

St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 20:1-18

“He Is Not Here – He Is Risen!”

It was Sunday morning and there was sadness within Jesus' followers, and fear filled the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders – because they were terrified of Jesus, and the Roman Governor – Pontius Pilate was probably still a little stunned over what had just occurred and so he agreed with the leaders and said *"Take a guard,"... "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how."* So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard." (Matthew 27:65-66) The tomb was sealed by stringing a cord across the stone wheel that was rolled over the entrance. If you don't know what kind of boulder they put in front of the tomb – it was a large stone wheel with a trough – because those tombs were reused as a crypt might be today. The cord had a clay seal at each end. Not only had the religious leaders requested guards – around the clock - because they feared that Jesus' disciples would steal the body – but little did they know that at that very moment Jesus' disciples were cowering in fear for their lives, and were not even thinking about the Resurrection.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, (Y'all know Nicodemus from John 3:16) these two prominent Jewish leaders, members of the Sanhedrin, had hastily prepared Jesus' body for burial by bringing to the tomb “a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds” (John 19:39b) but more had to be done – and so ladies set out for the tomb on that Sunday morning. They were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. (Mark 16:1) According to Luke 8:2 Mary from the city of Magdala on the Galilee region, was grateful to the Lord Jesus because He had driven seven demons from her. These women, along with the other disciples were still in a state of shock from the horrible, brutal death of Jesus – and since the Sabbath was over – they could now come and show their love and respect for Jesus by attending to His body properly according to the Jewish tradition.

Seeing that the stone was already rolled away – Mary ran to two Apostles who were coming – *“So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!”*” (John 20:2) As was his custom, John – the writer of this Gospel – never mentions his name but instead refers to himself as *“the other disciple – the one Jesus loved.”* He and Peter went into the tomb and saw the grave clothes lying there – (this is an eyewitness account) left as if Jesus had passed right through them. The headpiece was rolled up separately from the other wrappings that had enveloped Jesus' body. A grave robber couldn't possibly have made off with Jesus' body and left the linens as if they were still shaped around it. The neatness and order indicated that there was not a hasty removal of Jesus' body. Rather, Jesus arose and left the wrappings lying there, empty. The disciples did not fabricate this story about the Resurrection; in fact, they were so surprised that Jesus was not in the tomb. When John saw the grave clothes looking like an empty cocoon from which Jesus had emerged, he believed that Jesus

had risen. It wasn't until after they had seen the empty tomb that they remembered what the Scriptures and Jesus had said—that He would die, but He would also rise again!

John's Gospel eyewitness account also demonstrates that the disciples couldn't have "invented" the Resurrection in order to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies because they did not immediately see any Old Testament connection. The fact is that the Resurrection opened the disciples' minds to see that God had foretold His plan through the prophets.

Put yourself in the shoes of Peter, John and Mary Magdalene – after experiencing the events of Jesus' arrest, crucifixion, death and burial – now coming face to face with an open tomb and a missing body – what would be on your mind?

- Would you be calm and collected?
- Would you be in a state of shock?

I want to suggest to you that we cannot possibly know – because we have too much knowledge of what actually took place – and what still will happen to them in the 50 days to come. That is the difference – we know their future – while they are just dealing with that moment. We often try to judge them – thinking 'why don't they see it – what is their problem?' You know what – many of us have been where Peter, John and Mary Magdalene were that day – surrounded by evidence – but not really sure – maybe filled with some doubt. Something happened to each one of us to realize the truth of the Resurrection – and that truth is the power of the Holy Spirit! If you are here today with questions about the Resurrection – or the Lordship and Divinity of Jesus – ask the Holy Spirit right now to fill you with His Wisdom and Peace.

Here are the words of one of the eyewitnesses of the Resurrection – Peter – who wrote these words after receiving the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and then was able to see and know God's plan: *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you..."* (1 Peter 1:3-4)

Just the fact that the tomb is empty should give each one of us the absolute assurance that God's promises are very real. I challenge you to look through the Old Testament and see each time God makes a promise – God makes it happen. Being Bible Believing Christians - we are blessed to know the whole story –from Genesis to Revelation - the whole truth - that Jesus arose from the tomb to defeat death and sin. If Jesus had not come out of that tomb, we would be just like every other religion in the world – we would be following a dead leader – whose tomb is still occupied.

There is another truth that we need to face and that is that everyone, including everyone here today - is guilty; every one of us has sinned. We are all sinners. Holy Scripture tells us that *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23) But the Good News is that *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8) That's why He sent Jesus to die and then to triumphantly walk out of the tomb.

The Bible tells us there is no other Name given under Heaven by which we can be saved; that name is Jesus, the Messiah, Jesus the Christ, Yeshua Ha Mashiach. Because the tomb is empty, we have the full promise of eternal glory with God – and it is fulfilled. Since Jesus died for our sins, God the Father sees the righteousness of Jesus instead of our unrighteousness. Why? Because the debt has been paid – once for all!

I need to ask you to answer this question honestly: Do you know Jesus Christ this morning? I didn't ask you if you had heard about Him, I asked if you know Him. Do you have a relationship with Him? Do you talk to Him all the time? I had been there – many years ago. I grew up in a wonderful Christian household - with a wonderful knowledge of Jesus. I went to Parochial School through eighth grade; I had catechism; I had it all! I had that knowledge; I loved Him, and revered Him –and I longed to serve Him as an altar boy (that's and Acolyte for us) but I didn't know Him or have a relationship with Him. If you don't know Him or have a relationship with Him - don't you think you should? Jesus says to us in the Book of Revelation 3:20; *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."* If you feel that you need Jesus in your life – ask Him in -ask Him to be your Lord – and to lead your life.

If you have already accepted Jesus or you have decided to have a stronger relationship with Him – or you want to start a relationship with Him – please pray this prayer with me right now. This is not the sinner's prayer – but a dedication prayer or a re-dedication prayer:

- Dear Lord Jesus – I receive you as my Savior,
 - I accept You,
 - I accept your forgiveness,
 - Because I need forgiveness.
 - I trust you with my life.
 - I place my trust in you!
 - In Jesus' Name – Amen.

And now receive the freedom from doubt and emptiness – that can only come from one place – the empty tomb of Jesus – which says "He is NOT here – He is Risen!" Alleluia Alleluia!