

Easter, 2010
Good Hope Lutheran Church

PASTOR STEVE

Grace mercy and peace be multiplied among you all in the knowledge of God, and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. In the Easter story, as told to us by all four Gospel writers, it seems pretty clear that the Good News of our Lord's resurrection did not hit the women at the tomb all at once.

READER

Maybe the miracle was too big. Maybe the Good News seemed too good to be true! Maybe our little human minds just can't grasp what God has in store for us, and have to come to terms with it a little at a time.

PASTOR STEVE

Whatever the case may be, it is clear, that the good News of the Lord's resurrection did not hit the women at the tomb all at once; but was unfolded to them, step by step, little by little.

READER

To begin with, when they first went to the grave at sunrise, carrying spices and filled with grief because of the Lord's death, the women were worried about the stone. It weighed a ton, who's going to move it away?

PASTOR STEVE

They arrived, and marveled to see that the stone had already been moved. It was gone, now how'd that happen? What on earth does it mean?

READER

After this, they timidly peeked inside the tomb, even took a few steps within, and were startled to find it empty.

PASTOR STEVE

This is odd. There's nothing here, the tomb is empty, the women were "confused and perplexed" by this. Who has taken His Body away? And what's with the grave cloths, folded up neatly there in the corner? It can't mean He's alive again, that's impossible! But what then?

READER

After puzzling for a bit, the women were met by an angel—maybe one angel, maybe two, the Gospels don't agree on that point, but do agree on a couple of things.

PASTOR STEVE

One, the angels were scary. And two, the angels told them in no uncertain terms He is not here, He is Risen—really!—Jesus is Risen from the dead!

READER

So the women left and ran back the way they had come—having found the stone rolled away, amazing. Having seen the tomb empty and the grave cloths folded up and set aside, confusing, perplexing. Having heard the testimony of the angels, alarming maybe. Hopeful, certainly.

PASTOR STEVE

And on their way back from the tomb, they met the Risen Lord. Jesus Himself appeared to them, Peace be with you He said. And by His mere presence He answered all their questions, with His reassuring smile He confirmed their new faith. He let them in on the fullness of Easter, and of our hope. Christ has died, Christ is Risen. Christ will come again.

READER

Now the experience of the women at the tomb, is no different from ours, really. We are no different from them. Our minds struggle to grasp what God has done, our hearts find it hard to believe. And as with the women at the

tomb that first Easter Sunday, so also with us: God is willing to take us little by little, step by step, if only we let Him.

PASTOR STEVE

There is for starters the bit about the stone. “It must weigh a ton! Who will move it out of the way?” The stone represents all the obstacles that get in the way of faith. The reasons we find, the excuses we come up with, everything we can name that keeps us from trusting the Lord, or even taking that first step. I’m tired, it’s been a long week and the kids are cranky, we’ll try church next Sunday. There’s homework to do and dinner to fix, and baseball practice to get to later, no time for prayer and Bible reading today! Maybe tomorrow! I don’t feel real comfortable in church, to be honest, I don’t feel real comfortable praying, or reading the Bible, I’m guilty. I live with remorse and I live with regret, and every time I try to turn to the Lord the guilt and the regret are right there in front of me, blocking the path. I know I am a sinner, and my mistakes and bad habits weigh me down, my guilty conscience is like a stone on the heart, and so is my anger—life hasn’t treated me real well lately, I’m mad about it and I’m not even sure I want to turn to a “loving” God. And so on, what’s your reason? What stone blocks the path and keep you from taking even the first step toward faith? And more importantly, are you willing to let the stone be moved? He’s good at that, you know. He’s good at moving stones—ones out there, ones in here, only don’t be afraid to take the first step. The women that first Easter knew there was a two ton stone blocking the path, they could have given up before they even started but they got up and went anyway. And they were amazed to find, that the stone they thought was so insurmountable? The stone was already gone. Amazing but true—your stone can be moved too. Only give God the chance.

READER

After finding to their amazement that the stone had been moved from the tomb, the women peeked inside, and saw to their confusion that the tomb was empty! Only the grave clothes were lying there, neatly stacked in a corner.

PASTOR STEVE

This is a confusing world, more so all the time. Political pundits argue their points of view, generating heat but not much light. Science continues to expand its frontiers at warp speed, discovering new and incredible knowledge, while giving us very little in the way of actual wisdom. Consumer products of all kinds offer us lives that are more and more pampered, but somehow less and less happy. Medicine stretches our life span out longer and longer, giving us days, that are emptier and emptier. Even religion: Every religion on earth talks of peace, while at the same time explaining the many very good reasons it has, for waging war. This is a confusing world, and kids, your parents don't understand it any better than you do. Living in this world today, it's like being in a big room filled with an awful lot of nothing. That's it! A big room full of nothing!—nothing, except those grave clothes folded neatly in the corner. You see them? Can you explain them to me, can you explain to me what they're doing here, and what they mean? Could it be, there's something more to life, than the emptiness?

READER

After puzzling for a while about the grave clothes, the women were met by angel, who was at once frightening, and hopeful.

PASTOR STEVE

This is where the Bible comes in. This is the message of God's Word. Ok, it's frightening. There is a God, really, and He does have you in His sight, and He expects better of you. Ok? Your sins are abundantly clear to Him, and you know perfectly well that if you give Him half a chance, He'll make those sins abundantly clear to you, too. You can't hide, you can't pretend, you can't stall—this is God, speaking to us through Word and Sacrament, and if that's not at least a little frightening to you. You're probably not paying attention. But listen to what this God is saying to us: Words of mercy, words of hope. Words of mercy, words of hope, Jesus who died is risen, risen from the dead! The one who went to the cross to forgive you, has this day been raised from death to save you! God has not come here today to condemn you, He is here to rescue you, and start your life over, just like He promised. Scary at first, scary—but much more hopeful than scary, much more hopeful. God has given us new life now, God has given us life that

means something, life that will last forever! Jesus wins, and because He really does love us, that means we win too.

READER

And on their way back from the tomb, the women were met by the Risen Lord. Peace be with you, He said.

PASTOR STEVE

On Easter Sunday, we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus from the dead. Christ has died, Christ is Risen; Christ will come again. Stones are moved; empty places are filled; hopes are raised and these hopes, these hopes will not disappoint. Christ is Risen from the dead. And as you return to your homes this day, I pray the Lord will always be there to meet you along the way, and that He will build you up in peace, and love, and hope; and faith. And I pray the day comes quickly, when faith gives way to sight. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, AMEN.