

## I.N.I.

Easter Sunday  
April 20, 2014  
John 20: 1-2, 11-18

In Christ Jesus, our Resurrected and ever living Lord whose Names of Wondrous Love we praise and honor, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Have you ever traveled through a long, dark tunnel? Ruth and I several years ago rode our bikes on the Sparta Bike Trail which is a converted railroad line. There are at least 2 tunnels you need to walk your bike through. As you enter you can hear dripping water, it was cool and damp and we were quickly enveloped in darkness. Without a flashlight, which we did not have, it is almost scary and confining, as you leave the bright sun behind and enter that dark tunnel. Then we saw a pinprick of light at the other end. It was a relief to see that light getting bigger and bigger beckoning to us in the distance! And even better, when we walked out again into the warm sunshine!

The Lenten season is something like that tunnel experience. For six weeks now, we've been in the tunnel of Lent. The hours we've spent traveling with our Savior have been rather somber, solemn, serious ones. As those hours focused our attention on our Savior's names of wondrous love, and on our walking with Jesus in Peter's shoes, they drew our attention to our sins. They reminded us again and again about our failure to keep God's Law as He demands---in perfect loving obedience. Those hours of devotion showed God's anger over our sins and Christ's sacrificial payment for them with His suffering and death on the cross. Those dark hours sent us home deeply aware of what we had deserved from a holy God and what great price Christ had to pay suffering in our place.

But today it's all different. Today we walk out of the Lenten tunnel into the full sunshine, the glorious light of another Easter. For our joy, our comfort, our praise, today we look at one more name of wondrous love of our Savior.

### **Names of Wondrous Love—THE LIGHT**

#### **I. Dark night**

That first Easter Mary Magdalene came early, **WHILE IT WAS STILL DARK**, our text says. Those words also describe the condition of her heart. Anyone who has lost a loved one knows something about how she must have felt. Loss, despair, and grief flood the heart, with a loved one gone never to return again. But Mary's darkness went much deeper than that. Remember her past. Jesus had cured her when He had cast seven demons out of her (Luke 8:2). From then on she had followed Him, serving Him with full devotion and a heart full of faith in Him as the promised Savior.

But then had come the dark hours of the past week. Not only was the sky over Calvary pitch black as she stood beneath Jesus' cross, so was her heart. Not only was the tomb into which they had hurriedly placed Jesus' lifeless body devoid of light, so was her spirit. How can we even imagine the hopelessness, the despair that settled over her soul when they had buried Jesus and with Him all her hopes in Him as the promised Savior. This was not what she expected at all. How can we imagine the blackness as she sobbed later to Peter and John, **THEY HAVE TAKEN AWAY THE LORD OUT OF THE TOMB, AND WE DO NOT KNOW WHERE THEY HAVE LAID HIM.**

Mary was in a tunnel of despair without light, without an exit. That's why the tears came as she stood by His opened tomb. She thought that not only was her Savior dead but now even His body had been stolen. How happy she would have been if she had found His lifeless body still in that grave so that she could embalm it! But now she was denied even that last labor of love. Yes, she came **WHILE IT WAS STILL DARK**, not only in the sky but in her heart and soul also.

Is there any of you here today who knows that feeling? Anyone who's wept at a freshly filled grave of a loved one or who's returned to weep again and again? Anyone who's struggling with life, getting tired of its burdens and weary of its weight of suffering, grief and sorrow? Anyone who's worried about health, elderly loved ones, jobs, the economy, the future? Anyone whose sins just never seem to go away and whose temptations always seem to win? Anyone who feels that he has been shoved into some tunnel without any exit or daylight in sight?

Then this lesson this morning is for you. Listen and learn as we follow Mary Magdalene from **DARK NIGHT** into **GRAY DAWN**.

## II. Gray dawn

Darkness must yield. Dawn must come. Every day it happens. So also on that first Easter. Look with me a little more closely into our text. Can you see the dawn coming, just a little gray light at first, but light nonetheless. In the first glimmer of light that day, Mary could see the stone rolled away from the tomb of her Lord.

Just a little thinking and Mary should have known that the disciples would not have cracked open the master's tomb and stolen His body. What would they have had to gain by spreading the lie that Jesus was risen from the dead? She knew nobody would accept such a ridiculous story. Besides, she also knew those disciples were too paralyzed by fear to plan such a thing.

