

Sermon for Easter Sunday, March 31, 2013

John 20:1-18

Blessings to you and peace from God the Father, our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Easter is the **ultimate festival celebration** for us as Christians. We pull out **all** the stops on this day. We **process in** with the cross **before** us, we hear the choir **praising** God with all **their** lovely voices, we sing **beautiful** hymns, we have **triumphant** horn music, we have enough “**alleluias**” to make up for **all** those we did **not** say during the Lenten season, we have **lilies** aplenty, we have our **beautiful** flower filled cross up here in the front of our sanctuary, we hear **God’s** Word preached, and we **all** have the **blessing** and **gift** of coming up to **God’s** table and receiving Holy Communion. Our worship today is **truly** fit for a King, a **King of Kings** as a matter of fact. This Easter morning is **wonderful** way to give **praise and glory** to our risen Lord.

Some of you may be of an age to remember a song named, *“What a Difference a Day Makes”*. Some of the lyrics are: “What a **difference** a day makes, **twenty four** little hours, brought the **sun and the flowers** where there **used to be** rain. My **yesterday** was blue. Today I’m a **part of you**. There’s a **rainbow**

before me, the skies above **can't** be stormy. What a **difference a day made** and the **difference is you.**”

Is that **not how it is** for us this morning as we **celebrate** our risen Lord? What a difference a day **has** made. Of course, for us it has been **more than** 24 hours like the song said, but, **none the less**, the difference for us **is** most certainly Jesus as he brings **brightness and light** in the midst of the **darkness** in this world.

What a difference **3 days** have made. If you happened to be here **with us** on Thursday evening for our **Maundy** Thursday worship service you would have seen our altar **stripped clean** of **everything** that has meaning for us as Christians. Everything was removed from this **small altar** down here, **all the candles** were taken out, **all the coverings** for the altar-pulpit-and lectern were removed, the **bible** from the lectern was taken away, and the **cross** up there was covered with a **black veil**. We **left in silence** that night only to return on **Friday** evening for our *Service of Darkness*. That was a time of **remembering** our Lord's death on the cross through scripture readings, songs, and the darkening of the sanctuary to remind us of the **darkness** that came over the earth when Jesus died. It was a time for **reflection** on what **Easter** means. It was about the **difference** that this time makes in our lives. The **brilliance** of this morning could **not happen** without the events and remembering the **darkness** of the past 3 days.

In the **first two** verses of our gospel reading for today we are **reintroduced** to the **three characters** whose responses **dominate** John's version of the resurrection story. While it was **still dark** Mary Magdalene came to the tomb only to find the stone **had been rolled away**. She **ran** to tell Peter and the **other** disciple—the one whom Jesus **loved**—that Jesus' body had **disappeared**. **Someone** had taken him **away** she cried!! The two disciples took off in a **foot race** to see what Mary was talking about.

The rest of my sermon will **focus** on these **three** people./// I will begin with Peter as he was **the one who seemed** to be the most **impulsive** of the disciples. It is **not quite clear why** Peter would jump up so **quickly** to see what Mary was talking about—possibly ***guilt*** was dogging him as he had **just spent the last few days** running **away** from Jesus **not toward him**—you may remember **he** was the disciple who denied even **knowing** Jesus three times before the crucifixion. Or perhaps he felt a ***hopeful curiosity***—after all he **was present** when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead—could the **same thing** have happened to Jesus? Or maybe Peter was just feeling a bit ***jealous or envious*** of the disciple whom **Jesus loved** hence the foot race.

The unnamed disciple whom Jesus loved **also jumped up to see** what had happened **as soon as** Mary told them the news. He **outran** Peter. Throughout

John's gospel **this was the disciple** who was with Jesus, **right up until the very end**, he was the one who while **on the cross** Jesus told him to take care of **Jesus' own mother**—he was the **faithful witness**—he wanted to **see for himself** what Mary was talking about. John writes that when the unnamed disciple went to the empty tomb, “He instantly saw and believed” without **full comprehension or explanation of what it all meant.**

Then there was Mary. She on the other hand had **not raced** to the tomb with *guilt, or hopeful curiosity, or jealousy or envy.* She obviously expected **nothing** to happen that morning **except** to find her Lord **lying inside**. She came in **sadness** while it was **still dark**. **Weeping outside** of the tomb she had **just come to mourn** the loss of the one she loved, she wanted to be with her teacher **one last time**, and to **bid him** goodbye. In her **grief and sadness** she could **hardly think clearly**. She saw **two** angels and **did not recognize** the reality of **who** they were as **their presence** did not **compensate for the depth** of her grief. She **turned** around, saw Jesus and **mistook** him for the gardener. It was **only when** he spoke to her that she knew **exactly** who he was. He called her **by name**, “Mary” and in an **instant** she responded. Then Jesus **told her to go and tell** the others what she had seen. Mary **obeyed** her risen Lord, fighting off her **impulse to cling to Him**. She **left** the garden **to go to proclaim** to the others what she **knew** to be true.

What a difference 3 days has made. The difference is **Jesus** and what **God had** done and **continues to do through Him.** The difference is that **now there is light** where there once was **only darkness.**

In our **gospel story** for today an **unexpected ending** has become a **new beginning** for us all. The **Good News** of Jesus' resurrection and conquering death and the grave gives us a **new way to view our lives.** The reason we **need the Easter story** is that it provides for us the **possibility of a future** when we have **lost hope.** It is a story for those **who live in the darkness.** Where do we turn when a **marriage ends,** where do we turn when **cancer takes its toll on us or a loved one,** where do we turn when **financial crisis strikes,** where do we turn when **someone we love dies,** or where do we turn when we feel **our hope for the future is lost?** I tell you **all,** I am sure that at **one time or another in your lives** you will **most certainly** have a time when your **hope and faith** will be challenged. Where will **you** turn?

The **Easter story** gives us **hope and faith** in **God's goodness** in the face of life's **darkest moments.** Through our **faith in this story** we have the **promise of a new life** through the **death and resurrection** of our Lord. Thanks to what Jesus **has done for us on the cross** we can be **assured** of our baptismal promises that we will have **everlasting life with Him in heaven.** Of that we can be sure.

This is what the Easter story is all about. It is the **Good News of God** through the resurrection of His **one and only Son**, Jesus Christ. **This** story is to become **our story**. As Christians the Easter story lives **in us and through us** as we go out as Mary did to **proclaim our risen Lord** to the world. **Day** after day, **week** after week. Truly what a **difference** a day makes and it is **Jesus who makes all the difference in the world.** All **thanks** be to God. **AMEN.**