**EASTER—OUR STORY IS AIR, Mt. 28:1-20, Apr. 17/22.**

 Our walk with Jesus resolutely to the cross is finished. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world has done just that! Jesus didn’t dodge any trouble. He faced it head on. Though He struggled beyond all understanding in the garden at Gethsemane, asking God the Father to “take this cup” from Him—that cup being His suffering so much for us—nevertheless He persevered according to His Father’s will & didn’t succumb to temptation. He did not bail on His mission. It’s impossible to place too much emphasis on this. Jesus is 100% God & 100% human--impossible in our understanding of things; but with God, it’s no difficulty at all.

You see, if there was no real temptation for Jesus in the garden, if He was just God, then He wouldn’t really be our substitute. It is essential that we can identify with One who has gone through all that we go through in our human struggles for Him to take our place. Otherwise it’s just a stacked deck. But everything was riding on Jesus’ obeying the will of our Father. The salvation of the whole world was riding on that. It’s not difficult in that context, then, to understand Luke telling us that Jesus sweated drops of blood. He met the devil head on and delivered the knock-out blow. Our Jesus, our Saviour, our King, is victorious and so we are victorious with Him! He is **RISEN!** Jesus has defeated Satan, sin, death and hell—for us!

 The Pharisees’ plan to knock off both Lazarus & Jesus in order to eliminate their religious & political problem couldn’t hold Jesus back. In fact, their testimony, that they had no king but Caesar was indeed true. They’d turned their backs on their real king & accepted an infinitely poorer substitute in the earthly Caesar of Rome—even though they knew that Jesus claimed to be Christ, a king (Jn. 19:15).

 Last week we marvelled at Jesus submitting Himself to the public adoration of Palm Sunday, knowing what was coming in the next number of days. Everyone except Jesus was caught off guard. Even the disciples who fetched Him the donkey(s) to ride on, never clued in to the fact that they were fulfilling the OT prophesy from Zechariah until much later. But it is so evident that God used all circumstances—a true case in point to confirm that all things work together for good, for those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

 Listen to these other truths. “Let His blood be on us & on our children” (Mt. 27:25). Indeed it was, has been ever since, & forever will be. We are all covered, our sins are forgiven, we are redeemed in & by the blood of the Lamb! Will you repeat that with me.

“If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him” (Jn. 11:48). Well Jesus did go on like this. But then He went far beyond raising people from the dead, though He still does that today. More importantly, He raises people to new life & makes them a new creation. The old, sinful way is gone, & the new way of pursuing holiness because God enables us, is come.

When Pilate offers to release Jesus & the crowd instead calls for the insurrectionist, Barabbas, to be released, he asks the crowd, “What, then, shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” Pilate asks the most important question every person must ask him/herself. “What will I do with Jesus?” Will I believe Him for who He says He is? Will I recreate Him into something more manageable—less radical? Will I view Him as a great person? A moral & ethical leader? C. S. Lewis says we don’t have that option. He says we have only 3 options about Jesus: He is either a liar, a lunatic or He’s Lord. Any study would re-veal that lying was inconsistent with anything Jesus spoke. He said too much that was simply profound for Him to be considered a lunatic. You’re really only left with the possibility of recognizing Him as Lord.

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, Caiaphas, the high priest said, “It is better that one

man die for the people than for the whole nation to perish” (Jn. 11:50). But he didn’t just say it; as high priest it was a prophecy. Jesus not only died for the Jewish nation, but for the whole world.

The religious leaders & authorities resorted to treachery to seize Him, illegal court to try Him, slander to charge Him before Pilate, & bribery to silence the truth about Him after the Resurrection, saying his disciples stole the body in the night. Yet all of these desperate attempts to cancel Jesus failed.

In Matthew’s account, the sun stopped shining for 3 hours in the middle of the day during the crucifixion. Darkness came over all the land. It’s a clear symbolism of the darkness of humanity’s ways, the darkness of this crime against God, perpetuated by all of us.

Everyone was convinced Jesus was dead. To hurry the deaths of the 3 on the cross, the soldiers were told to break their legs; but when they came to Jesus, He’d already died. His side was pierced with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood & water. Separation of blood is a sure sign of death. On this 1st Resurrection Sunday, nobody was looking for Jesus. The ladies who went to the tomb with embalming spices certainly weren’t looking for Him alive. The disciples were holed up, terrified behind locked doors.

