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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“EASTER PEOPLE”
John 20:11-18

☠ Jesus died at 3:00 P.M. on Friday.

Imagine how horrible the rest of that day was for his disciples!

They invested their faith in Jesus. Now, all they had to show for it was a disgraced, defeated, dead Messiah.

They entrusted Jesus with their hope. Could hope survive a Roman flogging, spikes pounded through wrists and ankles, and catastrophic blood loss?

They poured their love into Jesus. They had to wonder: Was it the right thing to do? If they answered yes they were faced with another question: was it worth it?

That was Friday.

☠ On Saturday the new reality began to sink in.

→ With Jesus dead, who would {Lk 4:18-19} “**proclaim good news to the poor**”? Not the wealthy Sadducees.

→ Who would secure “**freedom for the prisoners**”? Not the legalistic Pharisees with their burdensome rules, or the Herodians who were dedicated to maintaining the status quo at all costs.

→ Who would accomplish “**recovery of sight for the blind**”? Not the scribes, who accused Jesus of using demonic power to perform his miracles.

→ Who would “**set the oppressed free**”? Not the monastic Essenes, who had withdrawn from the world.

→ With Jesus dead there would be no {Jn 4:10} “**living water**,” no {Jn 10:10} “**life to the full**,” no more {Mt 4:23} “**good news of the kingdom**.”

That was Saturday.

◆ In hindsight, their agonizing was needless.

Weeks earlier, Jesus had explained {Mt 16:21} “**that he must be killed and on the third day raised to life**.” He directly said, on at least three distinct occasions, that “**on the third day he will be raised to life**” (Matthew 17:23).

Still, they did not “get it”. All this despair was unnecessary and torturous for the disciples; but for us it has the benefit of underscoring the necessity of the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

⊙ Some people contend that the resurrection was a purely spiritual event – meaning, God raised the spirit of Jesus so He could “go to heaven,” but left his body in the grave. The entity with which the disciples interacted on Easter was really a ghost.

⊙ Others allege the resurrection was a psycho-social reality: Jesus stayed dead, but his followers “kept him alive” in their shared memories and their commitment to his teachings.

⊙ A few have proposed truly bizarre ideas: someone took Jesus’ place on the cross, so the “resurrection” was just Jesus coming out of hiding; Jesus was so virtuous He was reincarnated as a higher life-form; and so forth.

The disciples did not waste a moment’s thought on those wild theories. However, their fearful and hopeless response to Jesus’ death demonstrates the

absolute necessity of a material, physical, bodily resurrection.

☐ Please turn with me to John 20:1: **“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb.”**

The sky is still dark, because the astronomical sun has not yet risen.

Mary’s heart is still dark, for she does not yet know the Son of God has risen. She does not expect anything unusual to happen at the tomb; she goes for the same reason we visit a loved one’s grave or gather at a makeshift memorial on the side of the road.

☐ The rest of verse 1, and verse 2: **“Mary saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and [John] and said, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!’”**

Mary does not interpret the removed stone as evidence of resurrection; she assumes someone has moved Jesus’ dead body. She is in despair.

☐ Verses 3-10: Peter and John run to the tomb and see the empty burial cloths. John takes in the scene in and believes Jesus is alive.

☐ That brings us to verses 11-18.

Mary lingers **“outside the tomb crying.”** She looks into the tomb and sees **“two angels...seated where Jesus’ body had been.”**

They ask: **“Woman, why are you crying?”**

“They have taken my Lord away, and I don’t know where they have put him.” **“At this,”** she turns around. Clearly, she does not expect to receive help.

When she turns, Mary sees Jesus but does not recognize him.

“Woman,” he gently asks, **“why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”**

“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” The most she hopes for now is to give a decent burial.

Jesus says, **“Mary.”**

☺ Mary finally sees the risen Lord. He turns her brokenness to joy, her despair to hope. She is transformed into an Easter person.

