

The Wound of Death Is Vanquished!

John 20:11-16

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

April 5, 2015 – The Resurrection of Our Lord

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In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. It doesn't matter how many times you encounter it, death never feels natural or right. Indeed, death always feels wrong. When someone dies, there's something inside that refuses to accept the fact that you will never again hear that voice, see that face, touch that hand, or experience that laughter. Grief counselors can talk about how death is a part of life till they're blue in the face – and how you have to accept death as natural and inevitable. But you never do – and never will. Mary had no reason to doubt that her Lord was dead. After all, she had witnessed the horror firsthand. Standing nearby, she had seen the light of life in His eyes die as He hung gruesomely upon the cross. She saw the soldiers take His limp body down from the wood, and heard the horrid sound as they pulled out the nails. Jesus was dead alright, there was no doubt about it.

Still, Mary knew something wasn't quite right as she made her way to the grave on that first Easter morning to see His body one last time, and to finish the preparations for His burial. But when she arrived at the tomb His body wasn't there! She ran to tell Peter and John, but they weren't much help. After all, the body was gone, what could they do about it? After Peter and John left, Mary remained there at the place where she had last seen Jesus – not knowing what to do, where to go, or to whom she ought to turn. She just stood there and began to cry. Her tears weren't the easy, gentle tears of someone who was merely sad. No, her tears were the gut-wrenching, full-voiced sobs of someone in deep grieving.

I'm sure I don't have to tell anyone here that death is hard. It's hard for all of us. Death

wounds not only those whom it takes, it also wounds those who are left behind. Sometimes the death of a loved one wounds us so badly we think it will kill us right then and there, too. That was the kind of grief Mary was experiencing as she stood there, sobbing, looking into the tomb, not knowing what to do. But this time as Mary looked into that place where Jesus had been buried something was radically different. The tomb was no longer empty. There were angels inside, all clothed in white. One was sitting where our Lord's head had been, and one where His feet had been. And though Mary's sorrow could never shake or destroy the angels' joy, they were concerned nonetheless for Mary's well-being. "Woman," they asked, "why are you weeping?"

Jesus' death was such a given that Mary didn't say: "I'm weeping because my Lord is dead." Rather, her answer to them was: "They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they've laid Him." It was not knowing – not knowing about the location of the body of Jesus – that was tearing Mary apart. Jesus' death was horrible enough all by itself – especially given the kind of death He died – but her not being able to find the body, that was far worse. Mary knew she had to learn where Jesus' body had been taken. She absolutely had to touch and care for her Lord's body one last time. If she wasn't able to do that, how could she face tomorrow? How could she face the rest of her life?

Mary's grief was of such a magnitude that even having a conversation with angels didn't seem to faze her. So she straightened up, turned aside, and almost ran into the One who – though she knew it not – had never been far from her – who had been standing right beside

her all along in her grief. And Jesus gently asked her: “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” It was then that hope rose in Mary’s heart. Was it the gardener? Perhaps he was the one who moved her Master’s body. “Sir,” she cried out, “if you carried Him away, tell me where you laid Him, and I will take Him.” Was it her tears that blinded Mary’s sight? Was it the grief of her breaking heart that made all the world seem to move in slow motion? Then everything changed when Jesus said that one word. He called her name: “Mary.”

Although Mary had not recognized her Lord before that moment, at the sound of her name her heart pounded, her breath caught, she moved the hair from her face, and she stared at Jesus in awe, in terror, and in joy rising like a flood. “Rabboni!” she cried. Then she lunged for Jesus and held fast to His feet. Beyond hope – beyond her wildest dreams – there was Jesus standing before her. He wasn’t a ghost, a spirit, an illusion, or wishful thinking. It was her Jesus – her flesh and blood Jesus, His wounds still visible, but transfigured, shining in glory

Then the tears came again, but this time they weren’t accompanied by sobs of despair. These tears were brimming with joy. It was a tender moment, but Mary’s joy was just beginning. Jesus had work He wanted her to do, an errand she was to run. He sent her to the Apostles to tell them the Good News that He had risen from the dead and was preparing to ascend to His Father and to their Father – to His God and their God. Death had not been the end of Him, and so it would not be the end of Mary or the disciples.

And dear Christian, neither will death be the end of you, for Jesus has changed forever how we live, how we grieve, and how we die. That doesn’t change the fact that we still feel in our bones how wrong and unnatural death is – or that we hate it with a passion – but Jesus has made it something we need never fear – not ever again! For by His death and resurrection, Jesus has wounded death itself, dealt it a mortal blow from which it will never recover. He came out of its stinking gullet alive again, never to die again – and His promise to Mary, His apostles, and to all His Baptized children, is that He will bring each and every one of us through the hole He punched in death into the home He has prepared for us with His Father.

To strengthen your faith in His resurrection victory, Jesus continues to put into your dying bodies the very same body that was hung on the tree to atone for all your sin; that was in the tomb, sanctifying your grave; and that Mary held in the garden on that first Easter Morn. He pours over your lips the very same blood He shed to wash away the sin of the world, and He reminds you that all this was done for you. He whispers into your ear: “As death could not hold Me, so it will not hold you, My child. Baptized into My life, I will bring you out of death just as I came out of it – alive, never to die again. And then the celebration will really begin!” Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.