

Easter Sunday, 2022

Sermon

Luke 24:1-12

¹On the first day of the week, at early dawn, [the women] came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹²But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

In some ways, the women going to the tomb of Jesus this day was not unlike what many of us do this time of year - that is going to cemeteries where our loved ones are buried, bringing real or artificial flowers, and placing them on the headstones in remembrance of their lives, and the impact in their lives may have had on us. It's a ritual that many of us have done over the years, out of love, remembrance, a sense of obligation, or closure maybe. It's just a part of the rhythm of life for many of us.

Sometimes, my sister and I, when I'm home go down to Parksley, Virginia on the eastern shore of Virginia, to the cemetery there to visit the gravesite of our parents, our aunts and uncles, our grandparents, and others we've loved who are buried at the cemetery. Usually, around Easter, it's still early spring, so often the weather can be chilly, the sky gray, and all the leaves on the trees are just beginning to bud. I remember often the smell of lilacs in the air as we'd get out of the car.

There are lots of eastern shore of Virginia names on these tombstones – names like Custis, Parks, Mears, Wessels, and others, and lots of Shreaves. And often, my sister and I will sing some of the hymns that my parents loved, songs like Amazing Grace, In the Garden, Beautiful Savior, and so forth. And we don't know all the words, but it really doesn't matter. That we're there is what matters to us.

At times, we see other people we know doing the exact same thing for their relatives and friends as we are. And when we leave at Parksley cemetery, while we still remember mom and dad every day of our lives, somehow these ritual close something for us. It's done until the next year or at least until the next time we can gather again at the cemetery...Christmas maybe. It's as though we've had a visit with mom and dad when they were alive. We remember the old stories, we laugh and cry. We might even have a conversation with them while we're at the cemetery. "Mom, dad, remember when"...and then we'd recall a funny story. Or, "mom, dad, tell us again about how you both..." "And again, we'd think of something from out of the past. And whatever remembrance or story we happen to be thinking of. And then, we'd get back into the car, go home, or have lunch maybe and then head home.

But the ritual is always the same. We bring adornment flowers to lay on the gravesite, we talk to mom and dad, share stories, laugh, dry, and then we leave, until the next time.

I'm guessing that for many of you, you have similar rituals this time of year, or whenever you're near your deceased loved ones.

But something was different this day in first century Palestine, in this small burial ground, as these women had come to Jesus's tomb. It had only been a couple of days earlier when he was crucified and laid in this tomb, now sealed. And just like we always do, the women brought something to adorn the burial spot here - in this case they brought spices.

They figure they'll pray some prayers maybe, grieve the loss of their beloved Jesus, remember the good times, and then go home. Just like us.

But this time, this time it was different. As they approach the tomb, they notice something's not right. The stone that has been placed in front of the entrance to the tomb had been rolled away and the grave was opened. Strange, they must have thought. And two men stood at the entrance to the tomb, men they probably didn't know based on their appearance. And the men ask the women, "Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He's not here, but he is risen."

"Wait... What!? Not here... Risen? What's that all about?" Every assumption about death they had ever known, every ritual they knew about dying is suddenly turned on its head. No body to see, no body to rub the spices on. "What's happened?" they ask in disbelief? Every other friend, every other relative and

loved one they'd ever buried was in the ground, dead and buried. So what's up with Jesus here? And then then they remember the words of Jesus himself... "The Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and crucified, and on the third day rise again." "Oh, yeah, that's right, the remember. "He did say that."

And so at this graveside some 2000 years ago in first century Palestine, death dies. Because Jesus rose as he said he would. This is the day the death dies. A tomb once closed, is now open. And death's sting is no more. Jesus' dead body was no longer contained to this dark damp gravesite, but instead is risen. For Jesus, and for us, our agony is over, as we hear in the words of a song we sang earlier this morning, "And Jesus is not here but is among the living here, now, in the Holy Spirit." This one death means the end of death itself. Yes... Where is thy sting, O death...we ask.

Jesus is risen from the grave. That means that mom, dad, our aunts and uncles, our friends and relatives, your parents, your relatives, your loved ones, you, their death and your death are not final either. The stone of their graves has been and will be rolled away, and like Jesus himself, they live a new life in Christ as well you and I. Once dead, all are now alive in Christ.

Sisters and brothers in the faith yes, please continue to visit your cemeteries, your places of burial for those whom you have lost. Continue to put fresh flowers on them, sing your songs, pray your prayers over them. Share your remembrances. Talk to them if you'd like. But now, dance, and sing, and shout amen! Because Jesus has put an end to death today, for you, for your loved ones, for yourself. Their tombs are also empty. They're not there anymore because they have joined the living in Christ our Lord. And so with you, the baptized in Christ Jesus!

For everyone of you who has lost a loved one you need not fear where their final resting place is. And it's not a hole in the ground or in some box. Because they have joined all the saints in heaven, alive in Christ, joined with all the saints in heaven now. All because of what Jesus has done this day, putting an end to death itself

I think of the words to the song darkness veils the earth no more... Love's redeeming work is done now... Where is the victory or grave!

Death... And the tomb no longer can contain them. Jesus Christ is risen today hallelujah! Amen!