But what does that mean, exactly?

☼ 1st, Easter people are given a new relationship with God through Jesus.

- In verse 18, Jesus says, **“Go...to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to *my* Father and *your* Father, to my God and your God.’”** It is the first time in John’s Gospel that Jesus says, **“your Father.”** Until now He has only said, **“the Father”** or **“my Father.”** The shift in pronouns points back to John 1:12: **“to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”**

- That is not all. In verse 22 Jesus breathes on the disciples, and says, **“Receive the Holy Spirit.”** This foreshadows Pentecost, when the Spirit will fill every Christ Follower. Not only can we know God as his children, our bodies can be dwelling places for his Holy Spirit.

Easter people are given a new relationship with God.

☼ 2nd, Easter people are given a new faith in Jesus that includes specific intellectual content and personal trust.

- Verse 8: John “**saw and believed.**”
- Verses 24-28: Thomas says that he will not believe the resurrection without hard evidence. A week later,

Though the doors [are] locked, Jesus [comes] and [stands] among them and [says], “Peace be with you!” He [says] to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Thomas [says]...“My Lord and my God!”

Then Jesus [tells] him, “Because you have seen me, you have *believed*; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have *believed*.”

- John closes out the chapter in verse 31: “**These [signs] are written that you may *believe* that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by *believing* you may have life in his name.**”

Easter people are given new faith in Jesus.

☼ 3rd, Easter people are given a new vocation by Jesus.

- In verses 17-18 Jesus commissions Mary to go to the disciples “**and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: ‘I have seen the Lord!’ And she told them that he had said these things to her.**”

Mary is the apostle to the apostles, the first to bear witness to the resurrected Christ. But she is not the last.

- Verse 21: “**Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’** He is sending them out to build his kingdom by making “**disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything [He] commanded” (Matthew 28:19-20).**

For Mary Magdalene, Thomas and the other disciples, being Easter people is about new relationship with God, new faith in Jesus, and new vocation (a new life’s work). That is what it means for us, too.

Easter is a historical event. It happened only once.

And yet the risen Lord still approaches us as we stand in brokenness and despair at the tomb of our dead future, our dead hope, our dead love, gently calling our name. Jesus is ready and able to make us Easter People, too, if only we will let him.

Everything rides on his death and resurrection. God’s Word puts it in the strongest possible terms:

- “**If Christ has not been raised,**” then God has neither {2 Co 5:18} “**reconciled us to himself through [Jesus]”** nor “[given] **us the ministry of reconciliation.**” But Jesus has been raised!

→ {1 Co 15:17, NLT} **“If Christ has not been raised,”** then God has not forgiven the guilt of our sin and we **“are still under condemnation for [it].”** But Jesus has been raised!

→ **“If Christ has not been raised,”** then God has not set us free from the power of sin, and we have no alternative but to {Rom 6:12} **“obey its evil desires.”** But Jesus has been raised!

→ **“If Christ has not been raised,”** then God has not {Col 2:15} **“disarmed the powers”** {Eph 6:12} **“of this dark world”** and we are subject to **“spiritual forces of evil.”** But Jesus has been raised!

→ **“If Christ has not been raised,”** God has not broken the power of death and {1 Co 15:13} **“there is no resurrection of the dead.”** But Jesus has been raised!

→ **“If Christ has not been raised,”** God has failed. {2 Co 5:17} **“The new creation has [not] come: The old has [not] gone,”** and **“the new is [not] here!”** But Jesus has been raised!

→ {1 Co 15:14, NLT} **“If Christ has not been raised, then... [our] trust in God is useless”** and {1 Co 15:19} **“we are to be pitied more than all others.”** But Jesus has been raised!

→ {Php/BBE} **“The glorious fact is that Christ has truly come back from the dead”** (1 Corinthians 15:20)! The Lord {Mace} **“is actually risen.”** Jesus is alive!

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!