
THE MASTER'S MOST MASTERFUL MIRACLE

A man, his wife, and his cranky mother-in-law went on vacation to the Holy Land.

- While they were there, the mother-in-law passed away.
 - The undertaker told them, "You can have her shipped home for \$5,000, or you can bury her here in the Holy Land for \$150."
- The man thought about it for a while and told the undertaker he would just have her shipped home.
 - The undertaker asked, "Why...why would you spend \$5,000 to ship your mother-in-law home when it would be wonderful to be buried here and spend only \$150?"
- The man said, "A MAN died here about 2,000 years ago. HE was buried here and three days later, HE rose from the dead.
 - "I just can't take that chance."

Today we echo the angel's announcement, "HE is risen!"

- "HE is risen!" may be the most meaningful, most memorable, most mighty, most musical, most miraculous words ever spoken.
 - No statement in the marvelous mystery of the resurrection nearly as much brings out the majesty and might of CHRIST's victory over death as those words, "HE is risen!"

Clement of Alexandria, the Christian theologian of the second century once said, "JESUS CHRIST turns all of our sunsets into sunrises."

- That's what JESUS' friends discovered that Easter morning.
 - On Saturday, they were numb with despair.
 - Their situation seemed hopeless.
- But their sunset of despair was turned into a sunrise of hope and joy by the risen SAVIOR.
 - On Easter morning, power and glory burst upon them.
 - CHRIST had risen.
- They had seen JESUS perform many miracles, but the resurrection was and is the MASTER's most masterful miracle.

But let's consider the women on their way to the tomb.

- After learning of the resurrection, we might expect energy and enthusiasm.
 - But not before.
 - They were on their way to a cemetery, a graveyard.

Let's face it.

- Cemeteries don't generally generate energy and enthusiasm.
- Yet, these women were hurrying to get to the tomb to saturate the skin of the LORD with spices.
 - It had already been more than 36 hours, so they needed to hurry.
 - Their drive was heightened when they saw the stone had been moved.
- Then came the surprise of all surprises when they entered and heard the words of the young man, the angel, "HE is risen! HE is not here! See the place where they laid HIM."

Isn't it ironic that the greatest get-up-and-go event in history occurred in a graveyard?

- What would you have done?
- What would your reaction have been?
 - I like to think that I would have gone and told everyone I met.
 - I also think I would have told no one.
 - Who would have believed it?

Mark's Gospel tells us that they said nothing because they were afraid.

John's Gospel says that Mary Magdalene told the disciples, "I have seen the LORD."

- I don't think we should be surprised by two different versions of the response of the women.
 - I think all of us can understand both of these reactions.

What's important is that these women heard the good news and that this message was indeed shared.

- And I believe that it was no accident that these three faithful feminine followers were the first to know the truth about the LORD's return.
 - It leads us to the question, the very important question, "Whose story is the story of the resurrection of JESUS CHRIST?"

I believe that it was GOD's will that the women were the first to know.

- JESUS' resurrection could have been revealed to anyone.
 - But HIS ministry was always about those that society said were the wrong people:
 - the unimportant, the ones of little value, the ones who didn't matter.
 - Women were property, chattel, second-class at best.
 - Yet this was who GOD chose to receive and share the Good News.

The resurrection is not just good news for the rich, the powerful, or the important.

- It's a message for everyone: rich and poor, men and women, Jew and Gentile.
- The resurrection is for everyone and it is personal.

Many here today have had difficult years.

- Hardship, setback, sickness, death.
- For many, this year has felt more like Good Friday than Easter.
- It has been more like the cemetery than the empty tomb.
 - When we are looking at a doctor's report, a financial statement, or a casket, the resurrection matters.

Dr. Richard Jensen in The Crucified Ruler writes:

- *The Easter story begins with an earlier event. It begins with the death of JESUS the crucified. But this story is also about our death. JESUS' death gathers up our death into itself...JESUS' tomb gathers our tomb into itself. Our death, therefore, is to be swallowed up into victory. The Easter story is ours, too.*

So many today are in tombs, sometimes of their own making, sometimes ones that they could not avoid.

- Like the women on the early morning, they wonder, "Who will roll the stone away?"
 - Is there anyone who can open the tomb?
 - Is there any good news for those who are trapped inside?

I hope everyone here knows that the story of the resurrection is good news for you.

- The tomb is not the final word.
- And whether you are more like the women in Mark's version who said nothing, or in John's version who announced, "We have seen the LORD," or somewhere in between, I hope you can see that it is important that this message is claimed and shared.

You are here today to hear the good news of the resurrection.

- You are here to see the promise of the empty tomb.
- You are here because someone shared the message with you.

Yet, we know there are those today who are staring at a tomb,

- whose lives seem without hope, who don't know where to turn.
 - They need to know there is something more, something beyond.

The MASTER's most masterful miracle is victory over death.

- But the miracle is also how it can change the way we live.
 - No longer does death need to hang in the background of our lives.
 - No more does the sadness of disappointment or loss need to control us.

Our LORD's victory over death, the most feared power of all, frees us to live,

- and to celebrate all the CHRIST has to offer.
 - Life is no longer cradle to coffin.
 - Life, lived now, fully believing in a future resurrection becomes a life that recognizes that a future resurrection has to matter now.
 - To believe in a future, to make claims about GOD's future for us means that now is different.
 - No longer do we live looking at a tomb.
 - No longer do we wonder who and if someone will roll the stone away.

Our lives need never be the same because HE is risen!

- HE is risen indeed!
- Everything has changed for us because of the resurrection!
 - And that, too, is part of the MASTER's most masterful miracle.