

It's a Hallelujah Morning

Scriptures: Isaiah 61:1-3; Matthew 28:1-10

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Jesus had died at three o'clock in the afternoon, the exact time of the sacrifice offering for sin at the Temple. Jesus had made the last and only sacrifice necessary for the sins of people throughout the ages. No other sacrifice would ever be necessary. It would only be the responsibility of the individual to admit that they had sin in their lives, ask forgiveness, and ask Jesus to be the Lord of their life. As Jesus had said on the cross, his mission from God was finished.

Jesus had died on Friday. Because the Sabbath would begin at sundown, and no work could be done on the Sabbath, it was necessary to give Jesus a hasty burial.

Standing at the foot of the cross are Mary, the mother of Jesus, and some other women as well as the disciple John, but they are not able by themselves to do what is necessary. How will they get Jesus down from the cross and buried before sundown? Coming to their aid are two unlikely men who have become secret disciples of Jesus,

- Joseph from Arimathea, who is a member of the Temple Council, but one who had not consented to the plan and action of the Council to have Jesus killed, and
- Nicodemus, the Temple official who had secretly come to Jesus in the night time to inquire of Him about eternal life.

Both men have been earnestly looking for the coming of the Messiah and both have come to believe that Jesus is that person. Now they come to do the last loving thing that is possible for them to do. We can only wonder at their emotions as they go to Pilate to ask permission to take the body of Jesus from the cross and bury Him. They are at that point risking their own lives by doing so.

Pilate will not tolerate anyone that he considers a threat and never again will they be in the favor of the Temple authorities.

These two men prepare the body of Jesus for burial. Nicodemus has brought one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes and they wrap Jesus, with the spices in linen strips. In today's economy the spices would have cost between \$150,000 and \$200,000. It was a burial of a King. They take the body of Jesus and bury Him in the tomb that Joseph of Arimathea had prepared for himself. They roll the stone over the opening.

No one, not Pilate, not the Temple officials, not the disciples, not these two righteous men, not his mother, no one, believes that Jesus will ever be seen again in this world.

As the body of Jesus lay in the tomb, it must have seemed that

- hate had triumphed over love,
- cruelty was stronger than compassion,
- darkness was more powerful than light,
- evil had triumphed over righteousness,
- Satan had finally won the victory over Jesus.

But God will have the last word!

God's plan for the salvation of creation does not leave the body of Christ in the tomb.

As soon as there is enough daylight to travel on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and John make their way to the garden to visit the tomb of Jesus. As the women approach the garden where the tomb is located, there is an earthquake and the stone rolls away from the entrance of the tomb.

An angel messenger comes and sits on the stone, waiting for the women to arrive.

It is the angel who delivers the message that Jesus is risen, just as He said that He would. The angel messenger invites them to come inside the tomb and see for themselves that Jesus is not there. It is important for us to note that the stone was not rolled away so that Jesus could come out. Jesus was raised by God and in his resurrected body could leave the tomb without an opening. In the tomb are the grave clothes that Jesus has left behind.

As the angel instructs them, they run to tell the disciples. Mary Magdalene, herself one of the disciples of Jesus, becomes the first evangelist, the first person to share the news that Jesus is risen from the dead.

It is a hallelujah morning!

- Death has been swallowed up in victory!
- Grief has been turned to unspeakable joy!
- Mourning has been turned to dancing!
- Jesus has risen just as He said!

All of history has forever been changed. God has accomplished all that is necessary

- for the redemption of God's beloved creation,
- for the possibility of eternal life for everyone for all time.

One can be sympathetic with the disciples who are confused. Jesus had tried to explain to them before his death what would happen, but they simply could not take it in. They would really only understand what Jesus had tried to tell them until after He returned to the Father and the Holy Spirit came into their lives as their Teacher. No matter how much or how little they understand, their lives are now changed forever. Their work to fulfill the mission of Christ has just begun.

Forever after, we live always on the resurrection side of the cross. In the message of the angel at the tomb, the anguish of Friday and the grief of Saturday have passed. Because God has defeated death, the "third day" is forever. While it is true that we still live in a Good Friday world where hurt and harm and death and grief abound, it is also true that the resurrection, Easter, has changed our possibilities forever.

Easter is about the power of God to create something new, and alive, and glorious. It is the power to give us grace, to give us forgiveness.

The message of Easter is about

NEW BEGINNINGS

Easter is about leaving behind the old rituals and the old man-made requirements and opening up God's grace to everyone. Easter now gives us a new covenant between God and all of God's beloved creation.

- Law has become grace;
- Ritual has become transformation;
- Sacrifice has been satisfied on the cross.

Easter is about newness of life for all people who would follow Jesus and invite Him to be Lord of their life.

If we ever have any doubt about that,

- Consider Peter who denied three times knowing Jesus, but later preached at Pentecost where 3000 souls came to place their faith in Jesus as Lord.
- Consider James, the half-brother of Jesus. Throughout the Gospels he is portrayed as one who found it hard to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, but after the resurrection became the leader of the Church in Jerusalem.
- Consider Saul who saw his mission as wiping out the followers of Jesus until he met Jesus, and then became Paul, the missionary to the Gentiles and author of much of the New Testament.

Easter proclaims that the way things are need not be the way they remain.

Each of us could write our own story of how following the risen Christ has changed our lives for the better.

EASTER OFFERS NEW PURPOSE FOR LIVING.

It inspires us to get involved with the needs of others, all kinds of needs. It inspires us to get involved with the needs of the people of the world in which we live, and even attempt what may seem to be the impossible.

- If you have any doubt about that, don't forget those household goods that we dedicated last Sunday for the Afghan immigrants who are coming to New York.
- If you have any doubt about that, think of the offering that we are collecting for the next three months to send for the relief of the refugees from Ukraine.
- If you have any doubt about that, think of the ministries that each of you is personally involved in to help others in many ways.

EASTER OFFERS NEW BEGINNINGS.

EASTER OFFERS NEW PURPOSE FOR LIVING.

EASTER MAKES NEW RELATIONSHIPS POSSIBLE.

Easter makes possible

- the restoration of fragmented relationships,
- the possibility or reclaiming shattered dreams,
- the mending of broken lives.

When we become discouraged, Easter promises us that

- tragedy, and
- oppression, and
- disappointment, and

- sorrow

are not forever.

NEW BEGINNINGS.
NEW PURPOSE
NEW RELATIONSHIPS

But most of all, EASTER IS ABOUT LOVE.

The death and resurrection of Jesus is the greatest love story ever lived. The most sacred emotion of all the emotions is love. Before Jesus made his way to the cross in that indescribable act of love, He gave a new commandment to his disciples, and so to all of us who claim to follow Him.

That commandment was that we love one another as Jesus has loved us. It is to be the identification of us as followers of Jesus Christ.

We have all been changed because of that Sunday morning. Resurrection Day! It is a Hallelujah morning!
Amen.