

Barre Congregational Church

April 4, 2021: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Easter Sunday ~

“Who are you looking for? He is Risen!”

Our services can be found on our website at www.barrechurch.com and Facebook page.

Scripture Reading: John 20 v 1-18

I. Introduction:

I am wondering what gives you joy in life. What gives me joy? Hearing the voices of my loved ones, receiving good news, receiving phone calls or messages from people whom I have not heard from in a long time, working in our garden... can't wait! Laughing... I love to laugh, especially when I'm with my family in South Africa. There is usually lots of laughter going on, sometimes over small things! What else gives us joy? Good news from the doctor's, finding something that had been lost, finding a job we have been looking for, and seeing circumstances change for the better. These are all things that give us joy and peace of mind. Let us explore our passage and see how the empty tomb made the disciples and the women who followed Jesus feel when they discovered He was gone, and then to find out that He was alive!

II. The Empty Tomb

John describes the dramatic empty tomb situation in almost five different scenes: First scene, The discovery of the empty tomb by Mary Magdalene early in the morning on the first day of the week, and her running to Peter and the Beloved Disciple to let them know; second scene, Peter and the other disciple running to the tomb to see for themselves, seeing the strips of linen and the burial cloth that was around Jesus' head; third Scene, Mary Magdalene, the empty tomb and the two angels; fourth scene, her encounter with Jesus, and fifth scene, Mary going to tell the disciples she saw Him.

This passage is filled with drama, with shock, difficult emotions, a huge miracle, and joy, all at once! All of it to give birth to the extraordinary event of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. John's Gospel gives a little bit of a different account than the other three Gospels, for example in the others we read about more women who were present, whereas here we see Mary Magdalene as

the only woman who was a witness to the empty tomb and His resurrected Body. The time between His death, burial and the empty tomb can only be described as a big hole of darkness for those early disciples and the women like Mary Magdalene. His presence, His love, His endearing Spirit, that gave them meaning in life, were all gone.

To arrive at the empty tomb must have shaken their worlds even more. Who would have done such a thing to steal the Body of their dear Christ! Did they not do enough to bring only pain to them and His family? They, the ones who could not stand His message of love and compassion and justice. They who crucified Him. We do not know for sure what they must have felt as they arrived at the empty tomb. We know that Mary Magdalene's message made Peter and the other disciple run, their hearts pounding, just to get to see for themselves what happened.

III. Who are you looking for? He is Risen!

Mary Magdalene's encounter with the angels is short. She did not go home like the other disciples did. She stayed, and she was weeping, and then she looked inside the tomb to see for herself what happened. There they were, two angels sitting where Jesus' body was. She receives the first question from the angels, "Why are you crying?", they asked her. They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they put His body. They did not answer her. When she looked around and saw this other person, the apparent gardener, He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? He also asked her another question, "Who is it that you're looking for?". This person saw her tears, but went further than the angels, and asked her whom she was looking for. He saw the sorrow and the shock and the complex emotions she was feeling. He then brought her pain to an end by calling her name, "Mary!" That is all He needed to say, and her eyes opened and recognized Him as her Lord. He called her name, and she recognized Him. Whether she knew and realized that He was risen from the dead as He said He would, we don't know, but He is here, right in front of her. "I have seen the Lord", we read she tells the disciples when she saw them. She was filled with joy.

The disciple whom Jesus loved, saw the empty tomb and he believed, says the text. Leon Morris says it so nicely. He must have believed, even though he did not fully understand the resurrection. Who would have understood it? It was a mystery! It just happened! Even though Christ told them He would rise again, they had no idea what it meant.

IV. Who are you looking for? He is risen!

This is the power of Easter. It is about the Risen Christ who changes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday into a powerful Resurrection. We do not have to wander around and be asked by others whom we are looking for. We have our Christ Who is Risen. He has turned suffering into victory, victory over death! This Risen Christ knows our names, each one of our names. When we are distraught, afraid, feeling lost, angry, Christ is standing behind us, He is with us, calling our names. He is the Christ who asks what is wrong, why are we crying or why are we angry, and when Christ does, we will know it is Him, because of His love and compassion that fill our whole being. Whom are you looking for? What a powerful question coming from Christ, our Lord. Powerful, because after He said it, He became recognizable to Mary Magdalene. He appeared and gave Mary Magdalene and the disciples what they needed, restoration from their pain and loss and sadness. He appeared at their lowest and brought them great joy!

V. Conclusion

So, it looks like we do not have to look very far for help, for deliverance from sin or suffering, because the work has been done for us. Christ knows what and whom you and I are looking for. Christ knows us at our highest and our lowest points, and He knows our names like the Good Shepherd knows the name of every sheep. This is the message of Easter, that Christ is Risen, He is here, and we can rejoice in it. Yes, we can jump up and down, we can run and tell others about the joy we feel when we hear Christ's voice. We need not be ashamed of it, because it is a message that the world needs so much right now.

Have a blessed Easter everyone! Amen