

Introduction

Welcome to St. Peter's Lutheran Church Estevan. Pastor Kleemola here to bring you a partial service for Easter Day - April 12, 2020.

Readings

Old Testament: Jeremiah 31:1-6
First Reading: Acts 10:34-43
Psalm: 16
Epistle: Colossians 3:1-4
Gospel: Matthew 28:1-10

Text for today's Sermon is taken from John 20: 1-18

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. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They

have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

Sermon- God's Finely Tuned Plan

Christ has risen! He has risen indeed! Alleluia!

From an earthly point of view, that first Easter seemed like a day of confusion. From God's point of view, everything proceeded according to plan.

Many commentators have complained that it is hard, if not impossible to harmonize the Gospel accounts of the first Easter. Some people come and meet one angel. Other people show up and see two angels. Some of the women who came to the tomb had servants. Some of the accounts give the names of the servants, some don't. In today's Gospel, Mary met Jesus Himself. It's confusion at Jesus' tomb. But then, what do you expect when people show up to finish caring for a dead body and it isn't there? You expect confusion.

But what seems like confusion to the human mind is actually God's finely tuned plan at work. As we look through the Bible, we see evidence of God's perfect timing over and over again. As people who live in the 21st Century we can look back on the events of history and see God at work in the history of the world. We can look back into history and see the pattern. But most of the time, the people who *lived through* that history didn't have the opportunity to see the big picture. It seemed like confusion to them. *But in fact*, it was God at work.

From the point of view of the people involved, the confusion of Easter began on the evening before Good Friday. The people who followed Jesus were not able to deal with His constant predictions of suffering, death, and resurrection. These people believed that Jesus was their Saviour. He was also their Friend and Teacher. They simply could not wrap their minds around the idea that His death was the very way that He would save them. So, when the soldiers came

to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, they couldn't see the plan. It looked like confusion to them. But in fact, it was God's finely tuned plan.

The appearance of confusion deepened as Jesus hung on the cross. How could this happen? Jesus was supposed to be the Messiah. How can Jesus be the Messiah while He is hanging up there on the cross? The truth is that it is Jesus hanging there on the cross that *makes* Him the Messiah. Hanging on the cross... earning forgiveness for the sins of the world... that is what the Messiah came to do. His followers simply didn't understand that yet.

Then there was the timing of His death. It was relatively late in the day. By the time you can obtain an audience with Pilate in order to get permission to take the body off the cross, the Sabbath was almost upon them. When the Sabbath came, there could be no work... not even the work of placing a body into a tomb. There was the confusion of a hasty burial in a nearby tomb. Do the best you can before the sun sets. We'll come back and complete the burial when the Sabbath is over.

The seeming confusion of the hasty burial guaranteed that lots of people would be coming and going from the tomb when the Sabbath was over. These people thought they were coming to finish preparing the body of their Friend for burial. Instead, they ended up becoming witnesses of the empty tomb. As we look back on the history of these events, we can see that the apparent confusion of the hasty burial was actually God's finely tuned plan to provide witnesses to the empty tomb.

All four Gospel accounts tell us that Mary Magdalene was among the first to arrive at the empty tomb. Some of the accounts tell us that Mary had friends with her. The Holy Spirit inspired John to focus on Mary's experience at the empty tomb. As we follow Mary through that first Easter, we see very natural reactions to a supernatural event.

Mary arrived at the tomb before dawn when it was still dark. Given that this is a dry climate and the celebration of Passover always comes on a full moon, Mary could probably see fairly well as she came to the tomb even in the dark before sunrise. What she saw was not what she expected. The stone no longer covered the entrance to the tomb and there was no body in the tomb. Had someone stolen the body? Maybe the owner of the tomb, Joseph of Arimathea, had already decided to move the body to a better place. Who knew? The last thing Mary expected was that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Given that Mary did not even consider the possibility that Jesus was alive, she did the very natural thing. She looked for help. She found Peter and John, the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Peter and John ran to the tomb. John was in better shape because he was younger so he got to the tomb first. Peter arrived while John was trying to decide whether it was a good idea to enter the tomb. Peter, true to his nature went charging right into the tomb. John followed. It was

then that they noticed something that added to the confusion. The body was gone, but the burial clothes were still there. Who in their right mind takes a dead body out of its clothes before moving it? It just doesn't make sense. From an earthly point of view, things just keep getting weirder and weirder.