The temple curtain that separated the people from the Holy of Holies, that is, separated them from closeness & intimacy with God, was torn in 2 when Jesus died. Symbolically and literally, distance from God was eliminated by Jesus’ death & resurrection. The earth shook, the rocks split, the tombs broke open & the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life & after Jesus’ resurrection appeared to many people in Jerusalem (Mt. 27:51-53). Jesus rules over death with life that is in Him.

My question for us today is, if you were God, how would you have conveyed the message of God’s love for us, His desire to redeem His unredeemable people differently. I mean, here we are 2000 years after the resurrection & evil still seems to run rampant in our entire world, whether it’s through wars, extortion, threats, drugs, gang violence, the existence of the unimaginably poor while the obscenely rich go about their indifferent ways, the hatred expressed for one another, the intolerance, the deliberate hurting of “others” of different gender, sexual orientation, race, language, ethnicity, thought, ability. Just how effective was God’s way? What would you do differently if you were God, to arrest people’s attention, to rivet them on God’s truth, to acknowledge God’s grace &express heartfelt gratitude?

Jesus tells the parable of another Lazarus, a beggar at the gate of a rich man. When the beggar died the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died & found himself in hell, in torment & saw Lazarus beside Abraham far away. Thinking he still had the upper hand in the relationship, he asked Abraham to send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water & cool the rich man’s tongue. Ab-raham’s short answer is that there is a great chasm between heaven & hell that can’t be breached. The rich man then wanted Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his 5 brothers & father so they would not come to the same plight as he had. Abraham’s summation is that if they would not listen to Moses & the pro-phets, they would not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead. So what would it take? Someone, not just someone, but the very Son of God, God Himself, rose from the dead, & still people walk this life without the slightest concern for what God has done.

Beloved, the tomb is empty. That’s the defining mark of our faith. The proof of what God has done is there’s no body. One of the neatest details comes from John’s Gospel. The grave clothes—the strips of linen & burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head had been folded up & was separate from the linen. Still in their folds, means that the clothes never looked like they had been taken off. They were lying in their regular folds, as if the body of Jesus had simply evaporated out of them!

Beloved, the tomb is empty. If Jesus’ body had been found—and believe me, every resource has been put in place to try & find it, but without success, because it’s not there to be found—if Jesus’ body had been found, nobody would be talking about Him 2,000 years later, no one would be remembering Him. He’s not like Mohammad, He’s not like Buddha, He’s not like Confucius. He’s alive! He’s risen! And He’s here amongst us this morning! Beloved, do you believe that? Our faith is built on nothing less, but on much more. Jesus’ testimony is air. Empty air. But it’s not really empty air; it is Spirit-filled air; it is Spirit filled truth that extends far beyond the universe that has the power to forgive sins, to restore, to make new, to offer hope where none other exists. And it all rests on the blood of the Lamb of God who gives us the grace of God that gives us life—real life! That is what the empty tomb means.

It’s amazing that the 1st 2 people who confronted the fact of the empty tomb & the risen Christ were Mary Magdalene & the other Mary. They had been there at the cross, they had been there when He was laid in the tomb, & now they were the 1st to receive love’s reward; they were the 1st to know the joy of the Resurrection. Remember that Jesus honoured women, 2nd to none.

And here’s the message they are to convey. 1st, they are urged to **BELIEVE**. While it could seem beyond belief, too good to be true, the angel reminds them of the promise of Jesus & reveals the empty tomb. Every word is a call to believe. There are many today who still feel that the promises of Christ are too good to be true. The only way around that is taking Him at His Word.

2nd, they are urged to **SHARE**. Once they’ve discovered the fact of the Risen Christ, they are to share it with others. “Go, tell!” is the 1st command for us who have discovered the wonder of Christ.

3rd, they are urged to **REJOICE.** The one who has met the Risen Christ must live forever in the joy of His presence. Nothing can part us from Him any more.

 Jesus, 1) assures His followers of His power. They & we are servants of One who’s died & con-quered death & whose authority on earth & in heaven is beyond question. 2) He sent them & us to make all the world His disciples, to point all humanity to Him. 3) He promised them His presence—11 Galileans were sent in conquest of the world. So are we sent, **BUT** with the greatest presence in the world! He’s **RISEN! Go & live Easter!** Henri Nouwen says, now “live every moment as a seed of eternity.”