

McCabe United Methodist Church
The Rest of the Message
April 7 & 8, 2012 (Easter Sunday)
Pastor Rick Fossum

The battle of Waterloo was fought on Sunday, June 18, 1815 in what is today called Belgium. The battle featured Napoleon of France versus the Duke of Wellington of England. Wellington was leading an allied army of other European nations.

As the battle was being fought, the people of England and many in Europe were anxiously waiting for news from the battlefield. It was important to them. The future of England and Europe hung in the balance.

Finally, a message was transmitted to London by means of semaphores. The use of semaphores was similar to Morse Code, but instead of dots and dashes, they used flashing lights to spell out messages . . . letter by letter, word by word.

A London official started picking up the message from the battlefield. He started writing it down. The first two words spelled out: *WELLINGTON DEFEATED* . . .

And then, suddenly, a dense fog settled over London, making it impossible for anyone to see the rest of the message . . . if there was a rest of the message. *WELLINGTON DEFEATED* was the only part of the message the people in London received.

For 24 long hours, the city of London was covered in a dense, thick fog. The people of London were also in a fog. They were terrified and afraid, stunned and shocked because of the message they had received: *WELLINGTON DEFEATED*. As far as they knew, Napoleon had won the battle of Waterloo! England had lost! They were doomed. Conquered! No more liberty! No more England! No more Europe as people had known it.

And then, just as suddenly, the fog lifted and the official was able to write down the rest of the message. It went like this: *WELLINGTON DEFEATED THE ENEMY!* What looked like bad news in the beginning turned out to be the greatest of news in the end.

I share this little bit of history with you because it reminds me of Easter. For three long, sad days, a fog had settled over the disciples who had followed Jesus. These were the people who had loved Jesus and believed in him and put their hopes in him.

Then a fog settled over them at noon on Good Friday when the Bible tells us, “**Jesus breathed his last.**”

This was the message the disciples heard from the cross. “**Jesus breathed his last.**” The disciples were in shock and full of grief. Jesus was the Messiah. He was the Son of God.

He was going to change the world. But now, Jesus was dead. He was just as dead as dead can get.

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome were surrounded by that same fog. For three days they thought that the worst had happened. Jesus was dead.

Then, early on a Sunday morning, about 2,000 years ago, the three women went to Jesus' tomb. They wanted to anoint his body with spices which was the proper thing to do back in those early days. The three women weren't expecting a miracle that day, they just wanted to do something nice for Jesus. They weren't expecting to see a Risen Savior either, they just wanted to take care of a good friend. They went in tears and sadness, surrounded by a dense fog.

They were so certain of Jesus' death that they hardly paid any attention to the stone that had been rolled away.

The women even saw a young man dressed in white sitting where Jesus should have been laying, but still they couldn't see through the fog. They were convinced that Jesus was dead. They didn't realize that maybe . . . just maybe there might be more to the '*Jesus is dead*' message.

If you've ever lost someone you've known and loved, you know all about their sadness and grief. These three women had stood next to the cross on that Good Friday. They were there when Jesus had '*breathed his last*'. Who on earth would have thought about angels, or empty tombs, or resurrections at a time like that? For them, dead was dead. Period. There was no more. No more life. No more Jesus. No more anything. This is the way it's always been.

And then came the big surprise. The fog lifted. And they heard the rest of the message: **"You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified,"** the young man dressed in white said. **"He has risen! He's not here!"**

This is Easter's message. Jesus lives! The sting of death doesn't have the last word like the disciples thought or maybe like we think. God's Son, Jesus Christ, has the last word and that last word is *life*.

A son had just died after a long illness. He had been confined to a hospital bed for the last weeks of his life. The parents, the mother and father, knew the story of Easter. They knew that Jesus rose from the dead, but for this mother and father, it was just a story. Their son had died just died and he was still dead. Easter's story was nice, but for them, there wasn't going to be an empty tomb. There wasn't going to be an empty casket . . . just the emptiness of losing a son.

And then, a nurse from the hospital came to their house. It was Easter. He was carrying a water color painting that had been given to him by their son. Apparently, their son had painted it not long before his death and he wanted the nurse to surprise his parents with the painting on Easter morning.

The son had painted a lake with people on opposite shores. Two people were standing on one side waving. They were his mother and father. Another person was standing on the other side. It was the son. He was waving back. The son was smiling. In a caption above the son's head, he had written, "**Hi, Mom! Hi, Dad! Don't worry about me. I'm fine! I love you.**"

Suddenly, for that grieving mother and father the fog lifted and they were able to see the full message. Their son was not dead. He had simply gone on ahead of them. He had risen. Their son was alive because Jesus said, "**death would not have the last word.**"

For those of us who have stood beside closed caskets filled with our loved ones, crying and grieving until it feels like our hearts might break, there is Good News: Jesus lives! Those who appear to be '*gone*' have simply '*gone on ahead of us*'. Do you understand the difference?

For many of us, life can hurt sometimes. Sometimes, life can hurt a lot. During these times, we find ourselves in a fog. We can't see the whole message . . . just the '*he's dead*' part. But suddenly, the fog lifts and we see and hear the same things the three women saw and heard. We can see the stone that's been rolled away and we can hear the voice of the young man dressed in white. He's saying to you and to me, in our darkest and most painful moment, "**He has risen! He's not here!**"

And that's the full message. Jesus rose from the grave and because he did, we will rise with him. Death isn't the end, it's just a new beginning.

The three women ran from the tomb. The Bible tells us they were afraid. Who can blame them? Nothing like this had ever happened before . . . ever! No one had ever been raised from the dead before, but Jesus was. No one had ever defeated death before, but Jesus did. No one had ever proclaimed the whole message of Easter before, but now it was being proclaimed to the whole world.

"**He is risen! He's not here.**" This is the rest of the message and it's good news. It's the best good news you'll ever hear: "**He is risen!**"