Easter2023

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

*"Then she runneth and cometh to Simon Peter"*

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 There is a little independent church near in Denver across from the RC seminary on which its sign typically exhorts all passersby to many warm and fuzzy feelings towards other people, but never seems to advise about how to feel towards the **Lord**. Once it posted that the pastor's Easter sermon would be: "Love Wins"!

 Now last Sunday, Palm Sunday, was a bit of hell, fire, and brimstone with **love** seemingly losing: big-time. Today has a much happier tone. We know that Jesus Christ arose from the dead that first Easter morn because we have the benefit of hindsight. But, that was not how that first Easter seemed to be going for others not quite 2000 years ago.

 Some information actually comes from the Gospel for Holy Saturday evening. It contains the story of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea begging for Christ's body and placing it into a new tomb; the stone being rolled over the opening, and Mary Magdalene remaining "over against the tomb". It is a passage I can not recall ever having heard read in church.

 This Gospel passage continues that the next day (Saturday) the chief priests and Pharisees approached Pilate about tightly securing the tomb for fear that Jesus' body would be stolen by his disciples to fake a resurrection. (These leaders probably would have done it earlier, but the Passover was upon them.)

 Pilate allowed them to use their own guards to secure the tomb, which they sealed. And, after Jesus' resurrection had become noised about, the leaders themselves started the still existent rumor of Jesus body being stolen by his disciples, with the leaders paying the guards "hush money".

 If we read all the Gospel accounts together we get a pretty detailed picture of events that first Easter morning. In the early morning of the very next day, Easter morn, Mary Magdalene and other women came to anoint Jesus' body. While the named people in the group vary between the Gospel accounts, all have several women, and all have Mary.

 One account mentions another Mary who was the mother of Cleopas--of the Road to Emmaus fame--- and one mentions Joanna, and one mentions Salome. Travelling together would have been normal for women. It would be safer in a group, rather than alone in the dim light, for young women, in part, so tongues would not "wag".

 Sometime before they arrived they pondered how to get the tomb door open. Then, there was an earthquake and when they arrived the heavy tomb door already was open.

 They saw no body but rather a young man in white raiment sitting in the tomb, possibly a second angel as well. He told them, "Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him."

 Terrified they ran back to town. Mary found Peter and told him someone had taken the body, and they did not know where Jesus was. Peter and John then dashed to the tomb to check out the situation.

 It is telling that Mary sought out Peter. Despite his complete collapse in cowardice just two days earlier he was the one she went to. Peter, at least to Mary anyway, was still the leader of the group.

 On the way to the tomb Peter was outrun by John, because he probably was younger; he was alive 60 years after Jesus death. Mary came further behind. (She, after all, already had done the whole walk once and dashed to town as well with the earlier news report.)

 John did not enter, but Peter (true to form) went right in. Then John also went in. Surprisingly, they saw a tidy tomb, as we heard, with "the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about his head, **not** lying with the linen clothes, but **wrapped** together in a place by itself". They left in wonderment. (So much for grave robbers.)

 Mary **then** arrived to the tomb a second time and thought she saw a gardener. Looking around and sobbing with tears Mary asked if he had taken the body. Then the figure spoke and said, "Mary, Mary". Then she recognized Jesus, who told her not to hold onto him since he had not yet ascended to his Father.

 Mary did not recognize Jesus until he spoke. She had been sobbing and wasn't looking at the gardener. She was understandably very upset still. Yet great emotion can blind us to the Lord's presence. It can be difficult to see Jesus when emotion wells up in us in a crisis.

 Likewise, we won't find Jesus looking at the ground, looking away from him. We do this when we are all caught up in what is happening around us and those whom we love. This is normal human nature, but it still keeps us from seeing the Lord **right** in front of us. It pays to look beyond our pain and the whirlwind engulfing us. It pays to look for the Lord where he is, not where we hope he might be.

 What did Mary Magdalene do AFTER she found our Risen Lord? What he told her to do. She went and brought the Good News to others who were suffering, those in need, the disciples.

 That has been the Christian mission from the beginning: spread the Good News to those who need it. Today, we call it "evangelization", but the older word of "propagation"--the spreading of belief into new areas--to me anyway has more strength and specificity.

 That Good News is that Jesus overcame death, a gruesome one, and that he did it to benefit US. He did not need it for himself; he went through all this terrible suffering for **us**. Jesus offers us the ability to accomplish the same: to overcome death, and thus not be terrified of it. It is a gift open to all who still believe when they die.

 But, as with any gift, it has to be **accepted**. If we don't care for God's gift, it will not be imposed upon us. God loves everyone, even those who don't believe in him, loves them too much to impose anything.

 As those baptized in Christ we are attached to Jesus. We were "re-booted" when we received that Sacrament. Jesus can change anyone over time. Look at how Christianity rebooted the great, pagan Roman Empire!

 If we were infants at the time, we probably did not recognize, as with Mary, or appreciate, what was occurring right before our eyes. We were becoming part of Jesus, and thus able also to survive death in our spirit AND, ultimately, at the end of time, with our own perfected bodies too. Remember, Jesus physical body ever since his crucifiction, as he appeared that first Easter morning, has born his five human wounds.

 All we need to do to accept this gift from Jesus is **keep** loving him. As with any person whom we love, love means WANTING to **BE** with that person forever. And such is best displayed producing good fruits of affection, as we would everyday with our spouse, children and grandchildren.

 If that is how we feel about Jesus, then we need fear neither, death, nor hell, nor fire and brimstone. **Then**, then, yes then, very truly we can say, "love wins". A most **Blessed** and **Happy** Easter to all. Amen. +