

Surprised!
SonRise Service
April 1, 2018

Today is the greatest day of celebration on the Christian calendar. It should be the greatest day of celebration on the world's calendar! We put so much time, energy, attention and money into celebrating Christmas – but Christmas is really just the beginning. Easter is really what it is all about! Easter is the climax! And while we put so much time, energy, attention and money into Christmas, Easter is not about us at all. Easter is about the sole work of God.

If someone were to ask you what Easter is all about, what would you say?

You see, I think part of the problem, if not the biggest part of the problem, of why we seem to have so few, so called, “Evangelists” among us, an evangelist just meaning someone who is willing to share their faith, or what they believe, with others, is that not often enough do we take the time to reflect on just what God has done for us in and through His Son, Jesus Christ.

We get so busy with our lives – raising our families, working to make a living so we can buy the things that we need (both the things we really need and the things we think we need), distracted by so many things (television, movies, the internet, Facebook, sports) all vying for more and more of our attention, it leaves us very little time and energy, if any, to pause and reflect on just what God has done for us.

First, God created us, not like any other creature here on earth. He created us in His image. He gave us humans dominion over all the earth. He charged us to be good stewards of all creation.

He gave us a way to live, that which would benefit and sustain us all. But we failed to grasp that. We failed to grasp that the creator knows better than the created how best to live with one another. Part of being created in God's image is that He gave us humans minds to think, to have free-will, to choose. The primary choice, to choose God's way or our way. Left to ourselves, we always choose our way.

So, God intervened. First He choose a people, the Israelites, who He would call His people and they would call Him their God, with a big G! And there would be no other gods (with a small g). They would walk in God's ways, He would bless them, and they would be a blessing to other people. But they still rejected God's ways and often chose to go their own way.

That's the story of the O.T., the story of the history of mankind before Jesus. But woven in the O.T. history of mankind is prophecy – God speaking to certain individuals telling them of something better to come – people like Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah, along with many others. Prophesying that God would not abandon His people, not just His people the Israelites, but all people.

Prophesying that He would send a Messiah, a Savior, far different than that which would be expected. There would be nothing significant about Him as it tell us in Isaiah 53 - *He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.* He would be born in a lowly place, born to a pretty insignificant family. The two significant facts

would be that he had to be from the line of David and he would be born to a virgin. But for most of His life people would not even recognize that He came, including the people for whom He was originally sent.

It wasn't until he was about 30 years old that He would appear from relative obscurity and begin His ministry. His ministry would only last three years, but in that time He would preach and teach, heal many illnesses, drive out demons, perform miracles, and even raise some people from the dead. Through His preaching and teaching and actions He would create a large following of people who were for Him. But He created an even larger following of people who were against Him. People who were concerned about maintaining their power and keeping the status quo.

Not only would they reject Him, they would abuse Him, cause Him to suffer humiliation, mutilate Him, and crucify Him.

By the end, most of His followers weren't even left, save for a few. What today we call "Good Friday" was anything but good on that first Friday before Easter. It was as bad, as dark and as black as it gets. It was like going deep down into the Ohio Caverns with no light to be found. Even the few followers who were left weren't expecting much of anything, they came to prepare His body for burial.

Walter Brueggemann, an O.T. scholar and theologian writes in his book *The Prophetic Imagination*:

"The wrenching of Friday had left only the despair of Saturday and there was no reason to expect anything different on the Sunday after the Friday. There is not anyway to explain the resurrection out of the previously existing reality."
So, there you have it!

But, then!!

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” ¹⁴ *At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.*

¹⁵ *He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”* ¹⁶ *Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).*

¹⁷ *Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”*

¹⁸ *Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her. John 20:1-18 (NIV)*

Many believe that the other disciple in the story is John himself, that he has interjected himself in the story. It says that “when the other disciple went inside, he saw and he believed.” But then he adds a qualifier, “they still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.”

So, what exactly did they believe at this point? They believed that Jesus was dead. They believed that the tomb was empty. They believed that Jesus’ body was gone. Other than that, they didn’t really know what they believed.

The early disciples grappling with their belief at Jesus’ death on the cross, at the empty tomb, at the missing body – and not just what the Scripture had told them, but what Jesus himself had told them – should cause us to pause and reflect and to grapple with what do I really believe about Jesus.

Yes, history has shown that Jesus did in fact die on the cross, that the tomb was empty and the body was gone. But do we really believe, do I really believe – that Jesus is the Son of God, that He has been resurrected and that He is alive today, bringing new life to all who put their faith in Him?

He is Risen!

He is Risen!!

Indeed, He is Risen!!!