

4/4/2021

Luke 23:50 - 24:12

Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph. He was a member of the Jewish high council, but he had not agreed with the decision and actions of the other religious leaders. He was from the town of Arimathea in Judea, and he was waiting for the Kingdom of God to come. He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Then he took the body down from the cross and wrapped it in a long sheet of linen cloth and laid it in a new tomb that had been carved out of rock. This was done late on Friday afternoon, the day of preparation, as the Sabbath was about to begin.

As his body was taken away, the women from Galilee followed and saw the tomb where his body was placed. Then they went home and prepared spices and ointments to anoint his body. But by the time they were finished the Sabbath had begun, so they rested as required by the law.

But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes.

The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day."

Then they remembered that he had said this. So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it. However, Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, he peered in and saw the empty linen wrappings; then he went home again, wondering what had happened.

So, in December my husband Dustin and I got a doggie and we named her Honey. Well, this is the first dog I've ever owned and so now

that the days have been getting longer and the weather has been getting warmer, even when it's still pretty chilly outside, Honey has been getting restless and needs to take a walk. And so we've gotta bundle up, get her harness on, and walk around town for a while.

And on our walks over the last few weeks, I've been noticing, like I know you have too, that the grass is getting greener, the birds are singing again, the crocuses and daffodils are peaking up out of the ground and sometimes the warmth of the sun will make me take off my jacket in the middle of my walk. Spring is slowly, but surely, coming!

And these walks have got me thinkin' recently. You see, autumn has always been my favorite season of the year, historically, because the colors of the trees are just so beautiful, first of all, and I love the transition between sweltering heat of the summer into the cooler evenings of autumn. (Remember when we worshipped out here/the park last fall with the gorgeous, colorful trees around us?) Yeah, autumn is pretty great.

But recently on these walks with Honey I've been feeling a little torn because I have to admit that Spring is gaining some headway in the competition for my favorite season! Which is strange, Ya see, because I've never really liked spring before. I've always thought that there's just too

much rain! I'm a person who usually would take snow over rain any day. And the old adage of "April showers bring May flowers" is the very reason I have always had a distain for Spring. I want the May! I don't want April! I want summer sun! I don't want spring rain.

But I have a confession to make to you all this morning: I tend to think that way a lot about life. I tend to want to be at the finish line and not have to run the race, step by step. I want to know how to do something automatically without having to learn the steps and practice at it. And I was the kid in the backseat on childhood road trips that asked every 10 minutes: "Are we there yet?" And just like that, I don't like to experience the April showers, just give me those May flowers, please!

But this year, something seems different. I have a new interest and appreciation for spring that I've never had before. Spring has actually got me thinking and reflecting about this past year. Who else here feels like 2020 and the first few month of 2021 has been more like April showers than May flowers, right? Yeah, and honestly it has been a "when it rains it pours" kind of year, really. It all just has seemed to keep comin, and comin, and comin. And for some of us, it still feels like it's comin. And if you're anything like me, you and I probably aren't always the best at being in the "April shower" seasons of life. I feel ya.

But as I've been walking my doggie Honey around town, as I've been more up close and personal with spring this year, I've had a new perspective on this rainy season. Even though it might be rainy, or even very rainy, or even thunderstorm rainy, when I actually look around at what's happening before my very eyes, I have to notice that although the rains come, the flowers are still poking up out of the ground and the trees are still budding. In the midst of the rainy season, there still is promise of new life coming. And not only the promise – but there is literally evidence of new life coming...before our very eyes.

Jesus' original followers went through the most devastating storm since they each had met Jesus and decided to follow him. This person who they believed would finally save them, this one who they had seen bring dead people back to life, this man who could heal people of contagious and vile diseases, this one who they watched deliver people from demonic bondage into freedom

...this Jesus... became a laughing-stock and was brutally beaten and was pierced through his hands and his feet with nails and...this their dear Jesus died. This person who they loved so much was no more. He no longer breathed. His heart no longer beat. He was dead. Jesus was dead.

And while his followers were still in terrible grieving, some of them went to the tomb to care for his body 2 days after he died. What they expected to see when they arrived at the tomb where he lay was Jesus' lifeless, breathless, and cold body. They were prepared let the tears flow as they cared for Jesus' body. But something happened that they didn't expect.

As our scripture reading said...Jesus wasn't there. When they realized that the tomb was open and that it was empty, I imagine these friends of Jesus just going into an absolute panic! The scripture passage says that the women "stood there puzzled" but that one little word (puzzled) I think, sums up so much emotion and worry and I'm sure so many tears as they tried to figure out what happened to the body of their dear Jesus.

But what they didn't know was that the rolled away stone, the unwrapped linens left behind, and the empty tomb in which they stood were not signs of hopelessness like they thought, but these things that seemed hopeless were actually promise of hope. They were convinced that something horrible had happened: that Jesus' body was stolen by grave robbers, that they'd never see him again and that Jesus' body wouldn't have the proper rest he deserved. But as they would find out, what they thought was devastating was actually miraculous. What they thought was a

dead end was actually a new way. *In the midst of this storm of theirs, there was, instead, the promise of new life.*

And it was the angels that told them about this very fact! These two angelic figures appeared to them at the tomb and said these amazing words, “Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? Jesus isn’t here! He is risen from the dead!”

I just love how the angels break the news to Jesus’ followers here, don’t you? I mean the question that they pose to the women is just so funny to me: “Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive?” To me it’s like the angels didn’t realize where were – uhhh...hello angels...this is a tomb...what do you mean “Why are you looking for the dead”...this is where dead people go – in tombs.

But actually, the angels, of course, knew exactly where they were – this tomb was now the place where God’s own spirit breathed life back into Jesus’ lungs. The angels knew that the place where these women were standing was holy, holy ground. This tomb was not a place of death but a place of abundant life – life that could not be contained, life that not only brought Jesus back from the dead, but this very life was spilling out into these women and soon enough it would spread into the world and bring all sorts of people new life (including you and me!) and someday, be believe,

all of creation will be touched and transformed from death to life. Can I get an amen to that!?

New life. We all want that, don't we? New life? We all want to experience a newness of life that transforms our sadness into joy, that changes our worry into assurance, our shame into beauty, and our darkness into light. Do you want that? I sure do.

So much of life can seem like and feel like April showers. Maybe your life feels like that in this season. Life will always have new problems – have you noticed that? Just when one problem gets solved or goes away, there's always another one. But just like this spring has been teaching me that even in the rain, there is the promise of May flowers... even in the storms of life, the resurrection story has been teaching us this same lesson all along. Through the movement of God's spirit in our lives and in the world, even though we experience seasons of that are more like April showers, the promise of May flowers is still here because JESUS IS ALIVE!

That is the evidence of new life: Jesus is risen and the promise of new life is springing!

Let's pray --