

CAP EASTER SERMON 2024

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Scripture: John 20: 1-18

We left here on Good Friday, seeing Jesus on the cross having breathed His last, and yet, knowing that He wasn't killed. Nobody took His life from Him. He willingly gave it up.

John's gospel reminds us of these words: "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again." (John 10:18)

Matthew 27:50 When Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, He gave up His Spirit. He decided it was time and it was over. He had done what was necessary.

John 19:31-37

³¹ Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. ³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. ³⁵ The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. ³⁶ These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: (that says) "Not one of his bones will be broken,"³⁷ and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

Why did they want to break the legs? Because that was the only way those who were crucified on a cross could continue to live. The bottom plate where their feet were, helped them to push themselves up to take a breath because they couldn't do it with their hands which were nailed. And so, each time they pushed themselves up to get enough breath. When they couldn't do that, they died of asphyxiation immediately. But it didn't happen with Jesus, nor was it necessary.

Deuteronomy 21:23 says that a body should not be left hanging during the night. So, the Jews and the Pharisees went to Pilate and demanded that the legs be broken. They were so caught up with keeping the small things of the law while they had just committed the greatest crime in all of humanity – the rejection and murder of the Son of God. And there can be no greater sin than the rejection of the Messiah. Jesus has given up His Spirit and then His body is taken for burial.

Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away and he was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who had earlier visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it with the spices and strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden where there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Now, myrrh was a kind of sticky resin that held things together. In fact, the Egyptians used it for embalming bodies. The Jews however, didn't use it for that. They used it as a powder mixed with different aloes, the aromatic sandalwood that was available. Because it was a gummy substance,

when it dried, it would harden to form a kind of cocoon around the body. Typically, it was from the shoulders down that they would put these linen wrappings. They were about a foot wide. These wrappings were around the body all the way from the shoulders to the feet. Only the face was left uncovered. That was covered with a piece of cloth. And that's how they laid Jesus in the tomb.

I often wonder when I come to an Easter service, and I pray into what needs to be spoken or shared with you all, I'm always drawn back to the narrative of that first resurrection morning. And there can be no greater retelling of it than the reading of the word.

John 20:1-18

¹Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. ²So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." ³So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. ⁴The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; ⁵and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. ⁶And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. ⁹For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. ¹⁰So the disciples went away again to their own homes.

¹¹But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; ¹²and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. ¹³And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned around and beheld Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni" ¹⁷Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" ¹⁸Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and that He had said these things to her.

What a beautiful narrative of all that transpired on that morning. I want to place before you four points out of those verses, and see how the Lord would use it for our own hearts this morning.

1. *So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put Him."*

They have taken, meaning that those who had crucified Him. But that didn't make any sense, because if they had taken it, they would have justified what Jesus said, that the tomb would not hold Him. It was to their interest that the body be there. and yet, the body was gone. In fact, they took such great pains. We read that the next day, on the Sabbath, the leading priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate and they told him, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver once said while He was still alive. 'After three days I will rise from the dead.' So we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent the disciples from coming and stealing His body and then telling everyone that He was raised from the dead. If that happens, we'll be worse off than we were at first." Their own words. They knew how

important it was for the body to still be there. Pilate replied, "Take guards and secure it the best you can." So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it.

If God wants to do something, not all the guards can prevent Him from doing it. Nothing! Not a sealed tomb, not the guards who are posted there, not the fact that the stone that was rolled across the entry was so huge and heavy. All that was of no avail because God wanted His Son alive.

I wonder whether there are bonds that hold you, things like words that have been spoken to you or over you that act like a tomb or a sepulchre holding you in a demeaning place? And you always look at yourself and think: Well, that's who I am. I guess that's the way everybody sees me. You've considered it to be your lot in life. Maybe you've even accepted the status quo. You're bound in these shrouds forever. I want to tell you beloved, no bond, no shroud, can keep you in a place where God doesn't want you to be. God never wants you to live under the power of wicked, hurtful words that may have been spoken over you. Maybe till this moment you have accepted it. But this Easter, the message for us is that the shroud can be broken. You can come out of it. That's not something that you have to live with. God can bring you out of it.

2. *Finally, the other disciple who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and he believed.*

What did he believe? He saw the evidence. He knew that Jesus had risen. Why? Because the shroud would still have been there. The face cloth had been taken and folded. He saw the evidence of the grave clothes but no Jesus. He saw the evidence and he believed.

Josh McDowell, wrote a wonderful compendium called "Evidence That Demands a Verdict". In the revision which he brought out some years back, he gives his own account of how he came to write this book, or came to this knowledge of God's saving grace. He says, "I disliked all Christians, all religion. I was in pre-law. And I noticed on campus that there was a group of students who were quite different from the rest of the students. The one thing that drew me to them was the fact that they all seemed to have a certain degree of conviction. I was drawn to that because I liked people who had conviction." So, he got talking with them and began to hang out with them. Then one day they said, "Hey, we meet every week on this day. Would you like to come?" And he went. Then he saw that they were talking about Jesus, someone that he was just not interested in. But he asked one of the girls, "What is it that makes you different?" And she said, "Jesus." Again, he rejected her and said, "Don't tell me about religion or Christianity." She said, "I'm not telling you about religion. I'm just telling you that Jesus made a change in my life."

