

Resurrection Gifts

This morning, I invite you to come and see the tomb of Jesus.

We will not be alone in our walk. Some women who were close to Jesus are committed to getting to His grave shortly after sunrise. They are: Mary, the mother of James; Joanna, wife of Chusa, the steward of Herod; Mary Magdalene; and Salome, the mother of James and John. They are going early because the task of preparing a dead body is always unpleasant work; but when that body has been lying in the Judean heat for three days, the work is unbearable. Let's follow them as they make the heartbreaking trip to Jesus' grave.

Was it only last Thursday when Judas had betrayed Jesus with a kiss? Things had moved so quickly after that. Jesus had been taken to trial. Yes, a nighttime trial was illegal, but it had happened, hadn't it? They were certain the witnesses against their Rabbi had been bribed, but no one had voiced a complaint. Even the charges against Jesus had been changed, but nobody had spoken on His behalf. Their hearts had been torn when Pilate had put Jesus, whipped and crowned with thorns, on public display.

They had stood at the foot of the cross -- an honor guard of love committed to keeping watch. If those whom Jesus had healed and fed were not there, they would stay.

Keeping watch, as they were, they would have noted the moment of Jesus' death. They watched as He was taken down; went to see where He was buried; noted the preparation of His body for burial was richly, but incompletely done. That was when they would have pledged: "After the Sabbath Day we will make sure Jesus' body is cared for the right way."

We are approaching the tomb. You see, there is no guard on duty. No, you don't have to tell the ladies. Up to this point they've only been concerned about moving the stone. I don't think they've heard how the Jewish leaders went to Pilate and got permission to put a guard and a seal at the grave's door to discourage Body-snatchers. Look, the ladies have noticed the grave is open! They've noticed, and right now their minds are probably going a million miles an minute. They're wondering, "Is it possible the tomb's owner has had second thoughts about giving Jesus his grave? Has somebody moved Jesus' body? If so, where has it been placed? Has someone stolen it? Should we report the loss to the authorities? If we do, will these leaders show any willingness to help find His body? Is it possible His enemies wish to desecrate the body of the Man they have murdered?"

Which is why, fearing the worst, the ladies gathered their courage and entered Jesus' grave. They saw two young man dressed in dazzling white, and they were understandably alarmed. They

were told, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen." Christ has risen!

Jesus, according to prophecy, and completing His own prediction, had kept His promise. Before He had been arrested He had said, "I lay down my life that I may take it up again." (John 10:17) It was an outrageous statement, one that no man would ever be able to keep. But Jesus was no mere man. Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. He had been born to fulfill the laws we have broken, to triumph over Satan's temptation and to conquer death. Now, with His mission successfully completed, they had proof that Jesus Christ was God's Son and that everything He had said to them was also true. Christ is risen!

Christ is risen. Do you know what that means? Do you know any Christians who have died? Because Jesus has risen, when those folks stopped breathing; when the best of doctors shook their heads in helplessness, a risen Christ came and took the souls of those believers to be with Him. Because of a risen Christ we can assure those who mourn, "Because Jesus lives, your beloved also lives." We can tell them the farewell they were saying was not final. We can promise them an eternal reunion with these forgiven souls, not to mention a physical resurrection at the end of days.

Christ is risen. Do you know what that means? Right now many of you are worried, frightened, stressed out. You don't know what tomorrow will bring. You're not sure of your job, your family, your finances, or your future. But because Christ has risen, you need not face tomorrow's unknowns alone. The living Lord offers this assurance: "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). Even more, Scripture assures us we can cast our cares upon Him because He cares for us. (1 Peter 5:7) Because He lives, He can come when you call.

Christ is risen. Do you know what that means? Are you troubled by the wrong you have done and the good you have left undone? Do you lose sleep; does your mind dwell on these evils? A risen Christ can forgive you. The apostle John lists no exceptions when he says to those who believe in the risen Redeemer, "the blood of Jesus (God's) Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Christ is risen. Do you know what that means? Pastor Ken Klaus, former Lutheran Hour speaker once wrote, "Last year, from the basement of my home in St. Louis, I watched a great storm -- some said it was a tornado. I don't know about that. I do know it knocked down some very large trees in the back yard. Through my basement window I watched a sparrow cling to a tree limb, facing into the wind. The storm swept the branch back and forth, but the little bird stayed solid. As I watched, I thought, that bird is thinking, "Wind, blow hard as you want. If you dislodge me from this branch, I still have wings."

Because Christ is risen, you can look at sin, death, devil, and the disasters of life and say, "Blow hard as you want. You may dislodge me from where I am now, but I still have wings. I have Jesus Christ. With faith in a living Lord, I either hang tight or fly away to Him."