

Easter Celebration, 2009

Text: John 20:1-18

Title: Easter Joy

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What a morning! What a glorious day it is today.

For the past forty days we have endured the darkness of Lent. It began with Ash Wednesday. Our colors were black as we were marked for death with dust and the cross of Christ.

Then for five weeks our colors changed to purple, and we heard Jesus predict His impending death. We spent these weeks in mourning and repentance, knowing that Jesus was going to die for us, for our sins.

Last Sunday our colors changed to crimson, the color of blood. We watched Jesus ride into Jerusalem, and we heard Him speak once more of His death.

Then came Thursday night, and Jesus' Last Supper with His disciples. He gave them, and us, His body and blood, given and shed for our forgiveness.

On Friday our colors were black once more as we heard of Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, death, and burial. On Friday night we left in darkness.

But this morning all of that is different. Our colors are now white. The Christ candle is lit once more. Our altar is overflowing with flowers. Our alleluias have returned. Our songs are joyful once more.

And this is all is for one reason- Christ is risen! (R. He is risen indeed, alleluia).

When you woke up this morning, you knew that it would be Easter. You knew what was coming. You've been looking forward to this day, to an end of Lent, to an end of darkness, to an end of death and the return of life and light.

But it was not like this for Mary. Mary didn't know that this morning would be Easter. Mary didn't know what today would bring. When Mary woke up this morning it was still dark. It was dark because the Sun had not yet risen. It was dark because Mary was still in mourning. Mary was still stuck in Lent. Good Friday was all that she knew.

The past three days had been dark for Mary. Friday afternoon was the worst. To stand and watch her friend die, this had been the darkest moment in her life. How could God forsake Him like this? How could God allow Him to die? He had healed the sick, He had raised the dead. He had cast demons out of her, and showed her kindness like no one else.

Saturday was the day of rest. But Mary could get no rest. She couldn't stop thinking about Jesus. She couldn't stop crying. She couldn't sleep through the night.

So Mary was up even before sunrise, before the rooster goes off. It is still dark out. She meets with the other ladies and together they head off to the tomb.

When they get there, they notice right away that things aren't right. The stone that sealed the tomb had been moved. Jesus' grave had been desecrated.

When Mary looks inside, the tomb is empty. Jesus is gone. Things could not get any worse. Funerals are bad enough, but to have one without the body there, that is very difficult. Mary just wanted to see Jesus one last time, to say good-bye to Him, but now she can't even do that, because His body is gone.

So Mary runs to tell Peter and John. She doesn't have her cell phone, so she has to run and tell them in person. They go running off to see for themselves, and Mary slowly walks back to the garden.

She's curious. She just can't let this go. She can't forget about Jesus. So Mary goes back for one more look. One last look to make sure that Jesus is really gone.

When she gets back to the cemetery, all Mary can do is cry. Tears stream down her face.

But through the tears, Mary sees something new, something she missed the first time. Two angels sitting in the tomb where Jesus is supposed to be. Now there's something you don't see every day. The last time there had been angels around was when Jesus was born. They always seem to show up for the holidays.

They seem surprised at Mary's grief. They ask her, "Why are you crying?"

Why is she crying? What sort of question is that? Imagine asking someone at a funeral, "Why are you crying?" Jesus' body is missing.

Strangely, a man appears and asks Mary the same question. "Why are you crying?" Mary gives the same answer. Jesus' body is missing.

And then comes the turning point. The moment that will change Mary's life forever. She will never forget this moment. One word- Mary.

It's her name. Jesus speaks her name and everything changes.

No more death, no more tears, no more loneliness, no more despair.

Instead there is life, joy, happiness, hope. Jesus is alive, and he is here for Mary. There's nowhere else in all the world that Jesus would rather be. He comes to Mary, to bring her

comfort and joy. He is here for her. He could have chosen anyone. But He chooses Mary first. Before Jesus appears to His disciples, before Jesus appears to His family, Jesus comes to comfort Mary. Jesus calls her by name.

And then Jesus gives her something to do. Jesus puts her joy to work. “Go, tell my brothers that I’ve risen.” And Mary does. Mary is the first messenger, the first person to share the good news of Jesus’ resurrection.

From Mary the good news passed to the disciples, and from the disciples to the ends of the earth. We are here today, because this message is still being passed from generation to generation, from person to person. The good news that Jesus has risen from the dead is for everyone.

Without the good news, we are like Mary, that first Easter morning. Still in darkness, still surrounded by death and despair, sadness and sorrow. There is no hope beyond the grave. We don’t even know where to find to Jesus.

But Jesus comes to find us. Jesus searches you out.

Jesus calls you by name in Holy Baptism. He speaks your name just as He spoke Mary’s name that Easter morning in the garden.

And when Jesus calls you by name, your whole life changes. You are filled with life and joy and hope. He who was dead is now alive, and you will be, too.

As St. Paul writes, “In Christ, all will be made alive.”

This good news is too good to keep to yourself. Jesus sends you out with His good news. You may say to yourself, but I’m no one special, I’m not a pastor, I’m not a missionary. Neither was Mary. All she did was tell the disciples what she had seen and heard.

As you go from this place, you will meet people for whom Easter is just another holiday—a day for eggs and bunnies and flowers and chocolate. They are still in the dark. They are still looking for Jesus buried in tomb somewhere.

What do you say to them?

Christ is risen!