

Easter with Your Eyes  
Sermon Easter Sunday - April 16, 2017

Based on the lectionary, three years ago we had the same Scripture reading. I do believe that you all remember that on Easter Sunday 2014, based on this reading, I preached about Mary Magdalene ☺ and how she met the resurrected Lord Jesus. Today I invite you to focus on two disciples.

After the Lord Jesus died on the cross, his body was buried in a tomb. The burial was done in a hurry around 5 p.m. Therefore, the women were not able to finish their rituals to preserve the body. The Jewish did not allowed people to touch a dead body on Friday after 6 p.m., once the Sabbath started. If they broke the law, they were declared unclean and were excluded from celebrating the Passover.

This is why, on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and some other women went to the tomb very early in the morning to prepare the body of Jesus, according to their rituals. As they arrived, they noticed that the huge stone, which blocked the entrance, was rolled away and the body was no longer in the tomb. Shocked and scared, Mary ran to the disciples with the news. The disciples were still hiding in a house, afraid that Jesus disciples would be arrested and sentenced to death. They were afraid to leave the house. Suddenly they heard running footsteps and somebody knocking at the door. As they opened the door, Mary, breathing heavily, told them what she experienced: “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

Now listen again to what we read: “Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb”. Who was the other disciple, and why his name is not disclosed? It is mentioned as “the disciple, the one whom Jesus loved”.

Do you remember from which gospel we read these verses today? From John. John was such a humble soul. When he wrote these verses, he did not say proudly, that – *hey people, I am the one who was running to the tomb – I am the one whom Jesus loved*. He wanted to keep his name incognito, in a humble way.

As Mary was talking to the 11 disciples, Peter and John took the courage and they both started together at the same time, at the same moment, to run to the tomb.

We see two disciples running towards the cemetery. We read that John reached the tomb first. Why and how? Not because he was the youngest, or because he knew a shortcut to the cemetery, but for another very serious reason.

John was the apostle of LOVE. In his letters, he always talks about Love. See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are... Beloved, we are God’s children now. (1 John 3:1-2) “Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” (1 John 3:18) “... we should love one another, just as he has commanded us.” (1 John 3:23) “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us ..., since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.” (1 John 4:7-11) “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us ... We love because God first loved us.” (1 John 4:16-17,19) “The commandment we have from God is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.” (1 John 4:21).

John was the apostle of LOVE. His gasoline was LOVE, and this is why he arrived first to the tomb. Those whose gasoline is LOVE, will have more power to arrive **first** to their goals: they are able to forgive first, to love and help **faster** than those who have no love. Those who have LOVE are always a few steps ahead of those who have no love. They embrace **first**, and forgive **first, before the other person would offer forgiveness**. Those who have no love can be late in so many ways.

I heard about two brothers, who had an argument decades ago, and they did not visit with each other. Years later, one brother decided to take the first step to reconcile. As he arrived to his brother's house, he was informed that his brother was buried just two weeks before. This man was late.

I heard about a young man who left her mother's house for good because his mother was not able to give him more money for gambling. One day, this young man got a call from the hospital to visit his mother who was very ill. The son was hesitating for days. Then, one morning, he bought some flowers and decided to visit his mother. As he stepped into the hospital's room, his mother's body was being covered with a white sheet. She had just died. Her son was late, very late. Late forever. Those who have no LOVE will be late from almost everything that is important in life.

As we see John arrived first to the tomb, he did not have courage to step into the tomb. He was waiting for Peter.

Peter was the apostle of **FAITH**. At Pentecost, Peter was the first disciple who stood up in front of a few thousand people to preach. "Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 2:38) He is writing his letters "to those who have received faith." (2 Peter 1:1) "... even though you do not see God now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." (1 Peter 1:8-9)

"Your faith and hope are set on God." (1 Peter 1:8-9) "To you then who believe, he is precious." (1 Peter 2:7) "Be steadfast in your faith." (1 Peter 5:8)

Faith is extremely important. You need faith to be able to step out from your fear and to start your journey with Jesus. Faith will help you to reach your final destination, the eternal glory.

As Peter arrived to the tomb, without hesitation he stepped in. Then John got encouraged and he stepped in, too.

Love and faith are checking out the tomb. What happened here? "They saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself".

In Jesus tomb, everything was nicely folded together. There is a message in this: in those people's life where Jesus is present, everything is nicely kept and there is no chaos. If you are experiencing any chaos in your life, please ask yourself if Jesus was there before or not.

We read a very sad sentence here. The two disciples "did not understand the scripture, that Jesus must rise from the dead".

How come? Why not?

- Because when Jesus told them that he has to die but He will be raised, Peter did not listen carefully to Jesus. And this is again a psychological issue. When somebody talks to you and says something that you don't like, you are listening **ONLY** to the first sentence and then you

block out, you won't listen to the other sentences because your mind will think about your reply, how to reply or how to defend yourself. So the other person says to you 5 sentences and you are listening only to the first or second one.

Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. (Matthew 16:21)

Peter did not agree with Jesus. He did not want Jesus to be killed. When Peter heard this, his mind got busy with his own thoughts and ideas about Jesus death. Peter was thinking that if Jesus dies, he will lose his dreams about himself. Peter took the Lord aside and began to **rebuke** Jesus saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you'.

- Jesus, you cannot die. If you die all my dreams and plans are gone.
- I followed you because I saw you can do miracles. I followed you everywhere to make my name well-known by the people of Israel.
- I was hoping that You will sit in a high throne and I will sit on your right hand as your most faithful servant.

Peter did not hear the second part of the sentence when Jesus said that: He will be raised from death.

John was so shocked at the tomb that he was not able to think straight. For this, we read that "the disciples returned to their homes" wondering what really happened. (John 20:9-10)

Let me ask you:

- Are you still asking, and wondering what happened on Easter morning, or do you have faith to believe the biggest miracle of history?
- Do you have faith and love to share with those who still are in darkness and are still wondering what happened on Easter morning at the tomb?

Easter means resurrection.

The power of the love of God brought new life, rising in Jesus from the darkness of death. The amazing part of that story is not only that Christ was raised to new life. After all, He was God. The real miracle is that we will be raised to new life through Him, because Jesus promises new life to all people. The new Life is everlasting and this is the Easter Message. Thanks be to God.