



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
www.mzluth.org

April 12, 2009
East Sunrise Worship
John 20:1-18
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 12:1-6
Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 15:51-57
Gospel: John 20:1-18

We Have Seen the Risen Lord

Human reason cannot understand it
Faith embraces the truth and shares it

This morning the Sermon will be based on the words of the Gospel which we just read. But for just a moment now, put yourself in the place of someone that has some great news they just can't wait to tell. As you look back in your life, when would that have been? Maybe the birth of a child; you couldn't wait to get on the phone and tell someone that your son or daughter was born and they are doing well and everyone was fine. You couldn't wait to tell different people the news. Maybe there are other times in your life when you have just been so excited and couldn't wait to tell someone the news.

I think of the various times in my life where that has happened, but I can't imagine that I was any more excited than Mary Magdalene must have been as she was going to the place where the disciples were gathered. This woman who had spent the morning walking in darkness with some other women because they were going to finish preparing the body of Jesus for burial, think of how she must have had her head swimming as they get there and the stone is gone. There is no body. Can you imagine how any early morning aches from getting up and walking out there must have been gone as she was running back to tell the disciples, "I have seen the Lord;" the joy that must have been in her heart, the thrill that must have been in her voice. Do you think the disciples maybe had to tell her to slow down and ask what it was exactly she was trying to say because she was so excited the words were just tumbling all over themselves?

This morning as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and all that means for our life in this world and the perfect life that we are guaranteed that is yet to come, we see we can join Mary in saying "we have seen the risen Lord." Human reason can't understand it, but faith embraces it and proclaims it.

Human reason can't understand it. What do you think the disciples were thinking, John and Peter, as they ran out to the burial site after hearing from Mary that the body is gone, the stone is gone, there is no one there. She comes early that morning and says to them "They've taken our Lord away. We don't know where they have put him." And the disciples start out to go see for themselves. Do you think they came up with the answer "I bet he has risen from the dead"? I don't think so because we are told in that

parenthetical remark in our text that they didn't understand from the Scriptures that Jesus had to rise.

We are told that John gets there first. He looks in but he won't go in. He looks the situation over, and what do his eyes see? His eyes see the strips of linen that Jesus was wrapped in lying there. They see the burial cloth that would have been like a handkerchief placed over his face folded and left off to the side.

Put yourself in John's shoes. Would you be thinking to yourself, "the body is not here, but why in the world would someone who stole the body take the cloth and fold it up and put it aside neatly? Why would the strips of linen be lying here? Wouldn't they just take everything if they were stealing a body? Something doesn't make sense here. Something isn't right."

Then Peter comes and he goes into the tomb. He sees it and looks it all over. Finally John goes inside and it says he saw and believed, but he didn't yet know on the basis of Scripture that this is what had to happen. It's interesting to me that the Holy Spirit didn't see fit to record for us any discussion that these guys had. I would think they had to say something to each other. I don't think they just stood there in silence and looked at it. At some time they had to look at each other and say "What do you think happened?" "I don't know. What do you think happened?" Then we are told they just finally, I guess, shrugged their shoulders and started heading back to the other disciples so they could discuss what was going on.

We are told Mary is standing there. She's standing there, still crying. She has seen the same evidence, but she can't wrap her mind around what Jesus had already said, that he would raise from the dead. Human reason just has a problem with this. It just doesn't make sense. For her to stand out there crying because someone she loved has died and is buried and now the body is gone and the emotions are stirred up into a frenzy; I can understand that.

At times I've seen people in our cemetery and walked up and talked to them as they are there visiting a loved one's grave site. I've never yet met anyone who went there expecting to find an open hole where the body has come out and the person has come back to life. We don't expect that. It's not the norm of what happens in day-to-day life. Yet that morning, in a very real sense, that's what they found. They walked up to their cemetery and there was a hole and there was no body.

