

Easter, April 1, 2018

Psalm 118:1-24

John 20:1-20

Easter for Everyone

How many of you have been enjoying chocolate eggs and candy already this morning? It just seems that chocolate eggs and candy like jelly beans reflect Easter more and more. And there seems to be such a larger diversity in ways to celebrate Easter and spring bringing new life all made with chocolate and sugar.

In a recent article, a group of people were taste testing chocolate eggs and what these individuals thought about them as a group and as individuals. Those testing the eggs represented different age brackets, and diverse backgrounds. What they had in common was simply a desire to eat chocolate eggs. Different kinds of chocolate were tried- with milk chocolate, white and yellow centres, and then those coloured on the outside with chocolate in the middle. Each person then decided which they liked best and ranked the rest. The result? No one really agreed overall. But what made the difference is the texture of the chocolate, the amount of sugar in the inside and of course what they looked like. They concluded that everyone has their favourites and that is what people will eat! They also tied this to what they were introduced to as Easter candy when they were younger and even whether they first ate the feet or the ears off of chocolate rabbits. Chocolate candy they concluded is for everyone based upon choices made from childhood and even today.

Chocolate and Easter seem to go together well and is really for everyone. Or is it? What if you have allergies, or just don't like chocolate? But most importantly, if we are to talk about the reason behind why we have all these sweet treats people do not agree either!

We read from John 20 that very early in the morning Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. Why did Mary go so early? Was she afraid of being connected to the "King of the Jews" in any way? What was her reason? Mary was grieving and she could hardly believe that Jesus the teacher was dead. He was so kind to her, so compassionate and how she loved him for who he was. Could he really be God's Son and she didn't believe. Yet when she arrived at the tomb the stone had been moved away from the entrance. She did not go in nor even search the grounds for a guard. She just went back to see the disciples who were hiding. She was Simon Peter and the other disciple and she told them 'They have taken the Lord out of the Tomb and we don't know where they have put him.' Not only was Jesus' life taken away, but his body was now gone, too!

The disciples run back to the tomb and when they arrived, they looked in and saw that there were linen strips lying where Jesus' body had been laid. The cloth that had been put on his head was there folded up and placed gently there too. They did not know what to say or do. So they went back to home.

Mary cried. She needed to grieve for this is why she went so early to the tomb. She wanted to anoint his body to show compassion to him in his death. But how could she do this now? His body was gone.

She looked inside the tomb and this time there were two angels sitting where Jesus' body had been. They asked her, "Why are you crying?" Mary did not seem afraid of seeing angels. Maybe she was numb or in shock or just not facing reality in that moment. Angels were talking with her! She answered "They have taken my Lord away and I don't know where they have put him." In this moment she hears another voice, asking the same question as the angel. "Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Mary answered the gardener's question a little upset. Didn't he hear what she said to the angels? If you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Mary was so upset. She wanted to know where Jesus' body was carried and why he was moved. She then said she wanted to get him. Mary wanted Jesus' body back in the tomb where he was to rest in peace.

But then suddenly it is as if Mary comes back to reality. She really sees the gardener and this man looks at her with his compassionate eyes, and says her name out loud. "Mary!" At that moment life begins anew for Jesus. Life begins a new path for Mary. Mary turns to him again and cries out in Aramaic, "Rabboni"- teacher. Jesus then tells Mary to go to the disciples, his closest friends and tell them, "I have not yet returned to the Father. Go tell them this."

Mary went away with the good news—not crying, or slouching, depressed or sad—She went and said, "I have seen the Lord" and what had happened!

Simon Peter, the other disciples, and Mary had been deep in grief when Mary went to the tomb. Each of these followers of Jesus had a variety of needs on that Sunday morning. Peter- regret and guilt for having denied Jesus. Mary when she couldn't prepare his body properly before burial and the other disciples who hid for their own safety, not even watching him die or be properly cared for in death.

We who are gathered here this morning also have a diversity of needs, too! We're not all drawn to this place for the exact same reason. Some of you are here because you are curious. Others have come to keep peace in the family. Still others walked in because they have worshipped on Easter every year, and they cannot imagine being anyplace else. One's needs

don't outweigh someone else's but what is amazing is that Easter is for everyone. The story of Easter is such a gripping story that it ultimately meets the need of every person in this place.

