

SERMON EASTER SUNRISE – THIS IS THE DAY

Mary Magdalene did not look forward to the task before her on that particular morning. It was going to be one of those days; you know the kind that you don't look forward to. It had been a rough few days with the crucifixion of her Master and Teacher on Friday. Then a hasty burial in a borrowed tomb. Joseph and Nicodemus had done the best they could before the start of the Jewish Sabbath.

Now just before sunrise on the third day while it was still dark, Mary was headed to the tomb for the final burial preparations for Jesus. As she walked along in the dawn, she may have wondered how she was going to move the heavy stone placed at the entrance of the tomb. Would the Roman guards help her? In her haste, she had forgotten to ask Peter and John and the other disciples to come with her. Of course, it wouldn't have done any good since they were probably sleeping, exhausted from grief and the events of the past few days.

But like many of our days, this day would be full of twists and surprises. Now listen to how the day turned out from Mary's viewpoint as recorded in the twentieth chapter of the Gospel of John.

Read John 20:1-18

Mary had gotten up before sunrise with plans for the final anointing of Jesus' body. Like the disciples, she was not expecting to find the tomb empty that morning. When she realized that the tomb was empty and that Jesus' body was gone, she immediately assumed that someone had come during the night and stolen the body. Did her mind wander with questions such as: who would take the body? Why did they take it? Where have they taken it? Were any of the disciples involved? How did they get past the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb? So, many questions and so few answers.

Uncertain and in a moment of panic, Mary ran and told Peter and John what had happened; someone had taken the Lord's body and she didn't know where they had taken Him, indicating that she still did not understand what Jesus meant when He said that He would rise from the grave in three days. Do we still have questions and doubts this morning? Do we still look for His grave and body among the dead on this Easter morning, or do we believe that He is alive?

Peter and John raced to the tomb, looked around, and then went back home. The Apostle Luke tells us that Peter went away wondering what had happened. In our text, the Apostle John says he believed, but still did not understand that Jesus had actually risen from the grave.

While the disciples went back home, Mary stayed at the tomb crying, and continued to search for the Lord. You can imagine the emotional morning she was experiencing. She woke up filled with grief and loss, dreading the tasks of anointing the body of Jesus, wondering how to gain access to the tomb, and then finding that it was empty and Jesus was nowhere to be found. Then to her surprise, two angels appeared in the tomb and asked her why she was crying. Why

indeed! She was crying because she believed that her Lord was dead and she could not find His body.

Then comes the ultimate surprise, she hears someone behind her and she turns around. Initially, she does not recognize Jesus. Why, we don't know; maybe it was that her eyes were clouded with tears or that she didn't expect to see Him alive. Jesus asks her the same question as the angels: "Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" Mary assumes that He is the gardener and continues with her initial assumption that someone has taken the body and asked if He knew where they had put the body.

Then in one of the most touching scenes in the Bible, Jesus calls her name: "Mary." Immediately, she recognizes His voice and responds: "Teacher." Then she runs and tells the disciples: "I have seen the Lord!" There are many lessons that we can take from this story this morning, but let me just briefly touch on a few as we watch the sun rise over the Sandias.

Jesus is the Master of surprises; you never know when or where He is going to show up. Therefore, we should live each day in anticipation of meeting Him. Do you expect to find Jesus alive in your daily life? Mary started her day assuming that Jesus was dead, and then got the biggest surprise of her life. Make it a practice to look for Jesus in the beauty of nature, the situations of everyday life and the people you meet. Don't let your assumptions, biases, and even beliefs blind you to seeing the presence of Jesus in your life each day, especially today!

Jesus promised in Matthew 28:20 that He will always be with us, even to the end of time. As Mary found out all you have to do is turn around, He's right here; He's always there waiting for us to call on Him. As with Mary, He already knows your name; can you hear Him calling you this morning?

And once you find Jesus, don't keep Him to yourself, be like Mary and tell others: "I have seen the Lord." Share the Good News with everyone you meet, especially on the Easter morning.

Finally, even in our darkest hour when life seems to be caving in on us, Jesus is always there right beside us to give us strength and hope for whatever we are facing. As Mary discovered and as we have all experienced at some time, our days do not always go according to plan or as we expect. There will be surprises, and there will also be problems and challenges. Therefore, take each day one at a time. As Christy Lane sang: "One day at a time, Lord Jesus." Make it a habit to start each day by singing: "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Each day is a gift from God; make the most of this amazing gift!

As we have just discussed, Easter morning did not turn out the way that Mary had thought it would; it was better than she could have ever imagined. And that is what the Resurrection is all about. Because of the Resurrection, life can and is better than we could ever have imagined. Jesus even foretold this in the tenth chapter of John when He said that He had come so that we may have life and have it abundantly; more than we could ever dream of. Because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross on Good Friday and the empty tomb on Easter morning, you and I have

the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. There is no limit to God's love and what He will do for us. So, look for the best in life each and every day. All we have to do is put God first, walk in faith and live in a personal relationship with the Lord. So, on this Easter morning, as we celebrate the Risen Lord, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Because He is Risen! He has Risen Indeed! Amen