

“Rejoicing in the Unexpected”

Text: John 20:1-18

We are so familiar with the story of Easter and what surrounds it, that it is sometimes difficult to place ourselves in the disciple’s shoes. Even though Scripture had promised this and Jesus often spoke of his own resurrection, the disciples were utterly amazed and surprised. We know the end of the story and they did not. They did not expect Jesus to rise from the dead. An empty tomb led them to suspect a missing body, not one that had been resurrected. St. John records this especially from the view of Mary and what her risen Lord meant to her.

Mary Magdalene, Peter and John went to the tomb that morning but did not find what they were looking for. Instead of finding the body of their beloved teacher, they found their risen Lord and Savior. They really should not have been surprised, but they were. The first Easter gives an unexpected answer. The angels asked Mary, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She answered them, “They have taken away my Lord and I don’t know where they have laid him.”

That morning they did not find what they expected, they found an empty tomb. Most times when events happen that we don’t expect we are disappointed. This would not be the case for the disciples. There would be great joy because Jesus had risen from the dead just as he promised he would. As Mary discovered the gardener to be none other than Jesus, she could bring a message to the others of something that she had seen with her very own eyes. She could say to them with great joy, “I have seen the Lord.” This was quite a surprise and one that was unexpected as together with her and the others we can be-

REJOICING IN THE UNEXPECTED

- I. There was no need to look for the body of Jesus**
- II The resurrection brings us the greatest news of all**

I.

It has been well documented that they went to the tomb early in the morning to find the body of Jesus. This is especially clear when we consider what St. John says by way of explanation in verse 9: “For as yet they did not understand the Scripture that he must raise from the dead.” Given this information, this would explain their confusion and fear.

This text raises several questions. Why were the burial clothes arranged so neatly? Why was Mary crying in anguish? And where did they put the body of Jesus? All these questions are answered by one fact: Jesus has risen from the dead!

There is of course, a cracking of the case by John, speaking for himself that he went in, saw the evidence and believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. How had the disciples missed this point? Job said it in the Old Testament, which inspired our sermon hymn: “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.” (Job 19:25) Jesus also had promised: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” (John 2:19)

Since the first Easter has happened, what do we expect? We have the same promises that they did as well as the entire New Testament. We may not question the resurrection as some do, but what does it mean in our lives. A man from the newspaper interviewed me several weeks ago and asked what I did during Lent and Easter to bring you hope in these difficult days. There have been those over history who have tried to logically disprove the resurrection and came away believing in it. We may not doubt the resurrection because it is the center of our faith, but what about the certainty of salvation? If we live with

the goal and hope of heaven in mind. In Colossians, St. Paul calls for us to set our minds on the things above. He says: “For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (Colossians 3:3)

Our lives are in God’s eternal plans. He has accomplished this for us in Jesus Christ and has designed that from eternity. He sealed that promise with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead on Easter. The life of Jesus is ours that we might be with our Heavenly Father for eternity.

II.

The second part of the Gospel lesson from verse 11-18 deals exclusively with Mary and Jesus. She needs the consolation on this occasion more than Peter and John. Sometimes we do too. The angels asked her: “Woman, why are you crying?” They knew the answer that she didn’t. We can take as encouragement what Jesus says as well as the promise from Scripture: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)

We live in a world with its problems of family concerns, personal problems, and fears. At times we can be overcome with sadness. As the angels spoke to Mary she didn’t realize the solution to her problems was standing right next to her. Sounds like us don’t it? The things we worry about are never quite as great as they seem. A man, who worked at a convenience store where there had been multiple robberies, said he wasn’t that concerned because as he said: “My faith is in God.”

Mary talked to the gardener: “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” There would be none of that, because as we know, the gardener was Jesus. He asked her to tell the others that he was: “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” While it was good for Mary to Jesus it was not the end. She would see him again. He would stay among his disciples and return to the

Father. He is there now and through the Holy Spirit with you now.

There used to be a theory that the wind that blows on Easter Eve will be the prevailing wind for the rest of the year. How great it would be if that were true, for on Easter there is fresh breeze of renewed faith and hope and worship. Wouldn't it be wonderful that remained as the prevailing wind through the rest of the year?

Because Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, death has been defeated. Because Jesus has risen, you too can live a risen life. You are victorious over sin, death, and the devil because of him. This doesn't mean you will never sin; we are all sinners to be sure. As Jesus said of his Father: "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." (Matthew 22:32)

One of our great Easter hymns says this:

The strife is o'er the battle done;
Now is the victor's triumph won;
Now be the song of praise begun. Alleluia!
(LSB 464 vs. 1)

May that assurance be yours now and always! Amen.