

## ***Easter's Evidence***

John 20: 1-18

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*Prayer: Gracious and glorious God, as we hear again the story of the first Easter, grant us the joy of hearing your risen Christ speak our names, welcoming us into discipleship. In the Easter dawn you raised Jesus from death to life. As we are united with him in death, so unite us with him in resurrection - that we may walk in newness of life. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.*

It was also a time of sequestration, rumors, confusion...not knowing. Then and now. We are living in a time when deeply different realities are happening around us. We are more separated than ever. I saw in the news that yesterday, like several of the days previous, more people died of Coronavirus than previously. We are breaking records, records we would like not to hold. The records are confusing because we all know that there aren't enough tests to really know how widespread the pandemic is in our communities. We know the best thing to do, is to stay home.

To be honest, I had an ordinary day, we worked outside in the yard while the weather held, I got three meals together with my family who are at home with me, my kids are doing their schooling from home, I did laundry, was part of zoom meetings, emails, and phone calls. Like many of you, I am at home, no one is sick here, which I am very glad about, if I think about. It's also pretty easy for me to take for granted in the course of a day.

The difference between how things seem and how they are, was the set of issues Jesus' disciples and followers grappled with on the first Easter morning. A day of profound faith – and deep doubt. A day which began when no one knew how to put the events together yet. They didn't even know how to tell the story. Mary Magdalene came to the tomb expecting one reality: how to deal with the dead Jesus, and was met with a new reality: how to deal with the living Jesus.

I'm going to review this morning some of the Easter evidence in scripture, in the hope that you will also notice some Easter Evidence for yourself, in your life, where you are. Encouraging you to be part of the growing body of work and witness that comprises the work of Easter's continuing evidence in the stories of our lives. Jesus reminded his followers that it is easy not to have eyes to see, too easy not to have ears to hear. There may be another level of reality we are not sensitive to. The spirit of God may be closer than we know.

The first piece of Easter evidence is in the very first verse we read in chapter 20 of John's gospel: "Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark,

and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb." The evidence is there in that verse, to be interpreted: *The first day of the week* is Sunday on most calendars; the seventh day of the week is Saturday, which is when the Jewish Sabbath is observed. There is a Jewish expectation that Messiah will come on the Sabbath, and that he would continue the Sabbath into eternity, that thereafter all the world would enter into the 8th day together. Heaven. Or heaven on earth?

*Shalom, heaven, "the consolation of Israel," the new Kingdom and the new earth, eternal life, the time when the veil between us and God is lifted.*

There are many names for entering into "the shalom of God." If Mary comes to the tomb on the first day of the week, while it is still dark, that implies that Jesus rose during the previous day – on the Sabbath, fulfilling prophecy. And while it is descriptive to say that it was on the first day of the week that she made this journey, it begs the question as to whether it was really the first day, or had she actually arrived there on the 8th day without realizing it. There is this question hanging -- about how long it took them to recognize that they were standing together in the kingdom of God, with the risen Christ.

After all, how would you know it, if you were part of God's work in the world, God's blessing, the fulfillment of the prophecies? How would you know it if the significance of your life were enhanced by the spirit of God almighty? How would you know — that the church is not a building which you go to, but the faith you carry in your heart, evident to those around you in your words and actions? The blessedness of our lives is often only evident when we are on the edge of life — a birth, a death, an illness.

And so it was the morning after the Sabbath that Mary came to the tomb and discovered it was wide open and empty. It's puzzling that she would have been okay alone with him if he were dead, but she's not going in there alone, not with signs of life. She goes and gets Peter and another disciple and they come back and go in together, (running back and forth) no body, but there's the linen cloths. The linen cloths are evidence that there's no corpse! No one moved a dead body, they'd have left them on. And a living man has no need of them, he took them off himself.

I have always appreciated this little detail John's gospel gives us "the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself." There is a wealth of historical commentary on this detail. You can imagine well enough Jesus taking a moment after he got up to take off the wrapping on his head, and sits quietly for a resurrection moment there in the dark tomb alone, in all his glory, to roll the bandages up again, maybe like you keep ace bandages rolled up with your medical supplies ready for the next use. He sets it down and leaves it where he had been lying in the tomb; he doesn't need that anymore.

Mary stays behind and talks to the angels...She doesn't notice anything unusual there, angels are tricky. She talks to the gardener. "Where did you put him?" ... You can see and not see, you can hear and not hear... it's such a problem – to this very day. And when he says her name, in his own voice, "Mary" she recognizes him. The evidence of Easter falls into place for her.

Which raises of course, the question, of how the Easter evidence is falling into place for us in 2020? Is this the first day of another ordinary week? Or are you living in the 8th day already, counting the days of the week from 1 to 7 only because it is a peculiar local custom here?

Clarence Jordan, who was both a farmer and a Greek scholar, who wrote the *Cotton Patch* series of Bible translations said, "the crowning evidence that Jesus was alive was not a vacant grave, but a spirit filled fellowship. Not a rolled away stone, but a carried away church."

Friends our church building stands for something which has always lived and grown in human hearts. Have you noticed in your life the growing body of evidence that Christ is alive and at work in the world?

I hope this Easter, which will be unlike any Easter, ever, you will give yourself permission to look around in your own context for signs of life, hope and renewal. The Easter message means nothing unless it is carried out of the church and into the world. Which is where it is meant to make a difference. Jesus left the tomb and went out into the world.

The tomb is empty. Jesus lives. There were witnesses, many of them. It is not death that has the last word on us, but love.

You might take a quiet moment today to roll up the fears and cares of this world, which are dragging you down. ...Just like Jesus who rolled up the bandage from around his head, and left it in a separate place in the tomb, and then walked out into the sunshine of Easter morning to greet his friends.

Easter's evidence is all around us, waiting to be recognized. You can turn around in a moment, and it all falls into place for you. It is Sunday morning and the tomb is empty, that is the evidence. What will you make of it?

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