

Easter

24 April 2011

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Landover Hills, Maryland

“He Is Not Lost ... He Is Risen”

John 20.1-18

He is risen! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!!

“Alice ... did you happen to notice where I put my car keys?? ... No?I can't find them. ... They're lost.”

Losing something can be an inconvenience. Losing something important can create a real crisis. Losing the car keys when you need to be out the door and on your way. Losing the password to your online bank statement. Losing the paperwork you need to do the taxes. Losing a child at the amusement park.

I do not have a good memory for dates and for forty years have relied on a day-timer. Once in those 40 years I have lost a day-timer. It had appointments in it for the next day and week and year. When I realized I had lost it, I was in a panic. Retraced my steps I don't know how many times, and finally had to concede the day-timer was lost. One time in 40 years – and I don't ever want to go thru that again. It can be a real crisis when something important has been lost.

And so we know how Mary Magdalene must have felt on that first Easter. Jesus had died and was buried Friday afternoon. Buried in haste because his Jewish family and friends did not have time to do a proper funeral. From 6pm Friday to 6pm Saturday is the Sabbath, and they could not do a funeral on the Sabbath. It had to wait for Sunday morning.

St. John writes: ¹Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

The body is gone... we do not know where it is... it is lost.

This is a big deal for Mary Magdalene. This is not just car keys or eye glasses. This is the remains of someone she loved very much, someone who deserves better than a hastily arranged burial. It's a big deal for Mary and she runs and tells Simon Peter

“Jesus' body is gone, we don't know where it is ... it's lost.”

She later says the same thing to the two messengers:

“Jesus' body is gone, we don't know where it is ... it's lost.”

And again to the One she supposes is the “gardener”:

“Jesus' body is gone, we don't know where it is ... it's lost.

Did you take it?”

This is familiar stuff for us who live in the DC area. The same boondoggle is going on today at Arlington National Cemetery. The remains of our honored dead that should have been handled with the greatest of care and respect are being mishandled, and in some cases are lost.

A grave is opened ... and found to be empty. A grieving family is further traumatized. And a nation is shocked.

And we understand how Mary felt on that first Easter. “Jesus’ body is gone, we don’t know where it is ... it’s **lost**.”

BUT JESUS WAS NOT LOST! He was risen! He was alive!

It took them by surprise. No matter that Jesus had told them a bunch of times that He would go to Jerusalem, be crucified, die, and on the third day rise. It still was too good to be true. It took them by surprise ... they weren’t expecting it. Mary sees an empty tomb and assumes the body is lost. The disciples are inclined to agree with her.

But Jesus was not lost. He had risen, demonstrating the He is the Lord of Life and that – for Him – death does not have the final word.

And Jesus is resurrection and life for all who reach out to receive him as the resurrection and life. And in Christ – for us – death does not have the final word. Oh, Death may win a battle, but Christ has won the war. There is life beyond death. Death is not the final word.

It can be a real crisis when something important has been lost. And it is the language we often use at the time of death: “I’m sorry you lost your mother...I’m sorry you lost your wife.” It is language we use as we search for *something* to say at a difficult time. I use that language all the time.

And then we gather to remind ourselves that the person who died is **not** “lost”. Lost is when you don’t know where something is. We can lose our car keys, our eye glasses. There was one time I lost my day-timer – I never want to do that again. But our loved ones who die in Christ are **not** “lost”. We know exactly where they are. They are **with** their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who rose from the dead, who has defeated the finality of death, and who lives and rules eternally.

They are **with** the Lord and will be kept safe until the day of Resurrection. Then **all** the dead in Christ shall rise to eternal life. And we will be reunited with those who have gone before us.

The cover of last weeks “Time” asked the question “**What if there’s no Hell?**” The article is basically a review of the book “Love Wins” written by Pastor Rob Bell. In his book Pastor Bell speculates that *perhaps* the life, death, and resurrection of Christ will rescue every person who has ever lived.

The headline on the cover of Time is misleading. Pastor Bell is not saying that Hell no longer exists, he’s just wondering if Christ will de-populate it. Perhaps through his death and resurrection Jesus will have saved everyone who has ever lived. Discussing that is the stuff of a Bible study group.

But what I found really odd in the article was this statement of the reporter:

“To take away Hell is to leave the Church without its most powerful sanction. If heaven, however defined, is everyone’s ultimate destination in any event, then what’s the incentive to confess Jesus as Lord in this life?”

The reporter is asking “if **everyone** is going to heaven then why bother confessing Jesus as Lord?” And we would answer – ***because He is!*** With St. Paul in Colossians 1 we confess that Christ created all things and in Christ all things hold together. If there was nothing more to the Gospel, that alone would be reason enough for us to be here in Church and to celebrate. But knowing in addition that Christ has rescued ***me*** from Hell would also be reason enough to be here and to celebrate. And if Pastor Bell were correct and Jesus will ***totally*** depopulate Hell – wouldn’t that be even ***more*** reason to be here and celebrate.

Taking away Hell would not leave us without our most powerful sanction. Taking away Hell would give us our most powerful reason to celebrate.

You and I are here this morning ***not*** because Hell hangs over our heads as a Divine threat. We are here because ...

Jesus is ***not*** lost.

He lives. He’s Lord.

For you and I death has been swallowed up in victory.

Hell holds ***no*** threat for us.

Hell holds ***no*** terror for us.

We are not here to evade Hell but to embrace Heaven.

To celebrate.

To let the *whole world* know

He is risen! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!!