It's kind of interesting that the Holy Spirit had John write that parenthetical remark that they didn't understand from the Scriptures that Jesus had to rise from the dead. What that really is telling us is that Mary and these disciples went through a difficult time. The grief, anxiety, and worry; they went through all of this, and in reality they could have had something to help them through it. If they would have known the Scriptures better and applied the Scriptures better and listened to what Jesus had said about the Old Testament as he was with them, and the hearing of the Old Testament being read, they would have known that in the Psalms it says "You will not abandon your Holy One nor

will your Holy One see decay.” “You will not abandon your Anointed One to the grave nor will your Holy One see decay” it says in Psalm 16.

We can sit here and chide them, but the question becomes, how often do you and I face things in life with worry and anxiety because we are only relying on human reason, human understanding? You and I don't always go to the source of strength that is bigger than us and beyond us and the strength that is able, as Isaiah says - to lift us up as on wings of eagles. We have those same Old Testament Scriptures, and we have the New Testament Scripture. We have this source of strength where we can find God's promises and the assurance of his presence and of his being with us. But all too often, you and I, who know better, rely on our human wisdom and our human reasoning, and we end up having to face difficulties with a heavy heart because we don't do it in the full assurance of faith and the full promises of Scripture.

What human reason could not understand completely, the Holy Spirit leads us to believe. That's why the Gospel coming up where Jesus will say “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed,” these people had to see with their eyes and God blessed them with that opportunity. We might by our human reasons be thinking to ourselves, “They had it better than we do. They got to see Jesus walking around after he was dead.” But you and I, through Scripture, have seen the risen Lord. You and I, through the power of the Holy Spirit, have rejoiced that Jesus has not remained in the grave. You and I, through the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, have read the Word and we have believed the Word, not because our human reason was better than theirs, but because the Spirit has worked in our hearts.

So we too have seen the risen Lord. We see him in the Sacrament as we come and receive his very body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. We have seen him in his Word as he comes to us. We have seen him as he strengthens us when we are weak, as he lifts us up when we are low, as he washes away the guilt that we carry at times through his pronouncement of forgiveness, through his life, death and resurrection. We've seen the risen Lord. By God's grace, we have seen it with the eyes of faith that understand how important it is that he did rise from the dead.

We are told that he was put to death for our sins by Paul in the Book of Romans. But we are told that he was raised to life for our justification, our being declared not guilty. As we stand and gaze with our mind's eye into the empty tomb this morning, it is God's banging his gavel as the judge of the entire world and saying “You are not guilty of sin because your sin has been punished in Jesus Christ.” We know the importance of this day. We know that without this day, our faith is useless and all the preaching in the world is in vain if Christ did not rise bodily from the dead. But now is Christ arisen, and now we are declared not guilty.

Mary got to have Jesus come and talk to her. Mary got to have Jesus even give her a task. “Don't hang on to me. Go instead to my brothers and tell them I'm returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” So then she went on her way with those light feet and said “I have seen the Lord.”

Our God has given you and me a task as well, not only to believe that Jesus has risen from the dead, not only to believe that this means that heaven is open to us, but also to go and tell; to start first of all by telling ourselves. By growing in the knowledge of Jesus and God and his Word and his resurrection, by growing in knowledge of what the implication of all of this is for us, by growing in study of the Word and through worship and praise. To go and tell those closest to us, those we are with every day; to encourage one another with the Gospel of the resurrection. To point each other to Jesus and his forgiveness when we are worried and anxious, when we're focused on only the things human reason can understand. And then to go and tell those we don't know. Go and tell those who do not yet believe. Go and tell those who have fallen away from the faith that they once said they would rather die than desert. Go and tell them that even though they have wandered away, Jesus still loves them. Jesus still died for them. He was still raised so that they could be declared not guilty.

Tell them that it means that we have purpose in this life, to walk with God, to know God, to serve God, to rise beyond the "it's all about me" attitude of life that is so prevalent and to say "It's all about God and how I can serve him and how I can glorify him;" and to go and tell others.

That's the blessing our God has given us. That's what we see as we gather together early in the morning and gaze into the empty tomb. We can rejoice with our God because we too have seen the Lord.