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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
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Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
April 20, 2014
Easter Sunday

Scripture Lessons: Job 19:23-27; 1 Peter 1:3-9, John 20:1-18
Hymns: 199; 187; 200:1-3,7-8; 192; 210; 189; 188; 207:1,2

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 28:1-8

“Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn,
Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. 2 And
behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord
descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from
the door, and sat on it. 3 His countenance was like lightning, and
his clothing as white as snow. 4 And the guards shook for fear of
him, and became like dead men.

5 “But the angel answered and said to the women, ‘Do not be
afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is
not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the
Lord lay. 7 And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen
from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee;
there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.’

8 “So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy,
and ran to bring His disciples word.”

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our Crucified and Risen Savior, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: Heavy hearts Easter morning

It was a gathering of dedicated women who rose very early on that Sunday morning. They went when the day first began to dawn, which is fairly early this time of year, perhaps as early as 5:00 a.m. Even though they had heavy hearts, feeling the sting of a great loss, they were eager to serve their Lord, even in His death. Yes, even though He died, they loved Him. Even though these women had missed the point of why He had to die, and even though they had failed to comprehend the truth of His promised resurrection, they were eager to serve the Lord and properly prepare His body for its rest in the tomb.

The enemies of the Lord remembered Jesus' words, they had taken precautions to prevent the body of the Lord from disappearing. They felt victorious, while those who loved the Lord felt defeated. It is easy for us to shake our heads in disappointment at the disciples and these women also for having missed the hope and assurance that Jesus had given. We also shake our heads at the idea of the enemy who thought they were victorious. Jesus' enemies perceived neither the power of His death nor the victory of His resurrection. As a matter of fact we also often lose sight of the Lord's promise and assurance that is found in –

THEME: The Message of an Empty Tomb.

The fact that Jesus' tomb was empty may have had extremely different effects on different audiences. For those who do not believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior it may be seen as --

I. The Scary Specter of an Empty Tomb.

A specter may be understood as something from a horror story. The dictionary defines it this way: "Something that haunts or perturbs the mind." Seeing the evidence of the empty tomb was not something Jesus' enemies wanted to accept. They chose to deny the truth that Jesus would rise from the dead. They chose to deny it even with the evidence of the empty tomb right before them.

In our text we see how the Roman guard assigned to the tomb responded to the sudden appearance of the angel. There was earthquake accompanying the angel's sudden appearance, and the angel knocked over the stone that had sealed the door to the tomb. That in itself would have been startling, but then the angel sat there by them, in its glorious majesty, and they were undone! It scared them so badly they were like dead men. Maybe we would say that they were scared stiff! However, they evidently recovered quickly enough to run away, for they were no longer around when the women arrived at the tomb, and the angel was then sitting inside the tomb.

Did you notice that the angel made no attempt to quiet the fears of the unbelieving Roman guard? They were a part of the contingent that had attempted to destroy Jesus, and their purpose at the tomb that early Sunday morning was to make sure that Jesus stayed put, right there where His dead body belonged. The reassuring and joyous message that belonged to the empty tomb would have been wasted on them. They quickly agreed to accept a bribe from the chief priests to spread the lie that Jesus had not risen, but rather that His body had been stolen away by His disciples while they slept on duty.

Deny! Deny! Deny! That was the response of the Lord's enemies, and the result is scary. Too many accepted the lie instead of believing the truth. They shall all face the glorious majesty of the Risen Lord and they shall be held responsible for their denial of Christ as our crucified and Risen Lord. The judgment that awaits all those who deny the truth of Jesus' resurrection is a horror story that we would not wish on anyone, a horror that the Lord Himself does not desire for anyone. Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and His resurrection shows this to be true. Those who do not confess this truth, who will not allow for the reality of the resurrection will find themselves left with the same specter, the same haunting fear of death that only Jesus as our risen Lord can remove.

Certainly this is a fear that comes to all who have ever sinned and we see that automatic fear appear in the women who came out to the tomb that early Easter morning. But for them the angel had a joyous message that would alleviate that fear and unrest.

