

Sermon ✝ April 9, 2023

Luke 24:1-12

Frank H. Maxwell

There were no sunrise services that first Easter morning. There were no crowds at eleven-o'clock worship. There was no thrilling music from the organ, no robed choirs singing the anthems of angels. No banks of lilies added their beauty and fragrance. The fact is that there was no Christendom, no church, no mood of excitement or anticipation. There were no Easter fashions or parades.

Most interesting of all, there was not even a sunrise! A pall of deep darkness had settled over the disciples' spirits; it was a suffocating, killing smog, as thick, as black, as unyielding a darkness as ever cloaked the lives of human beings.

Read the story of that day as it is reported in the four Gospels. Read it in its stark, unadorned, grim simplicity. Read it in its own context. Forget, if you can, the pageantry with which it has been invested and the heart-lifting music to which it has been set.

Listen to the sob of grief and pain, the cry of fear, the amazement and incredulous astonishment that broke from the hearts of those who kept that first Easter vigil through the dark terror of their fears, their crushed hopes, and their broken spirits in the gross darkness that shrouded their lives . . . before the sunrise. And so begins the real story of the first Easter.

In their agony of grief, it was the simple need to be doing something that drew these women to the garden. It was still dark when they started out. It was a darkness occasioned not only by the early hour, but also by senses numbed with the pain of grief.

Their eyes were blind to the unfolding beauty of the springtime. Not even the well-tended beauty of Joseph's lovely garden could attract their interest.

Just try to imagine their frame of mind. They had stood at the foot of the cross. They witnessed his death.

They had watched through tears as the ashen and limp body had been taken down and carried away for burial. What a terrible experience it had been.

The only evidence they gave of being in touch with reality was a nagging worry that grew in intensity as they neared the tomb. *“Oh my, we've come all this way and not one of us has given a single thought about that stone with which they sealed the tomb.” “Who will roll away the stone?”*

Such was the darkness that shadowed their spirits as they went out on this most beautiful of spring mornings. It was a bleak, cold, meaningless world. They had nothing to expect of this day—nothing except more pain and deeper hurt.

But not everything was at it seemed. It was into this black, doleful, un-expecting moment that God thrust the radiant sunburst of victory.

The light inside the tomb was so brilliant that artists invariably have pictured the women shielding their eyes. The light of resurrection, the power of eternal life, had burst upon the world.

Its illumination was so intense that the women, once blinded by the blackness of their sorrow, could scarcely see any better in the amazing, glorious, overwhelming reality that faced them in the crypt.

The body of their friend was not there! At first, there was probably anger. *“What could have happened?” “Who could have done such a terrible thing?”*

And then, just as the moment of sunrise brilliantly announces the dawn of a new day, the women understood this thing that had happened. *“The Master had said that, on the third day, he would rise from the dead.”* It was true. He had risen!

The women were stunned and they ran to tell the others. At first, the disciples did not believe the news. For it was new—entirely, completely new, totally unheard of. That very day, out of the blackness of night a new age had dawned. The earth stood new and trembling under the transforming power of the Easter sunrise.

And so as we gather on this Easter day. It is difficult to imagine a more fitting symbol of our faith for this day than a sunrise. It is one of the most exciting daily occurrences of the human experience.

As the springtime sun warms the soil and brings forth new growth, let us be reminded of our Easter faith. We are a people who stand in the sunrise. And Easter is the day to bask in the light of God's brilliance.

Get out your sunglasses because the light is especially bright this day. Don't worry about going to Florida or the Bahamas this spring . . . there is plenty of sunshine right here.

But, of course, there is one problem with all of this joyfulness. It is difficult for us to fully enjoy the sunlight because of the clouds that come over our lives.

We must still deal with the realities of disease and death, and sickness and sorrow. Often the shadows stand tall around us and we can so easily lose our way in the dark night of our trouble, and grief, and pain.

This is where faith is tested, where we come to know if the sunrise has really touched our lives or is dissipated in the picture-window beauty of Easter pageantry.

The good news for this and every day is that the sunrise is real. Believe it. Trust in it.

May the story of that first Easter sunrise light up the dark corners of your life. May your trust, your love, your hope be grounded in a sunrise faith.

The warm, sun-rays of God's love touch every life here.

May the radiance of that light, warm the coldness from your heart, and wash the darkness from your spirit.

Leave this church as children of light,

And may you shine with the radiance of the sunrise wherever you go.

Easter blessings!