

EASTER

April 16, 2017

St. John 20:11-18: ***“He Is Risen!”***

The Wound of Death Is Vanquished”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It has been suggested by some, with no supporting evidence, that Jesus did not really die on the cross, and so his resurrection was a sham. Didn't die?! Really?! Bloody sweat in the garden, beatings, severe scourging, crucifixion, and the apostle John writes that when the Roman soldiers came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead and did not break his legs. Rather, one of them pierced his side with a spear, and blood and water flowed from the body of our Lord and Savior (John 19:31-37). You know, medical experts say that the blood and water was a sure and certain indication that Jesus was truly dead when they took him down from the cross.

Now add to that being wrapped in linen with about seventy-five pounds of spices and left in a cold tomb and you end up nodding your head in agreement with Pamela Ewen when she writes: "It is even more ludicrous to suppose that, had he lived, he would have been able to appear on that same day to numerous people in various locations as a healthy, happy, whole person." Indeed! Keep in mind, not only does Jesus appear at the tomb, but he walks miles to the village of Emmaus with some of the disciples on the day of the resurrection (Luke 24).

Then there are the chief priest who paid the solders and said to them: "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble (Matthew 28:13-14)." Now think about this. There were Roman guards at the tomb. The penalty for failing to guard what you are supposed to guard is death. I love what John Chrysostom of Antioch says about this:

For indeed even this establishes the resurrection, the fact I mean of their saying, that the disciples stole Him. For this is the language of men confessing, that the body was not there. When therefore they confess the body was not there, but the stealing it is shown to be false and incredible, by their watching it, and by the seals, and by the timidity of the disciples, the proof of the resurrection even hence appears incontrovertible.

The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians [3-8], in what is often called "The Great Resurrection Chapter of the Bible:

he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures . . . he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

What if we had each person that witnessed the resurrected Lord come up here this morning and talk for just 15 minutes, giving a little testimony to what they saw? If we listened to the testimony of all the people that Jesus appeared to for just 15 minutes, we would be here all day today and tonight, Monday and Monday night, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and sometime early Friday morning they would be finally wrapping up their testimony. It would take over 128 strait hours just to hear, for 15 minutes each, the

testimony of those who saw the Lord after he rose from the dead! Please keep in mind that these people lived as witnesses that could be cross-examined. Many of these witness died because they refused to deny the resurrection. Some of this testimony even comes from people who initially refused to believe in the resurrection, such as Thomas and Paul. The close of our Gospel lesson reads, "Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord' and that he had said these things to her." This is astounding as Mary lived in a day and age when the testimony of women was often dismissed.

There is so much more that we could say about these things. We have hardly scratched the surface. Every human being needs to face it and one day will face it - something astounding and wonderful happened on that first Easter morning. Jesus rose from the grave! And that is the problem. If anyone would face these things, it would change everything. No wonder then that this unbelieving world does everything in its power to put Jesus to death in order to remain in sin - doing whatever they want to do.

But we know better than this, having been called to faith. He has been raised in us. We have died to sin and even now live in him while looking forward to our own resurrection from the dead and all that it means. John writes:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us - that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete (1 John 1:1-4).

Indeed! That we may participate! That we might be like him. It is amazing to consider that manifested life has made its way to us through testimony - preaching - but it has - by the power of the Holy Spirit. **He is Risen!** And with his resurrection, **The Wound of Death is Vanquished!** What a miracle it is that we are raised from unbelief to a living faith!

Mary could not accept death. She had no doubt that her Lord and Teacher was dead. She had witnessed the horror of it all. Standing beside Jesus' mother, she saw the light die in his eyes as he hung there on the cross. She saw them take his limp body down from the wood. He was dead. But it was not right. It was not right because he was innocent. We deserve to die because of sin. He became sin for us.

Not only that, but at this point it was very important for Mary to see and touch the body again, even finish the care of the body that had started when it was first laid in the tomb. How else could she face tomorrow? Mary's grief is of such a magnitude that angels don't faze her. She turns and almost runs into Jesus who died for her. He gently asks, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seek?" It's as if the Lord is saying to her, "if you were to really consider the one you are seeking, you would know that death cannot hold him, and you would no longer be weeping." But she cannot seem to hear because she is so overwhelmed in the grief of death. "Sir," she cries, "if you have carried him away, tell me where you

have laid Him, and I will take him away?" It all changes when Jesus says one word: "Mary." His sheep hear his voice, he calls them by name and they are his.

And then she knows. **He is Risen! The Wound of Death is Vanquished!** He stands there. Not an illusion or some wishful thinking. It is here that Mary's grief is taken away as well as ours. What Jesus has done on the cross is real and for us. He calls us by name. He says to each of us, "I am alive! Your sins are forgiven! I am here to wipe your tears of grief away! You are mine!"

There was a missionary in Brazil who discovered a tribe of Indians in a remote part of the jungle. They lived near a large river. The tribe was in need of medical attention. A contagious disease was ravaging the population. People were dying daily. A hospital was not too terribly far away - across the river, but the Indians would not cross it because they believed the river was inhabited by evil spirits. And to enter its water would mean certain death.

The missionary explained how he had crossed the river and was unharmed. But they were not impressed. He then took them to the bank and placed his hand in the water. They still wouldn't go in. He walked into the water up to his waist and splashed water on his face. It didn't matter. They were still afraid to enter the river. Finally, he dove into the river, swam beneath the surface until he emerged on the other side. He raised a triumphant fist into the air. He had entered the water and escaped. It was then that the Indians broke into a cheer and followed him across.

Isn't that what Jesus has done? He has entered the river of death and hell and has come out on the other side. We are no longer afraid because he has done it for us. He calls us by name that we may no longer grieve or fear death. Instead, we come out on the other side of eternal life!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott

Note: the story above is retold by an unknown author, but is originally from Max Lucado's book, "Six Hours One Friday." I have not read the book and am not endorsing it.