II. He Is Risen! – A Message of Hope and Joy.

Matthew 8:5-6 “But the angel answered and said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

When the angel spoke to the women he was addressing people who had loved the Lord, and had looked to Him for life and salvation. They had failed to put it all together, that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and be crucified and be buried. They had failed to comprehend that Jesus’ promise was true, that on the third day He would rise again, just as the Scriptures had taught concerning the coming Christ.

The angel’s words to the women, “**He is not here, He is risen,**” the message of the empty tomb, was the beginning of putting the pieces of the knowledge of the truth together, that had been fragmented in their minds and hearts. Just as the disciples didn’t want to hear about Jesus dying, so these women also had failed to put it together, that this was exactly what Jesus had to do for them and for their salvation. This was exactly how it had to go in order for Jesus to bring them to God in peace. The message of the empty tomb, “**He is not here, He is risen!**” spoke to them of the wonder of Jesus as our Redeemer who died for us and rose again and lives forevermore.

The message of the empty tomb remains a central element of our faith. Jesus had to die to pay for our sins, and He had to rise again that we might know that He was successful in His mission, and that He has secured peace for us with God. Paul writes of this as being key to our salvation in his epistle to the Romans.

Romans 4:24-25 *Righteousness* shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

This is the message of the empty tomb for you and me! Righteousness is imputed, charged or attached to us through our

faith in God, because we know God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we know God as the One who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. **Jesus was delivered up because of our offenses:** because of crimes that we have done He suffered and died upon the cross enduring the curse of the law, dying spiritually as well as physically. **He was raised again because of our justification.** God looked upon the price Jesus paid with His holy precious divine blood, and was satisfied. He declared the world just and righteous before Him because of the death of His Son, and made this declaration known by Jesus' resurrection!

The message of the empty tomb is a message of peace and joy and hope for it reveals the reality of resurrection. This is --

III. A Message to Share with Urgency.

That was exactly what the angel told the women to do.

Matthew 28:7-8 And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.' 8 "So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word."

Go quickly and tell His disciples. The disciples needed to know that Jesus was alive and that He would appear to them. It wasn't the end of the story. It wasn't the end of their relationship with the Lord. It was going to continue. There is life with the Lord. Life here in this world and hereafter in heaven above. There is an urgency to this message for the disciples were in grief and sorrow that could lead to despair. They were convinced that they had lost the Lord. And so the women **ran** to bring this joyous message of the empty tomb to the disciples.

With a dead Lord we would be lost in this world. With a dead Lord Jesus, we would be still in our sins! Peace of conscience and hope of eternal life and joy of salvation are all inseparably bound together with the message of Jesus' resurrection. People everywhere need to hear and know and believe in a very literal and true understanding of the message of the empty tomb.

This is lost to many today. And that is sad. For many the message of Easter is centered on the Christian life of love and the renewal that is found by loving one another. Isn't that a good message? Of course it is a true and important message, but it doesn't supplant the message of the empty tomb, "**The Lord is risen indeed!**" And yet that is what we find going on in the world. I stopped at the church supply store a while back and looked for a special bulletin cover for today's service. There was quite a variety of them there, but all but one of them focused on the Christian's life of sanctification rather than the straightforward foundational message of the empty tomb, that Christ is physically risen from the dead! The sense of urgency for this message to be delivered has been lost to so many Christian churches who now view this teaching as optional to the faith. The real truth is that He who died for us rose again, literally, physically, actually rose again from the dead, and lives forevermore!

The apostle Paul communicates this urgency and the wonder of the resurrection in his first epistle to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 15:20- 23 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

This is such an urgent truth because man brought death into the world, and death is ready to take us all. It was also Man in the person of Jesus Christ that brought **resurrection** to the world, and made it a reality. Everyone needs to be told, and reminded of this message of the empty tomb. Jesus was the firstfruits, being the brightest and best of all who shall rise, for He is the Son of God and the Son of Man. He will come again and call us forth from the graves, and there will be a resurrection of all the dead. For those who know the wonder of grace in a Risen Savior it shall be a resurrection unto eternal life in heaven. **This is what makes this Resurrection Day the day which the Lord has made, and yes, we shall rejoice and be glad in it!**

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.