A little more thinking and she should have known that the enemies had nothing to do with the rolled away stone either. In fact, that was the very thing they were trying so hard to prevent. They had posted an around-the-clock guard and sealed the tomb securely to keep the stone in place. They wanted Jesus still dead in that tomb so that people could start forgetting about Him and His claims. They wanted things to settle back to normal again.

The dawn was starting. Easter light was beginning to shine in some darkened souls. Several of the women claimed to have seen the risen Jesus, though few of the disciples believed their emotional report. The women reported seeing angels at the tomb, and also hearing them speak the news that Jesus was no longer dead. Soon others like Peter and the Emmaus disciples breathlessly reported news so wonderful that it was almost unbelievable. The end of the Lenten tunnel was in sight. Easter light was starting to shine.

Again, are they any of you here who knows the feeling? Anyone who's walked away from the Sunday morning worship service feeling refreshed only to have life's trials and troubles as usual dim the joy? Anyone here who's learned in those Sunday school and parochial school days those Easter lines: ***"I know that my Redeemer lives, what comfort this sweet sentence gives,"*** only to wonder and worry when it's your loved one who's being buried or your grave that's coming closer? Anyone who's seen the Easter dawning only to have pain and problem, loss and doubt, like some dense fog shutting out almost all of the Easter light?

Then this lesson is for you. Listen and learn as we follow Mary from **GRAY DAWN** into Easter morning's **GLORIOUS LIGHT**.

## III. Glorious light

Dawn doesn't last long. It's only that short period between night and light. So also that first Easter day. Soon the glorious SON appeared and with Him all His glorious light. In the dawn Mary had seen the stone rolled away and had run back to report her fears to Peter and John. Later, in the daylight, she had returned to the tomb to weep and seeing the angels told them the same story, **THEY HAVE TAKEN AWAY MY LORD, AND I DO NOT KNOW WHERE THEY HAVE LAID HIM.** Then it happened! As she wept, she turned and noticed a man standing behind her. Through tear-dimmed eyes she didn't recognize Him. But when He said, "Mary," her heart leapt for joy. "Rabboni--Teacher," she said in amazement. This was her Lord. She was not in the dark anymore. She had seen them lay His dead body in the grave, and she recognized Him now alive. With amazing suddenness her tears were dried and the weight was lifted from her heart. All past sorrows were gone. Darkness had vanished. Now it was "My Savior lives." No more tunnel, just the bright light of Easter victory for her.

What a day that had to be for Mary and the others! What wondrous truths His resurrection brought them. No more could sin's guilt hammer them. Christ had been delivered for their offenses and raised again for their justification.

Yes, their guilt had been laid on Him and crucified Him, but His resurrection was proof positive that He had paid for all of those sins. By raising His beloved Son, the Father had plainly shown Christ's payment was complete. No more could Satan accuse them because Christ on Calvary had crushed his head. The Savior had even descended into hell on that glorious Easter morning to declare His victory and lay the old, evil foe flat in the dust of defeat.

No more could death hold His followers. Christ had entered His grave and exited to show that

because He lives, they would live also. These wondrous truths, sealed by their Savior's resurrection, filled their days with glorious life, their lives with serving Him, and their deaths with victory.

Again, are there any of you here who knows that feeling? I hope so. I pray that each of us here today can say, *"You bet, Pastor. I've not only seen the glorious light of Easter; it fills my heart and I live in it daily."*

Easter's glorious light lifts us above our daily battles and puts a spring into our step.

Easter's glorious light brightens our darkest days and keeps the smile of faith on our lips.

Easter's glorious light gives a meaning and a purpose to my life and to my service for my Savior and to one another.

Easter's glorious light shines down on our deathbeds and puts a light that cannot be extinguished into our graves.

And long after our graves are forgotten and the etching on our gravestones has faded, this Easter light will still be shining. As long as the world stands, people of God like us will find their greatest joy in the risen Savior, who said, **"I am the LIGHT of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"** (John 8:12).

Today we leave the dark tunnel of Lent for the glorious light of Easter. Someday each of us will enter another tunnel, the dark tunnel of death. What comfort to know that at the end of that dark tunnel stands the risen Jesus, the One who truly is the Light of the world. What a day that will be when we can join with Mary and the others in singing the praises of our Savior's wondrous love.

Amen.