The Easter Sunday

**“The Tomb, The Empty Tomb, Beyond the Empty Tomb”**

John 20:1-18 / April 4, 2021

**The Tomb**

Let me begin the sermon today with a question for you. What is it that you believe about Easter? According to survey, many people believe that there was a Jewish man called Jesus, who lived very morally, teaching the law of God, and then died on the cross. But survey also says that when it comes to the empty tomb, there are ongoing debates. Many people begin to talk about what is possible and impossible; about what is really real and what is not; about what is believable and what is unbelievable. There are many people who draw a line and refuse to cross it.

What do you think? You see, although the resurrection story is a great discovery, perhaps the most remarkable discovery in the human history, it is not taken for granted by all people. Well, in a way it is understandable. Because Jesus' resurrection story is not a matter that can be approached in scientific ways. Instead, it is an act of divine revelation that can be approached by faith. So, we know that the resurrection story means nothing to some people, and that for them it may be just an idle tale.

Then, let's think about this story. The story is introduced in Bruce Larson's book, <Living Beyond Our Fears>. A Yugoslavian judge died from an electric shock. In his town, there was a tradition that a corpse was to be laid in a cemetery for 24 hours before being buried. Surprisingly, the judge was resurrected in the cemetery during the night. He was so happy that he quickly looked for his family and friends. It was told that after seeing him, six people, including his wife and sister, fainted away.

Interesting story, isn't it? Compare the resurrection story of the Yugoslavian judge with that of Jesus. What's the difference between them? The difference is while the former ended just as a happening, the resurrection story of Jesus has been spread to all around the world for more than 2000 years. Why? Why is it still being spread without ceasing? Why have the countless people devoted their whole lives to spreading the news?

We talked about that Jesus' resurrection is not a matter of scientific ways, and so there are still ongoing debates on the issue of the resurrection of Jesus. But then, how has Jesus' resurrection story broken into the lives of so many people in so many unexpected ways? How does it continue to shake our foundation and change our perception of life and our attitude to it?

One of the reasons, I believe, is that Jesus' resurrection story conveys true HOPE. Once we truly believe that God has brought us life through Jesus' death and resurrection, we come to live a new life as a people seized by a hope that is in Christ Jesus.

I wish I could say that this hope means that we will not suffer the death of other people or we will not experience our own death. But you know it doesn't mean that at all. We still mourn for others' passing, we still experience deep grief for the loss of our loved one, and we still will face our own death when time comes.

Nevertheless, those who believe in Christ crucified and resurrected, live, die and live again with God all for the same reason---they are a part of God's plan and mysterious ways. This may not sound like hope to some people. However, it is a statement of our faith and hope for eternal life---the life in which we shall never die in Christ, though our bodies will become decayed some day in the future. But there is more.

**The Empty Tomb**

In today's gospel, we see Mary remained at the tomb weeping alone even after some of the disciples had left. She stood alone there with no friends, no hope.

To Mary, Jesus was the source of hope and the water of life. Indeed, he was the Lord to her. And now, that Jesus was gone. With full of despair and emptiness, she stood weeping there. Her despair was so great that even when she saw the angels in the tomb, she said hopelessly,

**“They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him.” (20:13).**

Then, a man approached her and asked,

**“Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” (20:15)**

That man was actually the risen Jesus.

Do you remember a time in your childhood when you were crying due to fear, disappointment, or anything bad? Do you remember the way how your parents comforted you?

“What’s the matter, honey?”

“Why are you crying?”

“Momma’s here---It’s all right. You don't have to cry.”

Jesus spoke to Mary much as parents would do to quiet a fretful child: **“Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”** Still, Mary couldn't recognize the risen Jesus. Finally, Jesus called her by name with a gentle voice, “Mary!”

Mary! That gentle call revealed the divine, unconditional love of Jesus. It is love that continues over the death. This continuity of love is a crucial point of Jesus' resurrection story. Whenever and wherever the wonderful news of Jesus' resurrection has been spread, his continuing love has been alive. That love finally made Mary realize why the tomb was empty.

Yes! Mary finally realized the tomb couldn't hold Jesus. It was only empty because Jesus was alive and standing right beside her. Now she was not alone---the Lord was with her; the Lord continued to love her. Knowing that love---divine love, unconditional love of Jesus---she didn't have to stay in the darkness, but could live in a new hope and a new life.

**Beyond the Empty Tomb**

My friends, think about this. The empty tomb is not really a point in this Easter morning. Proof of the resurrection is not just there in the empty tomb. It is actually beyond the empty tomb. Indeed, it is there in the encounter with the living Lord.

After encountering the risen Jesus, encountering his continuing love, Mary was transformed, and she became the first witness to the risen Jesus in the history. After encountering the continuing love of the risen Jesus, the disciples went on in the face of opposition and spread the good news boldly to all around the world. They passed to us their testimony that Jesus brought life from the dead and that he shared that life with us.

Every time people encountered the risen Jesus and his continuing love, they became stronger, wiser, kinder, more daring. But more importantly, every time they encountered the risen Jesus, they became more like him, more like being a love being like Jesus. And they have passed on their transforming experiences by words and action continually. That's why the wonderful news of Jesus' resurrection has been spread to all around the world for more than 2000 years.

Everyone, let me ask you a question again, as I did in the beginning of the sermon. What is it that you believe about Easter? Empty tomb? No! It's actually more than that. It is actually beyond the empty tomb! Easter miracle happened and goes on happening again and again and again in the encounter with the risen Jesus Christ; yes in the encounter with his continuing love. What we believe about Easter is the love of God in Christ who is risen to bring goodness out of evil; life out of death; love out of hate; and hope out of despair.