: **“Come, see,”** and:

“GO!” This was the third of the angel’s imperatives. It is a strong reminder that however tempting it may be to remain near the tomb to learn its lessons, there is nevertheless work that remains to be done and we must get with it: **“Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.... (Matthew 28:18-20)!**

“Tell!” The last of the angel’s imperatives was “tell!” It rightly comes last, for if we have come to the tomb, have seen that it is empty, and know that Jesus has

been raised from the dead—we then need to obey Jesus by going into the world, and there we must speak of what we know! We, too, must say to people: ***“He is not here! He has risen just as he said!”***

Brothers and sisters, as I was preparing to share this message with you today, I found myself confronted with a question that I have never been confronted with before, I don’t think! That question is: ***“What was it that brought those women back to the tomb of Jesus that first Easter morning?”***

You might tell me that it was the solid work ethic with which their godly parents had raised them—and of their having listened to a father and/or a mother for years who said: “If you are going to do something, give it your all and do it the best that you can possibly do it! Never do anything halfway!” They would have liked to **have lingered at Jesus’ tomb a while longer that first Good Friday—but the SABBATH** was fast approaching and they had been taught to live in obedience to the Ten Commandments too!

But I believe there is a much higher motive that brought those women back to Jesus’ tomb that first Easter morning—even as there is a much higher motive that has brought the vast majority of you, together with me, back here this morning too!

They were brought back to the tomb of Jesus because of the **POWERFUL WAY THAT JESUS HAD LOVED THEM—EACH ONE OF THEM—EVEN UNTO CRUCIFIXION!** We, too, are brought back here today because of the powerful way that Jesus has loved us—loved every one of us—also unto crucifixion!

For a while, it seemed as if their faith had died when Jesus died, and only their love lived on. And it was love that brought the women back to the tomb, where the miracle of the resurrection burst upon them and their faith was born again ten thousand times stronger than it had been before!

What is it that brings us here today? Heaven knows we are not alone! A vast portion of the civilized world is engaged in a similar exercise today. In hundreds of thousands of churches around the globe—Jesus’ disciples—and many others with them—are keeping the Festival of our Paschal Celebration—the Feast Day of our Lord’s resurrection alive today! IT’S LOVE THAT BRINGS US BACK HERE, AGAIN, AND AGAIN, AND AGAIN AND AGAIN!

John writes: ***“SEE WHAT LOVE THE FATHER HAS LAVISHED UPON US THAT WE SHOULD BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD—FOR INDEED—THIS IS WHO WE REALLY ARE” (1 JOHN 3:1)!***

I recently came across a study that had been done with children 4 to 8 years old. Each child was asked to speak about some incidences in their lives when they clearly could see what true love is—you know—love in action! The answers they got were broader and deeper than anyone could have imagined. Here are just a few of those answers:

ONE LITTLE GIRL, NAMED REBECCA, 7 YEARS OLD, SAID: “WHEN MY GRANDMOTHER GOT ARTHRITIS, she couldn’t bend over and paint her toenails anymore, so my grandfather does it for her, even though he has arthritis in his hands two.

A young boy, named JOHNNY, AGE 5 SAID: “LOVE IS WHEN YOU GO OUT TO EAT AND GIVE SOMEBODY MOST OF YOUR FRENCH FRIES **without making them give you anything in return!”**

MEGHAN, AGE 7 SAID, “WHEN SOMEONE LOVES YOU THEY SAY YOUR NAME DIFFERENTLY!”

TOMMY, AGE 6 SAID, "DURING MY PIANO RECITAL, I was on stage and I was scared. I looked at all the people watching me and then I saw my daddy waving and smiling. He was the only one doing that. When I saw that I wasn't scared anymore!"

AND THE FINAL ONE I'LL SHARE WITH YOU IS WHEN A FOUR-YEAR OLD CHILD, WHOSE NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOR WAS AN ELDERLY MAN—HAD LOST HIS WIFE TO DEATH. UPON SEEING THE MAN CRY, THE LITTLE BOY WENT INTO THE OLD GENTLEMAN'S YARD, CLIMBED ONTO HIS LAP AND JUST SAT THERE. When his mother asked what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy replied: "NOTHING, I JUST HELPED HIM CRY!"

What is it that brought so many of you here to 1541 Lake Murray Boulevard again today, though I am hoping we have some first-time guests today too! I believe it is the love that God made evident to the whole world in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

It's that same love that will give to you and me a whole new sense of direction in our lives day by day. It's you knowing for yourself and me knowing for myself that the words of St. Paul in our second lesson today are completely true: *"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God! When Christ, who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory"* (Colossians 3:1-4)! **Amen**