He would go to these meetings, and he would ask all kinds of sarcastic questions, try to show them up, trying to be smart. One day, one of them said to him, "You're a pre-law student. You have a legal mind. Why don't you spend time and come back to us with a treatise or a legal document that you have put together that says that Jesus is not the Son of God? Why don't you do that?"

So he took it as a challenge. And he said, "Okay. I'll prove it to you. I'll find the evidence to support it." He took about a year off and he travelled around just looking for supporting evidences that would help him to prove that Jesus was not the Son of God. At the end of the year, he was sitting at his desk with all this material around him, and he heard Jesus saying: "Josh, you're never going to prove it because all the evidence supports the fact that I am the

Son of God.” And he says, “I broke down. This is so true. Every evidence that I have points to the fact that He is the Son of God. I can find nothing that says that He is not.” He gave his life to the Lord.

But then he says, “There was one thing in my life that I couldn’t get over. It was the hatred that I had for one man. If I could have killed that man, I would have. That man was my father. I grew up watching him as a drunkard at home, totally intoxicated. There were many days I went to school, and my friends would jokingly laugh and say, ‘Hey, we saw your dad in the gutter yesterday.’ That was how I lived. There were days when I would come home and see my dad sprawled on the couch. I would find my mother crouched in the barn, bleeding because he had hit her over and over again with a hose. If I could have laid my hands on him, I would have killed him. There were times when we had guests coming home and he would be drunk in the living room. We would take him and put him in the barn and I would tie him to one of the poles and tell people that he had gone out. One thing I would do was tie a loose noose around his neck hoping that he would try to get up and strangle himself. I hated him that much.”

Then he says, “God began to work in my life and take away that hatred little by little by little. One day I found myself kneeling in front of my dad, crying and saying, ‘Dad, I love you.’ I can never imagine how that change could have happened except for the fact that Jesus made the change in my life. For the next 6 weeks, I sat with my dad and I shared with him about what Jesus had done. At the end of 6 weeks, my dad said, ‘You know, son, if God can do what He has done in your life for me, I will ask Him to be my Savior.’ And he did. And this man who had been drinking non-stop for 40 years, never drank again.”

Beyond all the evidence that we have, God can also bring change when we accept the evidence that is there for us to see. Maybe today, the evidence is in front of you. Maybe you’ve been pushing it to one side and saying: I don’t want to deal with it because I know it may bring changes in my life. maybe God is saying to you this morning: But those changes will be good for you. They’re changes that will help you to live in abundance, changes that will help the purpose for your life to be fulfilled. I wonder whether today is a day for you to look at the evidence, and appropriate it for yourself.

3. *As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and one at the foot.*

How symbolic of the Holy of Holies. If you remember, beyond the veil, on the tabernacle, on one end was an angel looking down, and on the other end was another angel looking down. and that’s exactly the imagery that was there on that first day. Where Jesus should have been, two angels marked the spot. It seemed like the doors had been flung open for mercy to flow through that Mercy Seat. That’s why the writer of Hebrews would say: Come boldly before the throne of grace. You don’t have to come in fear unlike the priests who had to have bells on their robe when they entered the Holy of Holies, or a rope tied to their ankles so that if they died, they could be pulled out. This happened once a year, and the word that the children of Israel waited for when the priest would come out was the word ‘forgiven’, because the sacrifice had been received and accepted.

And yet today, the Bible tells us that we can come boldly before His throne of grace and receive mercy. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Not yearly, beloved, but any moment. Maybe today is a day that could be a red-letter day in your own life. maybe till now you stayed afar. I was

looking at the Bible and thinking how often the word 'they stood afar' comes. I was surprised at the number of times that people stood afar. They didn't want to get close. And yet, come boldly before the throne of grace. Maybe today God is calling you and saying, "Would you come and accept what I've offered to you? Would you take it? would you let me change your life? would you come to the Mercy Seat?"

The beautiful hymn that says:

The Savior is waiting to enter your heart.
Why don't you let Him come in?
There's nothing in this world to keep you apart,
What is your answer to Him?

Time after time He has waited before,
And now He is waiting again,
To see if you're willing to open the door,
Oh, how He wants to come in.

Would you let Him in beloved?

4. ***Jesus said to her, "Mary."***

There was something in His voice as He called her name that made her realize that this was Jesus; something in the way He spoke her name. and throughout history, we see how God calls people by name.

Isaiah 43:1 talks about Jacob and the Israelites.
*O Israel, the One who formed you says,
"Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you,
I have called you by name; you are Mine."*

I have called you by name. "Take off your shoes, Moses, you're standing on holy ground."
"Samuel, Samuel." God calling a young lad in the middle of the night. Never heard His voice, but God was calling him by name.
"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" "Who are you, Lord?" "I am Jesus, Saul."

John 10 reminds us that Jesus is the good shepherd, and he says, "He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out." That begs the question, beloved. We, who are sheep of His pasture, do we hear Him calling us by name? That's His Word, that He calls us by name. Maybe today He's calling you – through this week, or maybe through these 40 days that we've spent in Lent. Or maybe for years He's been calling you and you've been brushing it aside and saying: Not now Lord. I don't want to deal with You yet. Maybe today is the day that you hear Him calling. And the question for you is: Will you answer Him? The resurrected Christ calls. What will be your answer to Him?

Beloved, the cross couldn't hold Him. The evil plans of the people didn't prevail. The grave couldn't confine Him. He burst out of there, the resurrected Savior, the Savior of the world. The Lord is risen.

Amen.