

Sermon Manuscript for “Good News from the Graveyard – He is Risen!”



Good News From the Graveyard - *Luke 24:1-3*

***A Walk Among The Stones**

One day some time ago I took a walk through a local cemetery.

It was a clear, cool day and no one else was there besides the cemetery workers in a far off corner..

I spent some time walking ... and looking ... and thinking.

A Cemetery is a good place to do that.

It's been said that if you have a big decision to make, take a walk through a cemetery.

I guess it's a peaceful reflective space that can bring a perspective to your thinking.

As I walked I began to read the markers.

Names and dates ... 1855 dash 1915.

Two dates and a dash.

A day of birth, a day of death, and a little dash representing everything in between.

I wondered about the hundreds of people buried there.

The markers read “Beloved mother,” “Faithful father,” “Rest in peace.”

William and Maragret, both born in the 1860's, both died in the 1960's.

A boy named John Gourley who lived to only be 11 years old.

One married couple born in the 1900's died within one year of each other, 2001,2002.

Another couple had the husband die in 1968, the wife died in 2003.

And the thought came to me that the cemetery was peaceful.

Quiet ... Beautiful ... Peaceful.

Exactly what a cemetery should be.

***Late on a Friday Afternoon**

It was probably very much like a certain cemetery outside Jerusalem.

It was a garden cemetery ... a little collection of tombs dug out of solid rock.

The Bible mentions four times that Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb.

It belonged to a rich man named Joseph from the city of Arimathea.

He was a prominent figure in local society because besides being wealthy, he was also a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious body.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John combine to tell us the story.

Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

When they took down the body of Jesus from the cross, his body was in bad shape.

It bore all the marks of the abuse he had suffered.

He was covered with blood.

There was a hole in his side.

His face was horribly disfigured.

The skin hung from his back in tatters.

Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped the body in strips of linen cloth.

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Then they sprinkled about 80 pounds of spices throughout the linen strips.
Part of it was a kind of ground powder.
The other part was a gummy substance.
The spices made the linen strips stick together and form a tight wrap around the body.
That was how the Jews embalmed their dead.

Buried Before Sundown

The Jews held that the next day began at sundown – not sun-up, like we do in our culture.

It was getting near sundown now – the Sabbath was about to begin.

That created a problem because the Old Testament forbade the Jews to handle a dead body on the Sabbath.

There was no time to find a new grave.

So, Joseph volunteered his own grave to be used.

Doubtless Joseph meant for his own family to be buried there someday.

But for the moment, everything and everyone else is put aside.

Joseph and Nicodemus pick up the limp, lifeless corpse of Jesus.

And half-carry, half-drag it to the garden tomb.

Thank goodness it wasn't far away.

Between the weight of the body ...

And the linen ...

And the spices ...

It must have been almost 250 pounds.

Meanwhile the sun slowly sank across the western horizon.

The entrance to the tomb was very small.

Nicodemus and Joseph had to bend over to get inside.

Inside the tomb ... it was dark ... almost pitch-black.

Musty and damp.

They laid the body of Jesus on a ledge and turned to go.

When they got outside, Joseph and Nicodemus rolled a great stone over the entrance.

Then Joseph and Nicodemus left ...

Darkness fell on the garden cemetery.

Everyone was gone, not a soul in sight.

Inside the tomb ... silence

The smell of death and decay, mixed with myrrh and spices hung in the air.

Silent Saturday

The Bible says very little about that Saturday.

Sometime between Friday and Saturday the Romans put a seal on the stone to keep people away.

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Luke says of the disciples ... “And on the Sabbath they rested.”

***Sunrise Surprise**

But of Sunday, the Bible is very clear.

John says, “Now on the first day of the week ... Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb.”

The women came to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus.

But to their shock ... and surprise ... and utter confusion ...

The seal was broken.

The stone was rolled away.

The tomb was open.

They looked inside. It was empty.

Jesus was gone.

The tomb was empty.

An angel stood beside them and said the most powerful words in all the Bible...

“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, for he is risen, just as he said.”

Mary ran and found Peter and John.

She didn't even believe it at first.

It was too much to take in.

Peter and John ran to the tomb.

John got there first.

But Peter went inside.

An Empty Cocoon

The Bible has a strange word about what he found.

It says he found the linen cloth lying there.

And the head cloth wrapped up by itself.

I think it means the linens were like an empty shell ... as if whoever had been inside had simply passed right through them, like a cocoon after the butterfly has flown away.

Then Mary met Jesus ... alive and risen from the dead.

Then two disciples on the road met Jesus ... alive and risen from the dead.

Then the apostles met Jesus ... alive and risen from the dead.

Then doubting Thomas met Jesus ... alive and risen from the dead.

Then 500 people at one time met Jesus ... alive and risen from the dead.

The message went out: He's Alive!

He is risen (He is risen indeed!)

You Can't Keep a Good Man Down

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Fifty days after that first Easter morning... Peter stood to preach in Jerusalem. He preached to the very people who had crucified Jesus. In that sermon he said these words ... Jesus of Nazareth ... You nailed to a cross ... and put to death. But God raised him from the dead. Freeing him from the agony of death. For it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Back Among The Tombstones

The awful finality of death hit me square in the face on that little walk through the graveyard. It all seems so final, so settled for good. Sometimes it's hard to believe in the resurrection of the dead. Many of you have visited a cemetery, maybe even left a loved one behind there... and felt the same thing. If you just go on what you see, it's a hard doctrine to believe. The odds seem to be against it. No one here has ever seen a resurrection. There haven't been very many over the last 2000 years. If you go to the cemetery and wait for one, you'll have to wait a long, long time. But maybe we're looking for the resurrection in the wrong place. I believe in the resurrection of the dead because I believe in the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday morning. The Bible says, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again ... even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus."

***For the first time ever, there's good news from the graveyard this morning.**

Good news that the tomb is empty.
Good news that Jesus rose from the dead.
Good news that the Devil couldn't hold him.
Good news that death has lost its sting.
Good news that the grave has lost its victory.
Good news that we need not fear death any more.
As far as I know my heart this morning, I am not afraid to die.
Not because I am especially brave. For I am not.

****But I know what's on the other side.**

God is not offering earth with heaven thrown in.
He's offering heaven with earth thrown in.
When we know him, it doesn't matter how, when or where we die.
I am going to be in his presence forever.

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I say that without any sense of pride or boasting.
For my resurrection does not depend on me.
It does not depend on my good deeds.
It does not depend on any merit in me at all.
It depends solely and wholly on the victor – the Lord Jesus Christ - who rose from the dead on Easter morning.
He promised that if I would trust in him, someday I would rise with him.

Good news from the graveyard?

That's a strange place for good news.
But that's what Easter is all about.
If you're looking for Jesus this morning, don't look in a graveyard.
He isn't there.
He left the graveyard 2000 years ago and never went back.
The really good news is this ... If you are looking for Jesus today, you can meet him right here.
His name is Jesus of Nazareth. He is the Son of God.
God so loved you that he sent Jesus to die on the cross for you and I.
He was buried in Joseph's tomb.
He rose from the dead on Easter Sunday morning.
He paid for your sins so that if you believe in him you will never perish but have everlasting life.
Jesus promised, "He who believes in me has everlasting life" ([John 6:47](#)).
That's good news.

Amen.

May you walk in the blessing of God's grace through him who is the Resurrection and the Life, even Jesus our Lord.

Amen.