Maybe you are facing tough situations in your life and don't know what to do. Maybe you are grieving some kind of loss- family member, job loss, marriage or relationship challenge, or maybe you are struggling with something at work or home that has left you tired and unsure. You're like Mary getting up from bed because she can't sleep. She needs to do what she can in her grief because Jesus has died.

Maybe you are hiding from something or situation you had no control over but if the truth comes out you are partially responsible. You are like the disciples who hid when Jesus was put on the cross and now are hiding out of fear. Or maybe you are curious like Simon Peter and the other disciple when Mary is crying and grieving and wondering where Jesus' body is after burial. If you had been there that morning, would you have been first to see the linens, head cloth and the angels. But would you have seen and believed?

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! These statements of faith have been shared over 2000 years not because someone thought Jesus might be alive again. No, because people saw Jesus. From the day of his resurrection to the day he ascended into heaven, over 500 people saw Jesus alive. But when we think of that number compared to the world's population not only living today, but all those who believed in generations past going back to the people who saw him, there is something about Jesus' story! He is alive. He is risen from the dead and he is alive.

There are 3 options for how to respond to this.

- 1) You can stay bewildered. You can let this resurrection story knock you down and leave you there.
- 2) You can deny it all. You can ignore the facts.
- 3) You can slowly assess and assimilate this information. You can pick yourself up and embrace this new truth and go through the long, sometimes painful, process of re-assessing life in the light of this new evidence.

But no matter what—you have to make a choice. This is what makes Jesus' resurrection story so unique. Easter is for everyone. The story has been told and retold for generations. It is a story to hear and to respond. Many people stay bewildered and many ignore or deny the facts that Jesus is alive. But this is the Easter choice. Easter is for everyone. But not everyone believes.

When faced with social media/ news stations on radio and tv telling of the celebrations of Easter around the world today we might ask where the fools are who don't believe? After all this

April's fools day might be when God really looks for those foolish enough who don't believe and opens their hearts to God's reality. God's reality is that out of love He sent Jesus to die and rise for everyone. God won't be happy until and unless all people belong to him.

But again it is the Easter choice. Even those who say they believe question the resurrection from time to time. Mary did not know that Jesus was alive. She prayed and had hope but was not sure. Jesus did tell them that he would die and rise again. He taught them that he would be raised above the earth in order that everyone would look to him. This was like when Moses held up the bronze snake for the people to be healed from their snake bites in the desert. And Jesus did teach that he would die but he also told him he would rise again from death.

What are the choices we can make about Jesus? When faced with the incredible proclamation that Jesus rose again from the dead, you can be agnostic and cynical by saying that you don't know what to make of this but then neither are you going to try. Who cares anyway? Or you can deny it. The whole thing is fiction, fantasy, a wish but something that never really happened. Or you can move past the shock toward acceptance. But let me caution you: if you are going to accept the truth of Christ's bodily resurrection, you need to let it totally change you.

Easter is for everyone. God gave the world His Son to die on the cross for everyone's sake. But we must choose to follow. The problem for many is that we are not surprised enough by Easter to realize we face a choice. Easter decorations and advertisements have been up and shared since Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day. Easter is only a small part of the background of our lives. We've never had to face what Mary and Simon Peter did—Jesus body not there and them not knowing why. We've never really thought about Easter much—except maybe the kind of candy and chocolate to buy. But believing Jesus rose again from the dead calls us to challenge our viewpoint, to look to the world with new eyes and to see that the world needs Jesus for the forgiveness of sin?

Has Easter become "routine" for you? Has there been a moment this Lenten season or during this Holy Week that sparked a notion of change for you? The reason for this is that sometimes we don't get excited over hearing a story for the 40th, 60th or more times and is no longer shocking to us. Yet when we face the death of a loved one, reality sets in and we wonder, will Jesus welcome them home? Did Jesus' death and resurrection mean something to this person? Does Jesus' Death and resurrection have meaning for me?

Jesus is alive and because he is alive we can face everything and everyone who will walk into our path. But we must be willing to accept this gift of faith granted to us by God's gaze.

Easter is for everyone. Christ died and rose for all people but the question is simply, Do you believe Jesus died and rose for your sake? When you eat your Easter chocolate today, will the new life each egg and rabbit eaten reflect the new life you know and/ or have received from Christ Jesus?

Easter is for everyone. Let us rejoice because Jesus is alive and through his resurrection we know who holds our future. We just need to renew, restore and live out Christ's love everywhere.