

COME SEE - GO TELL

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Matt. 28:5

There comes a time in the life of each of us when we suddenly realize: we, too, must die. It's not an easy discovery to make. One of the strange things about death is that we somehow find it hard to believe it will ever happen to us.

Even when we are bowed down with the weight of some serious physical infirmity, or when we have narrowly escaped the clutches of the grim reaper by living through some harrowing experience, even then we seem to consider ourselves as being apart from the reality of death.

We keep it at arms length. We just cannot bring ourselves to accept the inevitable. That for us, as for all people,

“There is appointed unto man a time to die” (Heb. 9:27).

I don't mean to suggest or imply that we deny the existence of death. Not at all. There are far too many shattered dreams and haunting memories for that. No, we are all well aware of the brevity of life. We simply assign that brevity to others. As for us, well, we will go on forever.

And then there comes a moment, an event, a “dawning” when in all of its stark reality calls upon us to face the fact we have tried to deny. We suddenly awaken to the realization that death awaits us—just as it awaits others—that in the end we will be granted no exemption or immunity.

It is in that disturbing moment that some people arrive at the sad conclusion that

“life is an adventure with an ending.”

This was the fatalistic deduction of the famous author, William March. He had thought of life as
“a succession of bright days which go on forever.”

When he discovered that this is not so—that he, too, must die—that try as he might, there was no escape, he says,

“The knowledge came with pain, and then astonishment.”

And he concluded fatalistically that

“Life is an adventure with an ending.”

But it is just here that the spirit of Christ crosses swords with the spirit of fatalism. For as Christians, we do not believe one’s history ends with the grave. And we offer as foundation for this deep conviction a person and a promise. The person is history’s “great exception.” For the life of Jesus ended with the miracle even greater than the one with which it began. To be born of a virgin was miracle enough, or so it would seem. But to conquer death, well, that was God’s crowning work of grace.

And because Jesus lives, we too shall live. For through this person we have this promise:

“I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in Me, though he be dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25).

The full glory of that promise was first revealed in a grave yard. The very place where all the evidence seemed to say that death was the final victor was the place God chose to make the great pronouncement that life and death had wrestled for a final fall, and life had won!

Strange, isn’t it, that history’s most wonderful news should come from a grave yard. But, such is the meaning of Easter. Strange, too, that the very first person to hear the glorious good news should be Mary Magdalene. At least it would seem so at first. But when you think about it for a bit, you realize it isn’t strange at all! For while the pronouncement of Christ’s incarnation was made to a virgin, Mary, the announcement of His resurrection was made to a converted sinner, Magdalene.

And both were fitting. As Fulton J. Sheen has pointed out,

“Only unsullied innocence could fully understand the wonder of the incarnation: God clothed in the garments of a man. And likewise,

only a repentant sinner, who herself had been raised from the grave of sin to welcome the newness of life in Christ, could fully appreciate the glory of His triumph over death.”

And so it was, but God selected as the very first to hear the news that Christ was risen, was one of those whom He had raised from spiritual death. And this is as it should be. For when all is said and done, Easter is first and foremost a day for sinners. It is the final and conclusive proof that Jesus did not “come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matt. 9:13).

Now as Mary Magdalene walked quietly into the garden that first Easter morning, she found that the stone had been rolled away. Standing by the open grave was an angel, and, according to Matt: 28:5, the angel said unto the woman: “Fear not, for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here. He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And then quickly, go tell his disciples that He has risen from the dead.”

The message of the angel on that first easter morning is my message to you today:

“Come, see - go tell!”

The first is a loving invitation. The second is a holy obligation.

Come See The Empty Cross

There are two things I want you to see this morning: an empty cross and an empty tomb.

Has it ever seemed strange to you that a symbol of execution should become a symbol of hope? Well, that is exactly what has happened in the case of the cross. This barbaric thing, this crude form of capital punishment, this monstrous memento of the dark ages when life was cheap and the value of human personality was a tragic mockery, this loathsome, brutal, hideous thing has become the symbol of hope!

We place it at the focal point of our halls of worship. We wear it like a crown on the steeples of our churches. We even let it dangle from a necklace or a watch chain as a thing of beauty. Have you ever wondered why? I'll tell you! It's because the cross is empty.

There is no hope in a crucifix. A dead savior is no savior at all. Our ally in this battle of life is not a broken, battered body hanging on a hellish Roman rack. The cross is empty! The Lord is risen! Our ally is a vital and victorious presence.

No, my friend, the hope of Christianity is not a wooden Christ upon a wooden cross. It is the living Christ of Easter. To be sure, our Lord did die. He died a death of infamy and shame. To be sure, He did hang on a cross. He hung there in open agony and anguish. But look! The cross is empty! It stands before us as a reminder of His sacrifice. Because it is devoid of its burden, because it no longer bears its weight, because it is strangely vacant, there is hope!

Come see an empty cross, for the King of glory isn't there. Calvary is over. It is but a shameful memory. And now there is the resurrection. Which leads me to say

Come See The Empty Tomb.

“In the history of the world, only one tomb has ever had a rock rolled before it and a soldier set to watch it to prevent the dead man within from rising. That was the tomb of Christ on the evening of Good Friday. What spectacle could be more ridiculous than armed soldiers keeping their eyes on a corpse? But here, sentinels are set, lest the dead walk, the silent speak and the pierced heart quicken to the throb of life. They say He is dead. They know He is dead. They will tell you He will not rise again. But still they watch” (Sheen).

