

Tonight, our focus is upon John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, who ran to the tomb, saw the stone rolled away, saw the burial cloths cast aside, and with joy believed. The opening verses of our Gospel, however, tell us that John’s day did not start out so well.

I. It Began In Great Darkness.

Only a few days before, John, the disciple who seemed most emotionally attached to Jesus, stood with some of the women at the foot of the cross and watched the bitter suffering of His Lord. After witnessing Jesus’ agonizing death, he was overcome with sorrow, fear and confusion. He had given his life and his love completely to Christ, and now it all seemed to be over. It may have been dark outside that morning, but the darkness John felt within was colder.

And then things got worse. Mary Magdalene, who had gone with some of the other women to anoint Jesus’ body, found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. Crying, she ran to Peter and then to John, and told them: **“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”** John’s life was falling apart. He was so sad, so guilty, so helpless!

Some of you may be experiencing some of these same feelings in your own lives. Like John, you may find yourself standing helpless and hurting at the foot of the cross, knowing that your sins put the Lord of life there. As you consider the death Jesus died for you, you may feel guilty over the things that you have failed to do for your Him and for others. Maybe you are sad, lonely, depressed or confused, and don’t know where to turn, or what to do. Perhaps that is why you are here this evening. To a greater or lesser degree isn’t that why all of us are here? With John, we realize that we need Jesus! And so we run here with our friends to see, believe, and feel the love of God and the resurrection power of Christ! In our Gospel, after hearing the report of Mary...

II. John Ran With His Friend To See The Empty Tomb.

Peter and John raced to the tomb not yet fully understanding what had happened or what it all meant. And when they arrived Peter as usual went in first and took in the scene. The word used in the original Greek to describe the way that Peter and John looked at the burial cloths was not just a passing glance, but to gaze in wonderment. Could it be that what they saw in the burial cloths was itself miraculous. Have you ever thought about what they actually saw? I think they saw something other than strips of cloth cut, or unwrapped, from Jesus’ body. I firmly believe that what they saw were the burial cloths laying just as if they had been wound around Jesus’ limbs and body, only the body was no longer in them. It was as if Christ’s body had passed right through them, leaving them undisturbed. And then over to the side was the head covering. It was not carelessly cast away, as one might expect an uncaring body snatcher to do. It was neatly folded and placed to the side in good order. It wasn’t at all as Mary had described it. This was not a continuation of their darkness, but the dawning of a new and glorious day. They were looking at the evidence of Jesus’ resurrection.

As you come here today looking for something to bring you through your own darkness the Lord calls upon you not to give this merely passing glance. He invites you, rather, to gaze in wonderment at His glory and His grace. Here, through faith we regularly gather in the empty tomb of Jesus in the assurance that He is risen. Here we raise up our eyes to the hills from whence comes our help. Our hill, our Mount Zion, is Jesus who comes to us in Word and Sacrament. We fix our gaze upon the pulpit where we behold the miracle of God’s Word creating and sustaining faith and spiritual life in us. With our friends, like John, we run here to behold the empty tomb and the evidence in Christ’s living body and blood of his resurrection. By running through the darkness to the empty tomb that first Easter, and seeing the evidence of Christ’s resurrection...

III. John Believed That Christ Had Risen In Victory.

Our Gospel lesson tells us that John saw and believed. In that moment the light began to shine in John’s life again. He believed from what he saw in the tomb that the same Jesus, who he had witnessed dying on the cross, and whose lifeless body had been poured into that tomb, was alive. But to John, this was not a shining moment. He goes on to confess that Peter and he still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

Although Jesus had repeatedly explained that he would lay down his life for the sins of the world, and rise again on the third day, John still did not believe until he saw the evidence, nor did he understand what it all meant, until Christ again opened his mind to all that had been written about him in the Old Testament.

We may be sitting here this morning, wishing that we were John. That we could have seen that stone rolled away, the empty tomb, and the burial cloths. But John, says, "No, I wish I could have been more like you. You are the ones of whom my Lord Jesus says: ***"Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed!"***

Through the Scriptures, and thanks be to God through the Gospel that John, himself, wrote, you and I believe. Not because of what we see, but by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit through the Word, we believe that Jesus Christ, God's Son, lived a holy life for us, died an innocent death for us, and truly rose again on the third day according to the scriptures.

We are those who have not seen, and yet have believed. We believe that because Christ lives we shall live also. We believe that because Christ rose from the dead, His sacrifice for our sins is acceptable to God. We believe that because Christ overcame the power of the grave, He is God and all His promises are true. We believe that because Christ rose in victory, we will be able to overcome sin and the devil. We believe that because Christ has risen we will be delivered from darkness, to live in the light of His love.

Thanks be to God that with John we believe, and can experience how good it feels to have that stone rolled away! How wonderful to be able to say with John: "The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen!"