Of course, from God's point of view, things are proceeding according to plan. The clothes are there without the body because Jesus came back to life and passed through the clothes just as He passed through the walls of the tomb. We should remember there that the reason the angel rolled the stone away from the entrance to the tomb was not to let Jesus out. It to let the witnesses see inside that Jesus was not there. Now that Jesus Christ has risen, He is in His state of exaltation... a state where barriers mean nothing to Him. It makes perfect sense that His clothes are laying neatly folded in the tomb. He simply passed through them and left them behind when He rose.

The folded clothes were the Gospel to the Apostle John. The Holy Spirit used them to establish faith. John saw the clothes. He remembered all those times when Jesus told him and the other disciples that He would rise on the third day. Things clicked. The confusion left. Today's Gospel says, **"He saw and believed."** Although Peter didn't quite believe yet, both Peter and John realized that there was nothing they could do at the empty tomb. There was really nothing for them to do except go back home in wonder.

Apparently, Mary had returned to the tomb following after Peter and John. After they left, she decided to take one last look at the empty space, but when she looked there were angels. As she saw them through her tears, they asked why she cried. She told them and then she turned to leave. As she looked up she saw Jesus, but her tears blurred her vision so that she did not know who He was. But then He called her name. At this Mary collapsed in joy. The accounts in the other Gospels tell us that she fell to the ground and put Jesus' feet in a hammer lock. That may be the reason Jesus told her not to cling to Him.

The other Gospels tell us that Mary brought some friends back with her when she came back following Peter and John. In the Gospel according to Matthew, we read, (Matt 28:9) **"They came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him."** Jesus then told Mary and the other women to share the joy. **"Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"**

The confusion was gone for Mary and the others. Now she understood that Jesus has risen and is alive forever more. The resurrection liberates us from our confusion as well. All of us were born into the confusion of sin. We all deserve to spend our eternity suffering in the confusion of hell. The resurrection means that the work that Jesus Christ did for you on the cross is valid. Just before Jesus died on the cross, He said, "It is finished!" The resurrection

means that this is a statement of triumph. Your salvation is finished in the risen Lord. His promise to you is sure and certain. Everything that He promised to give to you will come true.

If Christ had not risen, then His suffering and death on the cross would be meaningless. We would still be in our sins. The confusion of sin would reign. We would be looking forward to an eternity of punishment.

But Christ has risen. Our salvation is sure. We are children of God. Our eternity **is** with Christ.

When the end of this age comes, God will remove all evil to hell. He will create a new heaven and a new earth. At that time He will raise us just as Jesus rose. He will reunite our bodies with our souls. He will clothe us in immortality. We shall all know the joy that Mary felt as she fell to the ground and wrapped her arms around the feet of her risen Saviour. Amen.

Christ has risen! He has risen indeed! Alleluia!

Prayer of the Church

Rejoicing in the resurrection of our Lord and sharing in His peace, let us pray to the Lord on behalf of ourselves and all people as they have need.

O risen Saviour, set free our tongues to confess Your resurrection before a world still captive to sin and death. Give us courage to go to every place and to speak in every language the salvation won for us upon the cross and the hope granted to us of life that death cannot overcome.

Make us to burn with the fire of Your love, that we may love You above all things and love our neighbours as ourselves. Deliver us from fear and relieve the anxiety of our hearts, that we may live out fully the hope planted within us and the new lives we received in the waters of our Baptism.

Anoint the words of those who preach to us Your Gospel, and open our ears to hear with faith all that He has done to save us. Raise up many who will serve You in the various callings of Your Church and who will serve us in Your name with Your Word and gifts.

Hear us on behalf of Justin Trudeau, our Prime Minister; Scott Moe our Premier; the Parliament of Canada; and all provincial and local elected officials. Guide them according to Your Word, that their labours for our nation's health and welfare may not be in vain, nor forgetful of the vulnerable, aging and unemployed.

Hear us on behalf of those who cry to You in any need, especially the sick, the suffering, the disabled, the wounded in spirit, those who suffer mental illness and those in their last days on

earth. We pray especially for Pattie Berday, Dean Euteneier, Gerald Olson, and Wanda Stang. Give them grace according to their need, and sustain them in their afflictions to the day when their sufferings will be exchanged for glory in the life to come.

All praise to You, dear Father in heaven, for You have opened up to us the way to eternal life in the resurrection of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. We give You thanks for all those who have gone before us in the faith and now rest from their labours. Keep us in that same faith, and embolden us by Your resurrection to be fearless in the face of disease, chaos, loneliness and every sorrow of this world. Give us, with Job, the solemn expectation to cheer us: our Redeemer lives, and we, too, shall be resurrected and glorified to live with Him in His eternal Kingdom; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our resurrected Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.