

SERMON: "New Beginnings"– Easter Sunday 2010
Text: John 20:1-18

This morning's story begins at the tomb. The grave is evidence of death. Everyone and every living thing is born and everyone and every living thing will die. Death is the final event in life. Children, you learn about the pain of death when your pet or grandparent dies. After death they are gone. Your pet is not coming back from a visit to the vet, and Grandma or grandpa is not coming back from a trip. It is confusing because it is a final goodbye. Now they are gone.

Youth you seem to think you are invincible to death. Your thinking is that it won't happen to us, we are young. Death only happens to older people. When sudden death does occur due to car accidents or disease you are shocked. It is true, they are not coming back to be part of their families and friends. They are gone.

We adults also know this reality as well when our parent, child, sibling, spouse, or other family member, or close friends dies. It is a sadness that makes the soul cry even if there are no tears. It is sadness that tears apart the emotional strength of anyone. They are gone. They are not coming back. We will miss the way they touched us. We will miss the way they spoke to us, and even looked at us. Yes, death is the final journey of life. We as humans have to deal with the reality of death daily.

Well on this day filled with Hallelujahs, brass instruments, flowers, and with the familiar Easter Hymn, Jesus Christ is Risen Today we begin at the grave sight because this is where the first Easter began as well. Let's revisit this most

familiar story and learn from it, to make our Hallelujahs and declaration of Christ is Risen really authentic.

It was early Sunday morning, before sunrise, a lone figure comes to the tomb where Jesus was laid to rest. Mary Magdalene came possibly to spend some time alone to say good-bye to her dear friend and Rabbi or to give him proper burial rituals. When she comes to the tomb she sees that the stone that closed the tomb was rolled away. Her conclusion was that someone stole the body, a common practice in those days. She is beside herself. Not only was her beloved teacher cruelly killed, that she witnessed, but now someone stole his body. So she runs back to Peter & the beloved disciples, and tells them that someone stole Jesus' body. In response to this news Peter and the Beloved disciple run back to the tomb in kind of like a race. Simon Peter looks into the tomb. He sees the grave clothes neatly folded in place.

The other disciple now looks into the tomb and he believes. But what does he believe? It certainly wasn't the resurrection because in verse 9 it states they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. What the Beloved Disciple believed was that Jesus defeated death. He knew that because the grave clothes were left in the tomb, thieves did not take Jesus' Body. Grave thieves usually stole the clothing. A grave thief would not leave valuables in the grave and certainly not neatly folded. The Beloved disciple believed what Jesus said about defeating death, and the empty tomb confirmed his belief. Yet, he did not know how this was being done. He had no idea that Jesus had been

resurrected from death. No one had taken Jesus away. Jesus had left death behind.

Then the story abruptly changes. The disciples go home and there is Mary Magdalene standing alone in her grief and pain. She too while weeping turns to look into the tomb but she sees two angels dressed in white sitting where Jesus body would have been lying, one at the head, and one at the feet. Her perception has not changed she tells the angels the reality that she knows.

Jesus is dead. He died on the cross. Because Jesus was dead he could not of walked out of here by himself. Thieves took him. Now she can't even say her personal good byes, or do proper burial preparations. All she can do is grieve another loss, the loss of his body. The angels say to her. "Why are your weeping?" She says, "they have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him?" Notice there is no Easter pronouncement of the risen Christ from the angels. This news must come from the source himself, the Risen Christ. The angels were not messengers, but evidence of the in breaking of a new reality, a new beginning in Jesus Death and Resurrection.

Mary then turns around, sensing someone behind her. It is Jesus, although she doesn't know that it is him for this is outside of her reality. Jesus asks her, "Woman, why are your weeping? Who are your looking for?" Jesus knows whys she is weeping. She thinks he's dead. Gone forever. But he gives her time and space to state her pain and grief. His question heightens the drama of mistaken identity.

Mary assumes this man, not an angel, not a ghost, but human flesh, is the gardener. Maybe he took him someplace? Sir, if you have carried him someplace else, tell me where you laid him and I will take him away.” She is willing to do what seems impossible, to carry Jesus’ body back for proper burial. The beginning of a new reality is about to burst on the scene. Jesus calls her name, Mary. She turned, in internal turning of recognition, and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni.” This Aramaic word is a personal address of endearment for teacher or master. This interchange reveals that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He knows his sheep by name, and they respond to his voice.

Now there is a new reality. Joy in this new reality. Jesus words, John 16:20, has come true! “Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” Mary sees the impossible, Jesus. Jesus has shattered Mary’s customary world, even as reasonable as it may be. There is a brand new reality before her. This opens up for her the beginning of a new future. In this split second Mary goes from the reality of death and the grave, to the reality of joy of the resurrection.

The man standing before Mary was not a ghost, or spirit, angel, or something her mind created. It was the human Jesus. The command “do not hold on to me” was evidence that Jesus was real, bone and flesh. But the words also speak of a different reality. The resurrected Jesus was not going to stay on the earth. He was going to ascend back up to God so that the incarnation journey would be complete. He would never be the Jesus living physically among the people. No, he would finish the journey by going back to God, then

the Spirit would break loose on the disciples, and he would be with them forever. Because of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, new life was possible for believers. At that moment, Mary's life changed from grieving and mourning, to joyfully proclaiming the Good News. Mary was called and commissioned to be the first preacher of Good News to the world. She had a new calling and she took it. Off she went telling all she met, "I have seen the living Lord." And all the things he told her.

How does the fact of Jesus' resurrection change our focus in life? Are we about the dying ways of life, or are we about the ways of new life, and new beginnings?

Christ is risen

Christ is risen indeed

Do we live in fear of death, or do we embrace it's certainty in life knowing that it will not have the last say. We will also experience a bodily resurrection when our Lord returns.

Christ is risen

Christ is risen indeed!

Do we only see the dying in life, and not look for and expect the new life and new beginnings that will follow? Do we feel hopeless when the world events seem to be getting worse instead of better, or do we believe in the resurrection that does defeat sin and death?

Christ is risen

Christ is risen indeed!

My friends we are gathered here today as believers in the resurrection. We believe that Christ died, and rose from the grave, and that because he ascended back to God we were given the same resurrection spirit that will bring new life and new beginnings in the death of human beings, institutions, and relationships. Let us be about hope in new life, even when it looks dark, scary, and impossible. The grave is empty. Jesus did rise, and even when we face our death or loved ones death, in Christ it is not the end. In Christ life goes on in new ways. In Christ's death is not final.

Christ is risen

Christ is risen indeed!