

The Resurrection and The Life

Sermon April 18, 2021

Late afternoon, on Good Friday, before 6 PM, the body of Christ was laid in a stone grave. At 6 PM, the Sabbath started, when the people of Israel joyfully celebrated the Passover, recalling the time when their forefathers were rescued from Egypt. They celebrated because they were rescued by Moses and became free from the chains of Egypt.

On Good Friday evening, in heaven, the angels were rejoicing because you and I were saved by the Lamb of God, and rescued from the chains of sin.

On earth, the Israelites were rejoicing because they became the people of Israel.

The angels in heaven celebrated because you and I became children of God.

The celebration on earth was temporary, but heaven's celebration is everlasting.

The people of Israel were looking back remembering their past history. The angels in heaven were looking forward for the future. The angels knew that in heaven a place will be prepared for those who love the Lamb of God, who gave His life for all.

In Matthew 27:62-66, we read: *The next day, (on Saturday) the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."* "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. The priests and the Roman soldiers sealed the grave so the stone could be not removed. They were thinking that a piece of sealed paper would stop the Creator of Heaven and Earth from moving the stone away.

The soldiers' responsibility was to watch the grave close and not to allow anybody to come close to it. But in Matthew 28:2-4, surprisingly we read: *"There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men."*

Then we read that: *some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling*

them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed”. (Matthew 28:11-15a)

The events that begin on Easter morning give us a clear picture of who Jesus Christ was. When He was still with the disciples, our Lord Jesus had repeatedly told them that He MUST go to Jerusalem, there He will be betrayed, there He will be tortured and crucified, but on the THIRD DAY He will rise. Unfortunately, this last section of His message was not fixed in the disciples’ hearts and minds. They could not see beyond death, though they saw Jesus resurrect Lazarus, who had died 3 days ago, resurrect a 12-year-old girl, and resurrect a widow’s only son. After they saw Jesus suffering and dying on the cross, they could not even think that one day Jesus might be alive again.

On the first day of the week, early in the morning, we see three women, Mary Madgalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, rushing to the grave to embalm the dead body of Jesus. On Friday late afternoon, they did not have time for that because the time was very short, and they could not finish everything before 6 PM.

After Jesus died at around 3 PM, Joseph of Arimathea sought permission from Pilate to remove the body from the cross. It also took a long time, as a Jewish man could not enter a Roman’s home. Then it took time for the body of Jesus to be taken off the cross and taken to be placed in the tomb. At 6 o’clock in the evening the Jewish feast had already set in and from that moment they could not do any kind of work. If they had touched a dead man’s body, they had to wash themselves, otherwise they could not attend the dinner and the celebration of Passover at all. So, on Good Friday, the women no longer had time to embalm Jesus’ dead body. Somehow, this was God’s plan, so that after three days the women would come to the grave seeking Jesus’ body.

On Sunday morning, the women went out to the cemetery to the dead body. Meanwhile, God was working wonderfully and the women in the empty tomb met angels who were talking to them in a human way, in their own language, as we read: “As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’” (Mark 16:5-7)

Then the women ran away to bring their experiences to the disciples. But the disciples did not believe what the women told them. In contrary, they made fun of them, saying that their witnessing could not be taken seriously.

A few minutes later, Mary from Magdala came to the tomb. As she noticed from a distance that the stone was rolled away and the body of Christ was not in the tomb, she ran to tell this to the disciples. When they heard again that the tomb was empty, Peter and John started to run to the cemetery to see what really happened there, as we read in John chapter 20.

“So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally, the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.” John 20:3-10

But Mary decided to stay at the tomb. She loved Jesus so much that she could not just walk away with her pain. Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying.

We read that: *“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 the other at the foot. They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?” “They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”). Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.” John 20:11-18*

On the first day of the Resurrection, two men were walking home from Jerusalem to Emmaus. On Friday, they were there on Calvary when the Lord Jesus was crucified. As they were walking and talking on their way home, Jesus joined them. They were telling Jesus what they saw on Friday, and what their hope was from Jesus. Also, they mentioned, that they heard that some women spread the news in

Jerusalem that Jesus was resurrected and He lives, but they could not believe it. But Jesus turned their eyes on God and on God's plans so that humanity should be saved. Jesus explained to them that God's son, Jesus, died on the cross as the Lamb of God to save them and all of us. As they arrived home, they invited Jesus to join them for supper. As Jesus took the bread and gave thanks, these two people's spiritual eyes were opened. They realized that this stranger was Jesus, who was crucified, but now He lives. Right after this, these two men returned to Jerusalem, to meet the disciples and to tell them that Jesus is ALIVE.

On the day of the resurrection, the disciples were together, hiding in an upper room. They were scared to death that the Jewish leaders, would crucify them as Jesus' disciples.

On that evening, as they were trembling of fear, Jesus Himself appeared among them, with His famous greeting: PEACE BE WITH YOU!

Thomas was not present that evening. A few days later, the disciples met Thomas somewhere on the street. He was told they had seen the risen Jesus.

Thomas said, "If I can't touch the nails on his hands and feet, and I can't touch the wound on the side where a Soldier stabbed his spear when he was taken off the cross, then I DON'T BELIEVE AT ALL."

Eight days later, the disciples were together again, and Thomas was with them. Jesus appeared among them again. He turned to Thomas and literally quoted Thomas's sentence, which he had said to his companions on the street a few days before. Come and see, touch my wounds on my hands and feet, touch my side that has been pierced by the spear, and do not be an unbeliever, but a believer.

What could Thomas have thought? How did Jesus literally know what he had said four days before, since Jesus was not on the street when they were talking. Or was He still there? He was there invisibly and witnessed their conversations.

Then, once, Jesus appeared to 500 people and preached to them.

Then, He reappeared on the shores of Lake Galilee where His disciples were fishing.

Then He appeared before them on a mountain in Galilee, where He said His final farewell speech.

Thus, the activity of heaven on earth was widened.

As the Resurrected Lord Jesus continued to show Himself more and more often. heaven and earth were connected. The earthly people became children of God and they understood that, as Jesus is alive, after we die, our bodies will be transformed and we will live forever.

Today, we all have a big task. As children of God, we must become followers of Christ. Religiosity is not enough. To practice religious ceremonies, to confess, to sacrifice, to give, is not enough. We must follow Jesus, who gave His life for us, that He might lead us to heaven.

We cannot take His resurrection half seriously. We have to lay our lives in His hands, knowing that He is the Resurrection and the Life, and all those who follow Him, will live in His eternal Home forever.

May the Holy Spirit help us in our decision to follow Him, to the very end.