

Sunrise Service

It's me PETER I cannot sleep. I was in the shadows behind that pillar when that sound, which inevitably comes with the first hint of light, the sound that will haunt me for the rest of my days – each and every day, the sound of the rooster, the cock crowing, announcing to all that I failed, that I couldn't keep it together, that I even denied knowing him. I had abandoned Jesus.

I feel so guilty; ... but more than guilt – I feel the shame. Ashamed to show my face to my friends, to the other disciples as we try to make sense out of what makes no sense at all. I walk around with my eyes pointed to the ground. I cannot even make eye contact with anyone.

Jesus had called me, “Peter the Rock”, “Peter, the one on whom I will build my Church!”

Ha!

Maybe he should have called me “Peter as insignificant as a grain of sand!”, or better still, “Peter, the one who cannot keep his promise!”

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It's me, THOMAS. It is early morning, still somewhat dark. I'm sitting here with my arms crossed.

'Always the skeptic,' they tell me. Always standing at the back, observing and analysing. You know, I could see this whole thing coming - over the last months, as we started traveling to Jerusalem, there were little signs that things were going to change, that something big was going to happen. Everyone was more tense. We watched our backs - even if we wouldn't admit it. Jesus was getting more resistance and often the crowd took it out on us. I'm sure there were spies around, and officials and religious bigwigs hiding in the shadows, listening, watching.

And even Jesus was talking weird, mumbling things about suffering and betrayals and denials, even death. I just wanted some clarity, some evidence, some open discussion, but nobody listens to me. And now the whole dream is collapsing around us; are we to pick up the pieces? And do what, exactly?

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It's me - JOHN! I still can't believe he is gone. No one ever, had placed so much trust and confidence in me, given so much love and support, as Jesus did.

He called me "the Beloved Disciple." And now he is gone. Even when he was hanging on the cross, I thought , somehow,... somehow God would intervene and this horrible ordeal would end.

He looked at His mother standing beside me, tears flowing down her face, uncontrollably. How does anyone comfort a mother, watching her son die?

"Woman", came the firm voice from the cross, "here is your son". To whom He was referring? I looked up at Him; His eye caught mine - "Here is your mother", He said with finality. Me?! ME?! Suddenly, I heard a voice from the past, at Jesus' own baptism, when a voice from heaven, said "You are my Son, the Beloved." Now I am part of that family, part of that calling. "I am Beloved".

I WILL take care of His mother, now my mother, for the rest of my life!

What a responsibility!

What a privilege!

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John 20:1-9 (NIV)

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

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!"

So Peter and the other disciple set off 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, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head, folded up by itself, separate from the linen.

Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. *(But, they still did not understand what the Holy Writings meant. "He must rise again from the dead". So the followers went back again to their homes).*

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Mary stood outside the grave crying; then she got down and looked inside the grave, and saw two angels dressed in white clothes, one angel where His head was laid and one angel where His feet was laid.

They said to her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord. I do not know where they have put Him."

She turned around to walk away ... and Someone was standing there; she did not know who it was.

The man said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? Whom are you looking for?"

She thought He was the gardener and said to Him, "Sir, if you have taken Jesus from here, tell me where you have put Him. I will take Him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned around, her eyes wide open, a smile stretching as wide across her face as possible.

"Teacher!", She exclaimed at the top Of her voice!

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**It's me - MARY MAGDALENE. That's not my name.
Most people know me as Mary from Magdala.**

Can you believe it?! I almost missed Him!! The tears had blurred my vision.

I panicked when I saw the stone rolled away, revealing a dark and empty tomb. Oh! No!! They've removed His body; perhaps it was stolen! I **SHOULD have come earlier! I **SHOULD** have stayed the night, then His body would not be missing! I have failed Him.**

My entire body was trembling as I ran back to wake up the disciples, and then ran behind them, back to the tomb.

When Peter and John peered into the tomb and turned to return home, I finally broke down outside the tomb. Where is HE?! I just wanted to find HIS body, wash it and clean the blood, and give Him a proper burial!

I peered into the grave, incase the men had missed something. Two angels stood there, wanting to know why I was crying! What a stupid question! Surely, they of all people, should know!

I turned to leave and thought, the one I saw was the gardener. He knew my name! "Mary!" ... In that instant, I recognised that voice! It was Jesus, my Lord!!

