

McCabe United Methodist Church

It's Empty!

Matthew 28:1-10: April 20, 2014 (Easter Sunday)

Pastor Rick Fossum

One Easter morning, a mother was talking to her little four-year-old daughter about the meaning of Easter. It wasn't going very well. Maybe, some of you have had a similar conversation.

"Mommy," the daughter said, **"will the Easter bunny bring me purple jelly beans?"**

"Yes, I'm sure he will bring you jelly beans," the mother said. **"But honey, remember that Easter isn't about the bunny. It's about Jesus."**

"But, will they be purple jelly beans," the daughter wanted to know? **"Those are my favorites."**

"Yes, I'm sure there will be some purple ones in your basket. But remember," the mom said, **"the important part of Easter isn't the bunny. Easter is about how much Jesus loves you and me and the whole world."**

"Mommy," the little girl asked, **"how many purple jelly beans will the Easter bunny bring me?"**

"Listen," the mother tried to explain once more, **"you'll get plenty of purple jelly beans. Do you know how much Jesus loves you?"**

"Mommy," the little girl asked, **"will he bring me some tootsie rolls too!"**

I guess to a four-year-old, Easter bunnies and purple jelly beans and tootsie rolls are easier to understand than what really happened on that first Easter morning.

This is Resurrection Day. It's my guess that most of us are here looking for a bit more than jelly beans and tootsie rolls. And so, let's begin by talking about what happened on that very first Easter morning, 2,000 years ago.

It was the first day of the week and it was early in the morning. The sun was just thinking about rising. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary couldn't sleep. That's what Matthew called the two women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. They still couldn't believe what had happened to Jesus. He was gone. He was dead. He was crucified on a cross between two criminals. One of the criminals on his left and the other one on his right.

For the two Marys, It wasn't supposed to be like this. What they thought could never happen, happened. Their leader, their teacher, their friend was gone. The one they had believed in and hoped in was dead. Like everything else that dies, he was no more.

Sometime in that early morning hour, the two Marys decided 'to see' the tomb. It's interesting how Matthew recalls the story. "*They went 'to see' the tomb.* In Luke and Mark, the story is a bit different. In those two gospels, the women brought spices to prepare Jesus' body for burial. Matthew is different. In Matthew, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went 'to see' the tomb.

What did they hope 'to see'?

Did they hope 'to see' the beautiful flowers that grew wild in that area?

Did they hope 'to see' the Roman soldiers standing guard, all dressed up in their fancy uniforms and armor?

Did they hope 'to see' some old friends out there who maybe couldn't sleep like they couldn't sleep?

Did they hope 'to see' that large stone that had been pushed in front of the tomb to keep people like them out? Is that what they hoped "to see?"

Or, maybe they didn't hope "to see" anything in particular. Maybe they just needed 'to see' the place where Jesus was buried because they still couldn't believe he was gone.

And so the two Marys went "to see" the tomb. It was early in the morning. The grass was still wet from the morning dew. Slowly and sadly, they made their way along the path and then . . . and then they saw him!

The two women saw an angel sitting on the stone that had been rolled back. They weren't expecting to see an angel that day or any other day for that matter. The angel was wearing angel clothes bright as snow. The angel looked at the two women. He knew what they were thinking. He knew why they were there.

The angel said, **"Don't be afraid. I know you're looking for Jesus who was crucified, but he isn't here. Look! See for yourself. The tomb is empty. He has been raised."**

You might call it, God's greatest surprise ever. The tomb was empty! That's what they saw. An empty tomb. The unthinkable had happened. The

unbelievable had been accomplished. The amazing had been done. It was empty! The tomb was empty!

Jesus had risen from the dead!

Isn't that just like God? Just when you think that all is lost. Just when you think you don't have the strength do anymore. Just when feel you're being drained of all hope. God steps in and does something new. The tomb was empty! Jesus had risen! Whoever would have guessed?

A woman was walking down a street in Chicago when she happened to see a beautiful painting of the crucifixion in a store window. She stood outside the window and stared at it for the longest time.

After a while, she realized that she wasn't alone. A young boy was standing next to her and he was also staring at the beautiful painting.

The woman touched the boy's shoulder and asked, **"What does it mean?"** She was trying to be friendly.

"Don't you know," the boy answered? **"That man on the cross is Jesus and the woman that's crying is his mother and them others are Roman soldiers and,"** he added, **"and they killed him."**

The woman didn't say anything. She smiled at the boy, touched his shoulder again and walked away. A few seconds later, she heard some footsteps coming up fast behind her. She stopped, turned and saw the young boy running towards her. She waited.

"Say lady," he almost shouted, **"I forgot to tell you the good part! He rose again! He rose again!"**

The two Marys went out 'to see' something that first Easter morning. What they saw was God doing a new thing. A stone rolled away, an angel in white, and an empty tomb.

It was like God was using these things to shout to the whole world, **"There! It's done! Death is no more! He's alive! Jesus has risen from the dead. Because he lives, you will also live."**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the heart of our faith. Only Christians have a Savior like Jesus. All the great religious leaders of history: Confucius, Buddha, Mohammed, they're still in their graves, but not Jesus, not God's Son. His tomb is empty! He has risen from the dead.

The mystery of what happens tomorrow has been solved by the empty tomb of 2,000 years ago. There is a resurrection. There is a place beyond this place. There is a life beyond this life.

The beauty of Easter is this: It doesn't matter what you've done in your life or haven't done. It doesn't matter where you've been or haven't been, God did it for you. God did something new that day and God did it for all of us!

Our only response is to accept this gift and to bring Jesus into our lives and do our best to follow him. Our response is 'to see' what the two Marys saw, an empty tomb.

Listen to the first verse of our final hymn today. These are the words of Easter:

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia! Earth and heaven in chorus say, Alleluia! Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia! Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!

Let's pray: Lord, you are the Risen Christ and we honor you today and celebrate the new life that you've given to us through the empty tomb. In our own ways, using our own words, we accept you as our Savior and with one voice we sing, '*Christ the Lord Is Risen Today*. Amen.