What they do not seem to understand is that the One whom they nailed on that cross, the One who

lies encased in a borrowed tomb, the One they guard so diligently is not an ordinary man. And even as the fingers of the Easter sun stretch out to capture the gray darkness of the night, the sleeping corpse begins to stir. The breath of life is breathed again into His nostrils. And, as the soldiers watch, rubbing their eyes in disbelief, the Galilean comes to life and walks triumphantly from the tomb.

Praise God, it was an empty grave that confronted Mary on that first Easter morning. And from that moment until this, it has been the second symbol of our hope. I will not burden you with proofs of the resurrection, I only say: Come see. Come see an empty cross, eternal evidence that Jesus died for you and me. Come see an empty tomb, a reminder that our hope is not in a broken body, lying dead within a rock-cut grave, for He is risen and is alive forever more.

Go Tell

But the angel had a second word for Mary Magdalene and it is a second word for us:

“Go tell.”

The resurrection of Christ is a commandment to *go tell the world that life has meaning*. Because the cross and tomb are empty, because our Lord was victor over death, because He now offers to us the same possibility of life beyond the grave, because Easter is true, all of life takes on new meaning. It is not the disjointed jumble of daily experiences it seems to be. It is not a meaningless maize of events without rhyme or reason. It is not an “ironic jigsaw puzzle with which we struggle only to find in the end that some of the pieces are missing.”

For if Easter is true—and it is!—then this life is a preparation for the next. It is the tuning up period for what might become an eternal symphony if you but will it to be so, if you discover the King of Glory personally.

Now all kinds of perplexing questions are answered when you accept this new idea of life. No longer will you blindly ask “Why?” when a loved one dies prematurely. Now you will know that it is not

the quantity of this life, but rather its quality that really counts.

No longer will you blindly wonder why the strains of suffering and sorrow are placed upon your life. Now you will know that just as the strings of a violin must be subjected to cruel stretching in order to be in tune, so too, you and I must experience those spiritual stretchings which produce a life tuned for the symphony of eternity.

Yes! Life has meaning and the word of Easter is this:

“Go tell!”

You who have discovered this to be true, go tell the world that time is but the preface of eternity. Go tell the world that it is always darkest before the dawn. Go tell the world that even a Stradivarius needs tuning, and that the stretching process to which we are sometimes subjected only makes the music of our lives more beautiful.

Yes! Go tell the world that the King of Glory lives and because He lives, we too shall live. Go tell the people who walk in darkness that the light of the world has come, and therefore death is not the end, but only the beginning.

In his book, Lights Along The Shore, Fulton Ousler presents this moving thought:

“Suppose a man has never seen a seed. You show him one and say: ‘This will keep, just as it is, for a long time. However, if I bury it in the ground, it will soon stop being a seed and, instead, will become a plant with leaves, color and fragrance. From one seed will come 100 more.’

“The man who has never gardened would call you a fool. A daydreamer. Yet every seed carries within itself the promise of a larger growth and utter transformation. As long as the seed remains

a prisoner of its shell, the promise is suspended. The seed must die.

It must be buried. In the ground, it must sacrifice everything that makes it what it has been in order that it may develop into what it can become.”

There is a lesson in that for us. For there is a sense in which we are seeds. As long as our spirit is encased in a kind of mortal crust, limits are placed upon us by time and space. But when we shed the shell of this life, when we die in Christ, and sacrifice all we have been, then by the grace of God we develop into all God has meant us to be from the beginning. And that’s the moment when the full meaning of Easter will dawn upon us.

“Before Christ rose from the dead, people thought death was the supreme ruler of the universe. Even though life, at times, was fair and beautiful, it was also transient. Each life, like a flower, faded and fell before the tireless grim reaper. Each day, whatever the promise of its dawn, died on the edge of the Western sky. Each child, however beautiful, passed through adolescence and maturity into death. Like the torches they extinguished at the tombs of their friends, those people who lived before Christ imagined that, at death, life became extinct.” (Proppe)

But when our Lord mounted the cross to grapple with death for mastery of the souls of people, he changed all that. For awhile it seemed as if He has lost the match. But that was only for a moment. For on that historic Easter morn, when He came forth as victor from the bastille of death, He left behind an empty cross and an empty tomb. Living symbols of the fact that life is stronger than death, light is stronger than darkness, and truth is stronger than lies.

The empty cross and the empty tomb are God’s eternal answer to the question: “If a man die, will he

live again?" For as I stated at the beginning, our hope is centered in a person and in a promise. The person is Christ who battled death and won. The promise is that

“Whosoever lives and believes in Me (Him) shall never die” (John 11:25).

It was the spirit of fatalism that called William March to sit at his typewriter on the eve of death and write these tragic words: “Life is an adventure with an ending.”

But, it is the spirit of faith which gives us courage to say he was wrong. For we believe that “Life is an adventure with a beginning.” For want of a better word, we call that beginning death. But it is a beginning, nonetheless.

So Go Tell! Go tell the world the King of Glory lives. Go tell the world the cross and the tomb are empty. Go tell the world life has meaning. Go tell the world that death is not the end, but only the beginning -- of eternity.

“We only see a little of the ocean,
A few miles distant from the rocky shore:
But oh, out there beyond, beyond the eyes horizon
There is more. There is more.

“We only see a little of God’s loving,
A few rich treasures from His mighty store;
But oh, out there beyond, beyond this life’s horizon
There is more. There is more.”