



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

March 31, 2013

Easter Festival

Sermon Text: [John 20:1, 2, 11-18](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Exodus 15:1-11](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 118](#)

Second Lesson: [1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 24:1-12](#)

### The Light

In Christ, our risen and ruling Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

I don't know if you've ever done much driving across our country, but if you go out west and get out in the Rockies, there are some neat tunnels you get to drive through. Have any of you ever done that? I thought they were pretty fascinating as a kid when we drove through them until about halfway through it, it dawned on me...there's a whole mountain above us. The tunnel is a little dim and you can't quite see that light at the end of it and you start wondering...is this the greatest thing in the world, to drive underneath a mountain? Whose idea was this? It kind of creeps you out a little bit. Then as you get closer and see the light coming in, I remember as a kid kind of breathing a little better once we got back into the light and I knew there was not tons of mountain above me anymore.

The last 40 days have kind of been like that tunnel in a sense, spiritually, haven't they? During Lent, we go through the disciplines of Lent. We look at our own sins. We reflect on who we are. It's more somber. It's more silent in many ways. We haven't used the word Alleluia for 40 days, until this morning, because we're in that tunnel. We are seeing just what we are and what our sins really deserve as we go through the history of our Savior's suffering and death. We see what wretches we are, and it's like we are in that tunnel and it can start collapsing on you if you don't realize the light is coming.

The light at the end of that tunnel is today. We've celebrated before. We always know it's coming. The grave is empty. Jesus has risen. He lived and died in our place. Our sins are forgiven. Jesus is that Light at the end of that tunnel. He is the One that said, "I am the light of the world." So today we come out of this Lenten tunnel into the full sunshine of the salvation our Savior won. So let's focus on that Name of Wondrous Love...The Light. Light becomes all the more precious when you've been living in darkness for a little while.

I read to you about Mary Magdalene. She had been standing there at the cross. She was there in the afternoon when there was an unnatural darkness over the whole land. It was as dark as night it says, because the sun had stopped shining. It was black as night has to be not just the description of the physical conditions of that day but as Jesus was on the cross, that has to be a description of her soul in a sense, right?

If you remember who Mary Magdalene was, she had seven demons cast out of her by Jesus. From then on we are told she devoted herself to serving Jesus and the disciples, ministering to their needs, going with them. She believed he was her Savior. He had done this incredible thing and cast out these demons. She spent all that time with him, but now things changed. He had been arrested. He had been put on trial. He had been convicted of something he had never done. He had been nailed to a cross and he is hanging there, and the darkness that is over the land had to be what was in her heart.

So she gets up on that Sunday morning, she and those other women, and they are going to do their one last act of love for Jesus. They set out, one foot after the other, and make their way to the grave where they had seen him buried. Can you understand Mary's tears when you realize she gets there and this one act of love she wanted to do for Jesus, whom she so dearly loved, she couldn't even do it because his body is not there. She can't figure out why. She thinks someone stole it. She runs back and tells the disciples. She comes back again, and now she is standing there next to the tomb and the tears just cascade down off her cheeks and onto the dust because the darkness she is living in is just overwhelming at that moment in time.

Do you know that feeling? As you live in this sin-filled world, have you experienced those moments of darkness, when you feel as if there's no answer, you feel as though you're in a hole that light can no longer reach? Maybe you lost a loved one. Maybe a relationship ended. Maybe you keep getting caught up in the same sin over and over, and you know it, and you struggle against it, but you keep losing, and you feel like a failure. Do you know what it feels like to live in darkest night like Mary was living in?

