

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!!

I am so glad that you are all here this morning. If you are visiting us, if you're here with family or friends, or maybe you're looking for a place where you can find a church home, please receive our special welcome. We hope that God has led you to this place this morning. You are a blessing here this morning. All we ask is that you will allow us to be God's blessing back to you. Along with that, I hope that you will let us know that you were here with us this morning by filling out a visitor card that you can find in your pew or the visitor book that you saw as you came in. If you do you will get a very nice letter from me this coming week.

I say it every Easter. Welcome to the day that gives all other days their meaning and purpose. Welcome to the day that makes us who we are as followers of Christ. This is the day that we celebrate the miraculous. Jesus was dead but now he is alive again. And it all happened for one reason, really for one person, for you and for every other individual here and for all those who are not here and for even those who think that we are silly for being here this morning. For everyone! So, in gratitude and amazing Joy we proclaim it from the rooftops? Alleluia! Christ is Risen!!

In the year 33AD; 1,983 years ago; the world changed forever. Early on that Sunday morning a dead body that had been tried unfairly and executed viciously was raised back to life. A great stone was removed from the front of the tomb that the body was laid in and Jesus emerged. And the world changed forever.

Now, I have to admit that I was not there. I didn't see what happened to the posted guards. I didn't see a light blazing from inside the tomb. I didn't witness angels in the vicinity or a heavenly choir singing or an orchestra playing the Alleluia Chorus. I can't even tell you how that huge stone that was blocking the entrance to the tomb was moved. I don't have photographs, or texts, and Jesus didn't Skype the event. But let me tell you what I can do. I can see the repercussions. I can follow the evidence. And the evidence tells me, tells us, conclusively that a resurrection happened.

That is hard for people. When we encounter such things our natural inclination is to proceed by taking what we now know, what we have encountered, and compressing it down into a package that will fit into our human understanding. You know what I mean, right? People squeeze the revelation down to fit into possibilities that we can already comprehend and then we argue them away in order to find comfort within things, within an existence, that we can control. We say such things as: Jesus didn't really die, he swooned, he fainted on the cross...the body was stolen...the disciples were making it up...it was just a resurrection within our hearts. But that is not where the evidence leads us.

Some of you can probably remember me speaking of Sir Lionel Luckoo in the past. Now, this guy could follow evidence. As a matter of fact, he was so good at it, much better than I could ever hope to be, that he made the Book of World Records. Sir Lionel, twice knighted, was a defense attorney in Britain. More than that, he was the most successful defense attorney of all time according to Guinness. He holds the record of winning 245 murder defenses in a row. To give you somewhat of an idea of how many this was, the advisors on the Perry Mason show finally had Mason loose a case after 70 straight wins. Why? Well, they did that because viewers were finding his winning streak so unlikely that it hard to find him credible. Seventy straight wins? That could never happen. Luckloo won 245 in a row.

Well, at the age of 63, looking for a real challenge, he decided to investigate the case of the resurrection. This lifelong skeptic was going to take on the case for all times intending to win one last case by defending humanity, as he saw it, by disproving the main event of Easter.

He spent years in painstaking investigation, and at the conclusion this was what he wrote: "I have spent more than forty-two years as a defense trial lawyer in many parts of the world. I say unequivocally the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt!"

How could he say that? He wasn't there either. Well, he followed the evidence. It is like seeing the ripples in a lake moving out in a circular shape from a center. You don't need to see the event to know that something disturbed the water at the originating point.

For example, ripple one: A defeated group of followers, hiding in an upper room of a house in Jerusalem, were transformed and became re-energized, brave, and vocal. Something huge had taken place, something so amazing had taken place that changed them from fearing for their lives to be willing to die for that truth. They were willing to sacrifice everything; family, possessions, access to the Temple, their religious heritage, even their lives; all as a result of what they had been eye witnesses to. And what was it that they said that they saw? They saw Jesus alive.

Ripple two: The event was so powerful and so important that those reporting it were not willing to adjust it to fit cultural expectations. For example, it would have had much more acceptability and believability, if they had reported that it was men that discovered the empty tomb and that it was to men that Jesus had spoken to first. But truth overrode convenience; accuracy overshadowed expediency. And the accurate telling of what happened was so important that they were also willing to include their own shortcomings and confusion in their witness for the sake of accurately reporting what really happened. For example, Mary thought Jesus was the gardener and when the women went back to the men the men didn't believe her and thought it was just an idle tale by silly women.

Ripple three: A new church burst onto the scene. Faithful, lifelong Jews who believed to their core that violating the Sabbath would damn them, moved it to Sunday, the day that Jesus rose. These believers who were ruled by the law, and believed that the only way, the only way, to find blessing from God was through perfectly following that law, overnight embraced the new teaching that salvation comes through faith in Christ alone.

Ripple four: A young man by the name of Saul took on the sole mission in his heart and for his life of destroying the growing Christian church. However, by his account, after seeing the risen Jesus, he became a new person. He became Paul. He gave up everything, including his very self, and embraced the single mission of sharing Christ with the whole world. He was imprisoned, beaten, and eventually had his head removed all the while praising God for opportunity and privilege to know his Lord and Savior.

Ripple after ripple, event after event, changed life after changed life, all point to the empty tomb of Easter. They all point to the empty tomb of Easter! Right up to today, in this

church, surrounded by beautiful lilies, wonderful music, and faithful followers. Ripples proclaiming the resurrection down through time itself.

Now, that could be a great place to end this sermon for this Easter morning, 2016. The resurrection, as proclaimed by the witnesses who were there, and given the effects shown through history, is a rational conclusion from the evidence that points to a huge event that changed the world. But that would only be part of the story.

I could go on and delve into the theology of salvation and sin and Christology that would include a systematic explanation of why Jesus, who was fully man and fully God, had to sacrifice himself for the sake of humanity. But that would leave a big part of the equation, maybe even the most important part of salvation, left on the shelf.

I could quote Scripture by saying that God gave His only Son so that whoever believed in Him would find eternal life with God. But even with that, along with the volumes of books written on the topic of the resurrection and its rationality and its theology, we would be missing the most important part of the story.

You see, the most important part for us to understand today can be summed up in three words. They are three words that bring meaning and purpose to everything else and they answer the question, “why?”. They are, “God so loved...”

You see, here is the heart of Easter...God so loved the world. The Creator of the universe with its billions and billions of galaxies so loved *you* that even if it was just *you* that needed saving, he would have initiated and executed to whole plan and died on that same cross. The Creator of DNA, who put it together in just the right way to make *you* as one of the billions of human beings throughout history, cared so much about a single person, *you*, within those billions that he would have willingly hung and died on that cross just for you. God so loved...

Love, it is the reason for the crucifixion and the fuel of the resurrection. And so with great personal appreciation for the gift we each have personally received and for the sake of all those who have yet to embrace it, **WE ENTHUSIASTICALLY PROCLAIM TO THE WORLD...**

ALLELUIA! CHRIST IS RISEN!

Amen