



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

Well, the Sabbath was over. The day of rest and worship had passed. Now it was time to tend to Jesus' body. The three women in our Gospel reading today are ready to get to work, unpleasant work of embalming Jesus' body.

Think with me for a minute about these three women: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome. These three women were witnesses to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Male disciples were no where to be found. These women are left to perform the ritual of embalming the body of their Lord and Savior Jesus. During this time in history, it was unusual to have women as witnesses to anything. Having women serve as witnesses was not accepted in legal proceedings. Yet, these women are on the way to the tomb, where they plan to anoint Jesus' body with spices, a practice that honored the deceased. This was a sign of great devotion and takes over where the woman in Simon's house in Bethany, left off of anointing Jesus with expensive ointment.

In their grief, these three women, on their mission, had a practical concern. Who would roll the stone away from the tomb so they could enter and do their work?

Now, I can only imagine the other thoughts going through their heads as they walked toward the tomb. Their mind-numbing grief, tearful sobs and

questioning hearts were in turmoil within them. If you have ever experienced grief you know that heavy feeling, almost a feeling of disbelief. Eyes raw from crying. Desperate unbelief must have engulfed them. All three of these women thought that Jesus was the One. They believed that He was the one sent from God, the Messiah. Yet, the only question they voice, is quite a practical one. Who will roll the stone away from the tomb?

When they arrived at the tomb, they saw the very big stone already rolled away. Their grief was transformed to surprise. These three women were not ready for what they saw. And we are not told who rolled the stone away. Could this be God's activity? Hmmmmm. Probably in shock, Mary, Mary and Salome enter the tomb. And there sat another surprise. A young man dressed in a white robe was sitting on the right side. He spoke to the women. "Do not be alarmed, you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him."

Now I don't know about you, but by then I would have been ready to high tale it out of there in a quick hurry. Consider their emotional state, grief stricken, full of fear for sure. They encounter No Body but rather a heavenly being? And they are told not to be afraid. Yeah right? Fear would be a very common response when seeing this man in a white robe.

Some significance to the white robe, white represents several things, all positive. Glory was portrayed when Jesus was in a dazzling white robe at the Transfiguration. Salvation comes in Revelation where white stone is given to everyone who conquers. Purity is seen in the white robes in Revelation that have been washed by the blood of the Lamb. And here the white robe of an angel?

Yet fear takes over, as nothing was as it was supposed to be. The body of Jesus was supposed to be in the tomb. They had witnessed it being placed there. The stone was to be sealing the tomb. They had witnessed that as well. But the body of Jesus was missing. And now they learn from this young man that Jesus' death was not the end. Everything they thought they knew, everything absolute that they have trusted all their lives, turned out to be not true. No wonder they were afraid.

His body was gone. Could it be true that He was raised from the dead? Could it be another miracle, like when Lazarus came out of the tomb alive after several days? If Jesus is alive, death will have control over life any longer.

Things in their world and ours will never be the same again. Quite unbelievable, so no wonder these three women were afraid.

But do they do as they are told by the young man in white? Not quite, they certainly go, they leave the tomb. In fact our text from Mark tells us that they fled. So they ran away in terror and amazement. Fear had encompassed them, so much that they could not even do as they were commanded. They could not even tell the disciples what they had seen and heard. They were too afraid, too shocked to do anything. And there our story ends. Or does it?

Mary, Mary and Salome were also given the promise that they could see Jesus in Galilee. That was wonderful news, but I am sure that they were too afraid to believe that in the moment. And there our story ends. That is the original end of the Gospel of Mark. Talk about a cliffhanger.

Although most scholars agree that verse 8 is the end of Mark's Gospel, it does not work for most people. And so two alternative endings have been added in our Bibles; a short one and a longer ending. The short ending does not tie things up in a nice bow for us either and so most would prefer the longer ending where Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, then to the two disciples. Then Jesus commissions the disciples and finally Jesus is taken up to heaven to sit at the right hand of God. Much nicer finish, it feels complete somehow. Certainly more like the story we find in the other Gospels and one that most scholars agree was added later to Mark.

We all know that Jesus' story does not end there even though Mark's Gospel does. With no concrete reason given as to why Mark ends his Gospel with verse 8 should we assume that the rest of the story is obvious? But we need all the help we can get to believe that this man Jesus died and was crucified and rose again, defeating death and the grave.

Well, our three women finally I suspect, went and told someone. They must have or we wouldn't be here to celebrate and worship the Risen Christ this morning. They could not keep quiet. (I know typical women!) Their lives had been changed in that instant with the word's "He has been raised; he is not here." And folks, the story does not end here. It is not the end but rather just the beginning. We are charged with finishing the story ourselves. That is the only way we will be able to believe, the unbelievable. And so I ask you today;

What difference does the risen Christ make in your life? Why are you here this morning?

Celebrating the resurrection of Jesus is not about the flowers, as beautiful as they are and as good as they smell. It is not even about the music of Mr. Donner, as beautiful as it is. It is not about the Easter baskets that the bunny hid last night or the wonderful potluck meal we will share in a few minutes. The resurrection of Jesus and the hope that act gives us, shapes our future, if we believe.

We are all human and have our own crosses to bear. We need hope in our lives and so we believe. We know that the only way to have hope is if we place it in the resurrected Christ. That transforming knowledge will calm our fear, take the sting of pain and death away and give us new life. It is true that only a God who loves us so much to send His only Son to die a horrible death on the cross, be buried and then taken to heaven to sit at the right hand of His Father, will give us that joy.

And so to finish this story, we do believe and we know that this story means that we allow the resurrected Christ to enter our lives and give us new lives with God. We are here this morning because the tomb gives us fear and only through belief in the resurrected Jesus can we see the living power of Jesus in our lives and in our world. The resurrected Christ takes up residence in our hearts to change, renew, shape and transform us. The story, His story has not ended, even when the disciples see Jesus alive again and as He is taken to heaven to be with His Father. The story continues in each one of us.

It does not stop at the tomb, but continues to be lived over and over again in my life, in your life and in the lives of people all over this world who believe that death is not the end. There is much more to the story as we live out the ending. Death is not the final word because we have new life in Christ.

So do not be alarmed. Keep looking for Jesus of Nazareth. He has been raised; he is not in the tomb any longer. So, turn from the empty tomb and allow the power of the resurrection to enter your lives and transform them until we are absolutely, positively ready for our gracious, God given eternal rest. Until that

time comes, we cannot rest until this Good News of Jesus has changed us and the world around us.

Yes, folks, this Easter story is quite unbelievable. Those three grief-struck women came to the tomb to anoint our Lord and Savior. Now, the end of His story is ours to live. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Christ is Risen... . . . He is Risen Indeed!
Alleluia and **AMEN**.