If you do, then do your best to stay awake and listen to the rest of this, because I have some really good news for you. After every dark night comes a grey dawn, right? For Mary, she went from dark night to grey dawn. She is standing there by the tomb, tears are cascading down, the darkness is overwhelming and all of a sudden, there are two angels. They have a message for her that I think she probably couldn't process. "He's not here. He has risen, just as he said." Do you ever have those moments in your life when your head is so swimming and going around that you're not sure if you heard exactly what you heard? That's why you usually take someone along to the doctor, right, because you need someone else to help you hear it because sometimes you just can't process everything. Do you think that was her grey dawn right then and there when the angels told her this message? She didn't seem to quite get it all yet because all of a sudden, someone says, "Mary." She turns around and thinks it's the gardener. She pleads for the body. There is this moment now as she is beginning to think about it. She has to come to some kind of realization somewhere along the line that someone didn't steal the body. They had put a guard there. The disciples wouldn't have stolen it because they had sealed the tomb. There is a lot of evidence, when you stop and think about it, maybe as she stopped and thought about it later, that would lead her to see there is a grey dawn coming. No one was going to overpower those soldiers and take that body. No one was going to risk going through what Jesus had gone through by trying to steal that body. Maybe, just maybe she started going back and thinking about

what Jesus had said. But dawn was starting. It's coming, but she's not quite there yet in the full light. Maybe there's a glimmer of hope on the outside of the edges of her mind somewhere. Maybe you know what that's like.

We come together here and worship our God. We come here and rejoice in who our Lord is and what he has done. We remember how we were clothed and buried into his death and resurrection at our Baptism. We receive his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. The Spirit fills us, and we are all pumped up and fired up. But then we go back out into the world. It isn't always bright light. It's a grey dawn, right? We face challenges. We face the same things again. We have the same struggles with people that maybe we work with and sometimes we live with. We wonder, where did that light go? It seems like grey dawn again. We don't live in the perfection of heaven yet. We don't have everything the way it should be. We have loss. We have doubt. Some days its like even though maybe we've seen the light, it's still like we're living in a dense fog. There's light there somewhere, but we're not really sure where it is. It certainly isn't showing us the way as we stumble around in our daily life and seek to live for our God.

Once again, just as Mary moved from grey dawn into the glorious light, that's what our Lord wants you and I to do today. But in order to do that, we need to pay attention closely to who our God is and what he has done.

They say "It's always darkest before the dawn." Dawn doesn't take very long, does it? Grey dawn doesn't last real long. The sun comes up and all of a sudden, it's light. The light is here.

I think it had to be that way for Mary too, didn't it? Mary, as she turns around says, "Rabboni!" The light comes on full blast right in her eyes and wakes her up out of this sleep, this stupor of not knowing what is going on. All of a sudden the realization is there and it has dawned on her, Jesus is alive. She might not have grasped completely and fully what that means yet, because even the disciples, when he ascended into heaven, said, "Are you going to at this time establish your kingdom?" But when God poured out his Holy Spirit on them on Pentecost, then they got it. They couldn't stop talking about it. They couldn't stop sharing it because now they knew the greatest message. Then Mary also knew the greatest message. The grave did not contain Jesus.

Satan had to think he won when Jesus died and when he saw the tomb sealed. You wonder what Satan thought when earlier that morning, after Jesus had come back to life, he descended into hell and announced his victory. That had to be a real downer for him.

Then Jesus comes and appears to Mary, to the women, to the disciples, the Emmaus disciples, to the 500, to James, to Paul, to all these people, to say, "I am alive. The grave didn't hold me."

Jesus lived in our place and died in our place. Scripture tells us he was raised to life so that we might know for a certainty that we have been declared not guilty. Our sins have been paid for. We stand forgiven now, and that forgiveness becomes ours personally through faith in Jesus. When we believe that Jesus lived in our place and died in our place, God has washed the sins away. That's the Light that drags us out of that darkness of that hole at times we live in...to focus on this truth of who God is and what he has done.

When he says to us, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life," we can believe it because his grave was empty. Long after you and I are in our graves, long after the dates that were etched on our gravestones have been weathered away, we still will be forgiven. More than that, we will be with the Lord forever.

So we leave this dark tunnel of Lent for this glorious Light of Easter. As we go back in our daily lives and we still at times face the darkness, now we have the most powerful light in the world to shine into our darkness...this knowledge that our God loves us so much that he died for us. He loves us so much that he rose again. He loves us so much that he gave us the Spirit. He loves us so much that he gives us the Word. He gives us the Sacraments. When we get back into those dark spots, do you really think he is going to abandon you now, the One who has done that much for you? Of course not.

His love is certain and his love is eternal. Do not doubt it. Live in that Light and rejoice. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.