

I.N.I.

Easter Sunday
April 16, 2017
John 20:11-18

In Christ Jesus, the resurrected and ever living Lord and Savior, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We have spent the last six weeks of Lent and some time earlier this morning examining the thought “Who Gains from the Cross?” We have seen from Scripture that Jesus did not lose in His sacrificial suffering and death on the cross. He gained. He accomplished what His Father sent Him to do—to lay down His life for us. He gave the ransom price and earned for us our freedom, our redemption from sin, death, Satan and hell. All involved gained!

Had Mary Magdalene and the other women understood this, they would not have been walking sadly and slowly to the tomb with spices to anoint the dead body of Jesus, they would have been running with joy and anticipation to see the risen Jesus. At least three times Jesus told them and His disciples exactly what would happen, but in their grief and spiritual ignorance she and they did not comprehend it.

So early that Sunday morning she and the other women made the sad trek to the tomb. But when they got there they were shocked to see the tomb opened and empty.

From verse 2 of chapter 20 we find that when the women approached the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away and the tomb was empty Mary Magdalene immediately ran off to tell Peter and John, **THEY HAVE TAKEN AWAY THE LORD OUT OF THE TOMB, AND WE DO NOT KNOW WHERE THEY HAVE LAID HIM.**

In our Gospel reading this morning we heard that the other women looked into the grave and saw the angels and were told **DO NOT BE AFRAID, FOR I KNOW THAT YOU SEEK JESUS WHO WAS CRUCIFIED. HE IS NOT HERE; FOR HE IS RISEN, AS HE SAID. COME, SEE THE PLACE WHERE THE LORD LAY.** Mary Magdalene was not there to hear these words.

The women leave the tomb, excitedly as we heard; **SO THEY DEPARTED QUICKLY FROM THE TOMB WITH FEAR AND GREAT JOY, AND RAN TO BRING HIS DISCIPLES WORD.**

In the meantime, Peter and John had been told by Mary Magdalene that the tomb was open and empty---Jesus' body was not there. They ran to the tomb and saw it empty and then went back home.

Mary then comes back to the tomb and is all alone. She is emotionally distraught---filled with fear and confusion. What happened to the Lord's body?

This morning we will answer the question:

“WHO GAINS FROM THE EMPTY TOMB?”

I: First we see it was weeping Mary and

II: Then thankfully we see that it is all of us who believe in a resurrected Lord and Savior.

There is Mary standing by the tomb. Look at her. She is sobbing. Her whole body is shaking as she weeps. Wiping her eyes she stoops down and again looks into the tomb as if in disbelief. It's still empty. Where is Jesus' body? What has happened to it? Suddenly she sees two angels, one at the head and the other at the feet where Jesus had lain. They ask her, **WOMAN, WHY ARE YOU WEeping?** No doubt shocked at seeing these messengers of God, she is still able to compose herself enough to answer, **BECAUSE THEY HAVE TAKEN AWAY MY LORD, AND I DO NOT KNOW WHERE THEY HAVE LAID HIM.**

The angel's question implied in their most kindly way to Mary that she really had no reason for weeping at all. All reason for worry and sadness, sorrow and despair regarding Jesus' body had been completely removed. Now if Mary had found Jesus' dead body then she would have had reason to weep and cry bitter tears for the rest of her life! For what good would a dead Jesus do her, or you or me? A dead Jesus would mean His crucifixion was a waste, it was not sufficient payment for our sins and we would not have forgiveness and eternal life.

After she said this she turned around and saw Jesus, yet she did not recognize Him. Was this

because of her sorrow and tears, her distress and confused state of mind? Jesus asks her the very same question the angels did. **WOMAN, WHY ARE YOU WEEPING?** This same question by Jesus is really saying, “Mary, why don't you open your eyes of faith and see what is clearly before you. The empty tomb, the presence of God's angels, the linen-bands lying as they are and the head covering neatly folded? Don't these things remind you of My words and My promise; **ON THE THIRD DAY I WILL RISE AGAIN?**”

But all of this was lost on Mary. Like the other disciples she too was **SLOW OF HEART TO BELIEVE**. But before we shake our heads too much and wonder--how in the world couldn't she have remembered what her Lord had said to her so many times concerning His rising again--all we have to do is look at ourselves. We're in this same picture. This conversation could be one with each of us. Jesus could be asking us just about everyday; **“Brother, sister, why are you weeping, why are you so sad today, so depressed, so despairing, so worried, so burdened with cares and concerns?”**

Sad to say, in our troubles and trials we often do not remember the promises and assurances Jesus gives to us in His Word, just like Mary. Preoccupied with our own troubles and heartaches, trials and losses, fears and distresses, we fail to see a risen Savior, One who lives forever and gives us through His Word comfort, peace, joy, strength and courage; but instead act as if Jesus were still dead and lost to us.

Jesus adds another question for Mary to think about. **WHOM ARE YOU SEEKING?** This question of Jesus was to arouse in her another question. “Mary, aren't you on a futile pursuit? Looking for someone who is not here. What did I promise you? Think about what you are doing, looking for the living, resurrected Christ in a grave. Lift up your eyes in the confidence of faith and see a living Savior, never to die again.” But here again Mary does not understand the deep meaning behind the empty tomb. Do we understand the meaning?

