



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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April 24, 2011
Easter Festival
Sermon Text: [Matthew 28:1-10](#); [Luke 24:1-11](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Jonah 2:2-9](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 118](#)
Second Lesson: [Colossians 3:1-4](#)
Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 28:1-10](#)

The Women, The Witnesses

We are assured of forgiveness
We respond to that forgiveness

Have you ever heard news that was so good that you just couldn't believe it? You just couldn't believe your ears because the news just seemed to be too good to be true. Something like if I was out of the country at the end of the football season last year and came back and someone told me that the Lions ended the season with a four-game winning streak. The kind of thing you just couldn't possibly believe. It's just too good to be true.

I suppose in a real sense that's kind of how the disciples felt when these women, the witnesses, these people of the Passion that were there all along...they were there when Jesus was carrying the cross. They were there when Jesus was being crucified. They followed at a distance when Jesus was buried. They were there all along but they weren't really the focus until this Easter morning. They become the focus because they become the first witnesses of the Resurrection. They go and find the apostles, right? Where were the apostles? They were as far down in the dumps as you could get, right? They were locked in the Upper Room. The one they had followed for three years of their lives and left those nets behind and gave up that great tax collecting job, all these things, he was now dead and gone. They were worried. They were depressed. They were distressed. And here comes the women saying "He's alive!" Not only does it sound too good to be true, but you put yourself in the emotional state they were in and it was probably hard enough just for them to wrap their heads around how someone could possibly have a smile on their face that loved Jesus like these women did.

Humanly speaking, you can see why this message would sound like nonsense, right? If you're really down about something and someone comes into the room all smiles and all excited, don't you just kind of want to slap them sometimes when you feel like that? I have to believe that's kind of where these guys are.

Before the group of women got back there, they had already heard, because we are told that Mary Magdalene, when she saw the tomb was rolled away, that's what we read this morning at Sunrise, she went back immediately. Then Peter and John ran out with her and they looked in, but it sounds like these other women stayed there when Mary took off. They go in and see the angels. The angels talk to them and they're all excited. They turn around and start running off. They probably have their heads

swimming with excitement and joy and uncertainty and what does it all mean? And then Jesus himself meets them. He repeats that message that the angels had given them in the tomb, right? “Go tell my disciples. Go to Galilee. I will meet them just as I said.” We are told they throw themselves at Jesus’ feet and grab onto his feet and they’re all excited. Then they can’t wait to get back and tell someone else, right? They learn of Jesus’ Resurrection. They are the first to learn of it. They are the first ones that go and share the message. And they are the first ones that get rejected. “It sounds like nonsense.”

I suppose there are some lessons we can learn from this. Obviously, God can do anything. God can turn darkness to light. On Good Friday we saw him turn day to night when it became dark from the 6th to the 9th hour. And God raised Jesus from the dead to assure us that our sins are forgiven. That’s the most important thing we learn this day. And we learned that message overpowers our being rejected or our being rebuffed.

Here are these women. They didn’t quit talking about him and say “Oh, I guess you’re right. We better just go home and not talk about this anymore.” They couldn’t stop telling these guys. They had the most important news in the world and they weren’t going to shut up about it just because some guys who were down in the dumps didn’t want to listen.

You and I know that we’ve got the most important message in the world. You and I, who have experienced Good Friday, who experienced the depth of sorrow over our sins, we have had our God lift us up and look us in the eye and say “I love you. I’ve taken away your sins. There is absolutely no doubt about it. And I don’t care what garbage you go through in life, I’m going to be with you through the rest of it.” That’s what our God says to us. And that’s good news. And we want to share it. Sometimes we are going to have people look at us like we’re that nutcase that’s just too enthused about something, too much of a religious fanatic or whatever term they want to use, but it doesn’t matter because you and I know it’s the most important message ever.

Our God lived in our place. Our God died in our place. Our God rose from the grave to assure us that we are forgiven. That’s the answer that opens the gate to heaven, that takes away all our sins. You and I don’t deserve this from our God. You and I don’t deserve that God do anything for us. We are filthy rotten sinners to the core.

But our God loves us beyond our core. He loves us with a love that gets us through the difficult times, a love that is there even when we go through difficulties like we talked about this morning in the Sunrise service. God never tells us there won’t be difficulties. He just tells us he is going to turn our wailing into dancing. He tells us that he is going to do it because he has defeated our greatest enemy, which is death.

The women were the witnesses. They shared the message. They might have been rejected, but they were also vindicated, right? Peter and John ran out there. They saw it. They knew something amazing was going on but they didn’t know it yet. Those guys

walking on the way to Emmaus, they met up with some guy who talked to them, who didn't seem to know what was going on. As he explained Scripture to them later, they said, "Our hearts were burning within us as he explained the Scripture to us." Remember that? They didn't say "Hey, we just saw Jesus and he is alive." They said "Man, Scripture is powerful." So then they ran all the way back from Emmaus to Jerusalem to tell the disciples. The disciples had already seen Jesus. Jesus himself had come there and been with them in the middle of that locked room. The message of the women was found to be correct. It was the message that had come from God himself.

You and I, as we tell others about Jesus and his life and his death in their place, it really doesn't matter if they believe it or not. We will be vindicated one day. Our prayer is that the Spirit uses us, that the Spirit uses us in spite of our weak knees and our sweaty palms, that the Spirit uses the word about Jesus that we speak to touch hearts. You and I, not only do we go through tough times in this life, we know all kinds of people that do. We've got the answer that can help them. It's a God that loves them and a God that died for them. It's a God that loves them and wants to be with them. It's a God that speaks to them through the Word and wants to come to them in the Sacraments. It's a God that has this kind of deep and abiding love.

The women got to be the first witnesses, but they aren't the last. God has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. You know people that are hurting. You know people that need it. You might be that person yourself. So cling to it. Hold on to it. Get to know it better. And share it as though your life depends on it.

I have a confession to make. I've told some of you this. Every Easter I walk up those steps behind me and I'm scared to death, in a sense. I sit up front here. You don't know how cool this sounds, "I Know That My Redeemer Lives," what we just sang, with the trumpets, singing acapella, just the men singing, just the women singing...I walk up those steps and I think to myself, "I'm supposed to follow that?" I should just walk out and say "Thanks for coming. Drive home safely." What takes the fear away is that I know it's not my message. All I have to do is make sure I clearly point people away from me or away from you, away from us, to a Savior that loved us enough to die and then loves us so much he wants us to know that our sins are forgiven and that he rose again. So the fears I have in witnessing, focusing on Christ helped me to overcome them. The fears you have about witnessing, focus on Christ. He's always the answer.