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This morning we come here to celebrate the most glorious event in history. We come to celebrate:

- our risen Lord and Christ.
- our salvation.
- forgiveness of sin.
- victory over death.
- the gift of eternal life.

That's just a few of the things we have to celebrate because Jesus the grave could not hold back the One who had conquered death.

We come this morning as did those who came to the tomb early that first Easter morning. We can only imagine the joy they felt as they learned of the resurrection of Christ from the grave. Not many hours before, they mourned the grisly death of Jesus. But their mourning turned to joy on that first Easter.

If we look at the events of that first resurrection morning from all four gospel writers.

- **Matthew** tells about the two Marys who came early in the morning to the tomb and saw the resurrected Jesus.
- **Mark** adds that Salome was with the two Marys who came very early on that morning.

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- **Luke** also tells of the visit of the women to the tomb that morning.
- **John** tells of Mary's visit and of the visit of Peter and John to the tomb.

In all of these accounts, the writers record the first thing the visitors to the tomb saw, was that the huge stone covering the entrance had been rolled away.

But what if the stone still covered the entrance to the tomb that morning. What if it had not been rolled away? How would these people have felt?

Well, they might have felt like Job after his family had been killed and all he owned had been destroyed. Job reacted like many of us would. He said:

Job 14:7-12 (NIV)

7 "At least there is hope for a tree: If it is cut down, it will sprout again, and it's new shoots will not fail.

8 Its roots may grow old in the ground and its stump die in the soil, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth shoots like a plant.

10 But man dies and is laid low; he breathes his last and is no more.

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11 As water disappears from the sea or a riverbed becomes parched and dry, so man lies down and does not rise; till the heavens are no more, men will not awake or be roused from their sleep.

Is that all there is? Is that all we have to look forward to? To lie down and rise no more? If it is, we could utter the words of Paul:

1 Corinthians 15:19 (MSG)

If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot. But the truth is that Christ **has** been raised up, the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave their graves.

If that stone had not been rolled away, then those visitors to the tomb that morning would have been a pretty miserable lot. But praise God, the stone was not still in place. It was rolled away.

So we ask ourselves, "Why was the stone rolled away?"

Well, now, that's a pretty silly question you might say. The stone was rolled away because Jesus came out of the tomb. The stone was rolled away because He had risen.

But think of it, that's **NOT** the reason the stone was rolled away. Look what happened later that same Sunday evening:

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John 20:19-20

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Jesus came into a room where the doors were shut and locked. Jesus just walked right in. If He could do that, couldn't He have come out of the tomb with the stone still in place?

You see, the stone was not rolled away for Him to come out.

Whatever the nature of His resurrected body, He needed no door. Walls could hold Him in, neither would a stone door.

The stone was rolled away that morning so that the visitors to the tomb could go in. **The open tomb was not the means of His exit, it was the means of their entrance.**

The women went in and saw that Jesus was not there. Peter and John went in and saw the same.

God rolled away the stone, so we would know that He is risen. The open tomb makes it possible for us to go in, to see the discarded grave clothes, to see that He is not there.

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That's why the stone was rolled away. It was rolled away so that the empty tomb could be visible to all. If the burial tomb still had a body in it, Jesus would have been right, proper dead.

The empty tomb is the greatest evidence of the resurrection of Jesus. Cynics and critics have tried to explain it away, but that empty tomb still stands as evidence to all that Jesus is not dead. And He is alive today.

Christ is risen! (response: He is risen, indeed!)

He's alive.

In the midst of his own calamities, this is what Job said,

Job 19:25-26 (NIV)

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

What would our faith in God be like if the Disciples' legacy was, "We went to the grave, saw His body, Mary cleaned it up and we have buried Him in a secret place, so no one would bother Him"??!!

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The resurrection caused those who visited the tomb that morning to run and tell the rest of Jesus' followers about it.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is our story! It was possible because He who lived in eternity with God as His Son, and He came to open the door to eternity, that we might be reunited with the Father. That was only possible if He conquered death, broke its hold over us.

Does the resurrection affect us?

Of course it does!

If you are looking at the cross on which Jesus died, He is not there; He was taken down by those who loved Him. So please don't say, as some people do, "The crucified Christ is in me." He is not on the cross; He CANNOT be in you.

Ours is not a crucifixion faith, ours is a resurrection faith, a faith which marvels at the work of God, which stands in awe of an awesome God, that we may sing -

HE LIVES! HE LIVES! CHRIST JESUS LIVES TODAY.