WHOM ARE WE SEEKING? Do we seek the living Jesus in our daily lives? Do we live our lives victoriously over sin with a resurrected Christ who is daily with us? Or do we act as if He can't hear us when we say those mean words to others, that He doesn't know when we think those immoral thoughts, and He can't see us when we do those selfish things that we know are contrary to God's commandments? Do we act as if Jesus were dead and can't see our sins of neglecting His Word, not coming on Sunday morning to hear His Word, not reading His Word in our daily devotions—if He can't see us then there is no reason for shame, or guilt or repentance?

WHOM ARE WE SEEKING? In troubles and trials do we seek Jesus' help in His Word first and foremost, or do we run to the world for the temporary panaceas of comfort and feel-good counsel? Do we run to the world's way of escaping problems by drinking, or pornography or working more? Do we not face up to our responsibilities and problems of life by being distant, non-communicative, uncaring and unloving? Do we blame the rest of society for our problems? Do we blame God? Are we seeking a dead Jesus, who really cannot help or save?

Mary at this point is not seeking a living Jesus; she is looking for His dead body. She thinks this Man standing by her is the gardener. She no longer thinks that the enemies of Jesus stole His body away. Why would there be angels in the tomb if something as terrible as that had happened? Perhaps friends of Jesus had taken His body and hid it so the enemies of Jesus couldn't get at it and desecrate it. Thinking this, she said to Jesus, **SIR, IF YOU HAVE CARRIED HIM AWAY, TELL ME WHERE YOU HAVE LAID HIM, AND I WILL TAKE HIM AWAY.**

Jesus says to her, **MARY!** With that one single, powerful word, He opens her eyes and shows to her the same tender, loving care that she had known before He died---the same tender, loving care that Jesus has for you and me. And suddenly Mary realizes that she gains from the empty tomb! She does not lose because the tomb is empty!

Mary with her heart on fire says, **RABBONI! TEACHER!** Not just any teacher, but **THE TEACHER**. The Teacher sent from heaven, the divine Teacher who alone has given to her and all His disciples the heavenly **TRUTHS** for poor sinners, the Teacher who daily brought to them the Word of Salvation.

Here again, we see Jesus as the Savior who has the individual soul as the object of His love and care. Note that here He is concerned for one precious soul, Mary's--even as He was with the thief on the cross, Judas, Peter, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Mary and John and the soldiers in our Lenten devotions. As He was concerned about just this one soul on that first Easter morning, so also

He is concerned about your individual soul as well. Everyone of us can say with a confident heart of faith, **JESUS IS MY RESURRECTED SAVIOR, MY GOOD SHEPHERD, WHO LOVES ME, WHO KNOWS ME AND ALL MY NEEDS, WHO GUIDES ME AND GUARDS ME EVERY STEP OF THE WAY TO MY HEAVENLY HOME THAT HE HAS PREPARED FOR ME.** What great love our Savior has for each of us! That is what we gain from the empty tomb!

Evidently Mary also felt that great love of Jesus and did not want to let Jesus go. She clung to Him with a fervor that demonstrated she would never lose Him again. She wanted to cling to Him forever and never let Him go from her presence again.

Jesus has to correct her by kindly saying, **DO NOT CLING TO ME, FOR I HAVE NOT YET ASCENDED TO MY FATHER; BUT GO TO MY BRETHREN AND SAY TO THEM, I AM ASCENDING TO MY FATHER AND YOUR FATHER, AND TO MY GOD AND YOUR GOD.** Jesus would still be with them for a time, but soon He would be gone again, at least visibly gone. The relationship between Jesus and Mary and the other disciples would be forever changed. It had to be this way or the Holy Spirit; the great Comforter would not come. Mary and the other disciples needed to remember the words of Jesus **IT IS FOR YOUR GOOD THAT I AM GOING AWAY** for this new relationship as the Ascended Lord and victorious Savior would now fill their hearts with an even greater peace, greater joy and confident courage than ever before and bind them even closer to Him. Jesus had promised **I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU AS ORPHANS; I WILL COME TO YOU** and again He said **WE (THE FATHER AND I) WILL COME TO HIM (EVERY TRUE BELIEVER) AND MAKE OUR HOME WITH HIM** and again **AND SURELY I WILL BE WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE VERY END OF THE AGE.**

Jesus says, **“Mary, tell My brothers this.”** Tell them they are still My brothers, even though they fled in fear. Tell them My Father is their Father and My God is their God. I and the Father are one in essence, and you through faith in Me will be one with My Father. In Me is the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in bodily form and now because of Me you have an open access to God and can address Him as your Father. What an amazing honor Jesus is bestowing here. He gives to His believers, to you and to me, the high and great honor of being a child of God.

As we conclude this morning's sermon on the thought **“Who Gains from the Empty Tomb?”** may we once again hear Jesus ask us; **“WHY ARE YOU WEeping? WHOM ARE YOU SEEKING?”**

May the Easter joy of Jesus' empty tomb, of His being raised from the dead, to live forevermore in our hearts and lives with the power of His resurrection, cause our hearts to leap for joy and not weep for sadness not only today on this joyous morning, but also when sudden tragic events occur, or when our lives get turned upside down by catastrophes and disasters of any kind.

May we also tell others about this Good News, that through Jesus Christ's perfect life of obedient love, His suffering and death on the cross and resurrection from the dead we have peace with God.

The Apostle Paul says that as children of God through faith in Jesus, who believe that Jesus died and rose again, we will not sorrow or cry, as those who have no hope. For those who have died in Christ, on Judgment Day will rise first and then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall ever be with the Lord.

That's our Easter JOY because of the empty tomb!

Amen.