

LOOK INSIDE THE EMPTY TOMB!

A man was walking down the street one night when he saw his neighbor boy on his hands and knees on the sidewalk under a street light. The man asked, "Jimmy, did you lose something?" Jimmy said, "Yea, I lost the money my mom gave me for some ice cream." Feeling sorry for the boy, the man got down on his hands and knees and started looking for the money. After a while, the man said to Jimmy, "I don't see your money anywhere. Are you sure this is where you lost it?" Jimmy said, "No, I think I lost it across the street." The man said, "You lost it over there? Why are you looking over here?" Jimmy said, "It's really dark over there. I can see a lot better over here." No matter how hard or long Jimmy looked, he would never find the money because he was looking in the wrong place.

Couldn't the same thing be said about the women in our text on the first Easter morning? They were on their way to find the body of Jesus but they were going to be looking in the wrong place, his tomb. They were soon going to find out that when they looked inside the tomb, Jesus was not there. It was empty except for the angels. They would find out that the empty tomb was not a bad thing but a beautiful and glorious thing because it meant that Jesus rose from the dead. This morning as we celebrate our Savior's resurrection, let's go with the women and **look inside the empty tomb**. Look inside and find relief. Look inside and find hope.

Try and imagine for a moment what it would have been like to have been one of those women walking to the tomb of Jesus on that first Easter morning. You are slowly walking to do something you don't really want to do and can't believe you have to do. You are going to Jesus' tomb to unwrap the lifeless body of Jesus and finish the embalming by putting spices and perfumes on his beaten and lacerated body as your final act of love toward him. No wonder everyone is walking slowly and not saying much. You are all still in a state of shock because someone whom you loved so much was brutally killed. You never even had a chance to say goodbye. Now as you are walking, the thought comes into your mind. Who will roll the stone away from the entrance? Maybe you won't be able to do what you intended to do after all. The burden you are carrying in your heart is overwhelming and almost too much to bear. Why? You believe Jesus is dead.

As you come here this morning to look inside Jesus' tomb, are you carrying any heavy burdens in your heart? Maybe you have the burden of spending your first Easter without your loved one who died this past year. Maybe you are facing weeks of chemo. Maybe you have a loved one on his/her deathbed. Maybe you are having parenting issues with your teenager or problems with your spouse. Maybe you are disappointed in yourself because you are letting your friends and your sinful nature influence you to do things you know are not pleasing in God's sight. Maybe you are upset about some angry words you spoke that you wish you could put back into your mouth or some foolish thing you did that hurt your family or friends. Let's face it. We are sinners who live in a sinful world. We often carry heavy burdens in our hearts. When you are hurting, when you are troubled by your sins or upset with things you have done or failed to do, do you ever for the moment act as though Jesus were dead? You see, a dead Jesus isn't going to help anyone.

My friends, when you are carrying heavy burdens, you need to go to Jesus' tomb like the women did on that first Easter morning and look inside. When they did, to their surprise, Jesus was not there. Where was he? They needed an explanation and boy, did they ever get one. **While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.** What a question the angels asked! They were looking for Jesus but they came to the wrong place. A tomb is for dead people. Jesus was alive. Looking for Jesus among the dead would be like looking for an ice cube in a blazing fire pit or a cruise ship in the middle of a desert. You won't find them because that's not where they are supposed to be. Jesus was not in the tomb because that's not where he was supposed to be. He was alive. The

angels even reminded the women that Jesus had told them he would rise on the third day. As the women rushed off to tell the disciples, the Gospel writer Matthew tells us that Jesus appeared to the women. Then their burdens that were so heavy were gone.

This morning the angels share that same message with us. God directs our eyes to the tomb and tells us to look inside to see that it's empty. Do you realize what that means for our lives? It means that when stress and troubles come our way and our burdens start to overwhelm us, we have a living Savior who says **Cast all your anxieties on me because I care for you.** When we get scared with things that are happening in the world or with something that is going on in our personal lives, we have a living Savior who says. **Be still and know that I am God.** Looking inside the empty tomb gives us relief. It also gives us hope. When we think about all those nasty words that have come from our lips, all those actions that have hurt others, all those hateful, immoral thoughts that come into our minds, and then we wonder, "How could God allow a sinful human being like me into his sinless heaven?" and the devil whispers in our ears, "He won't," our living Savior reminds us **Fear not for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name; you are mine.**

Let me share with you a story which really points out what Easter is all about. You may have heard this before but it's worth hearing again. A week before Easter, a teacher gave her 8 students one of those plastic Easter eggs and told them to put something in the egg that reminded them of life. The students were in 3rd grade. The last day of school before Easter the students put the Easter eggs on their teacher's desk. She opened them one by one. One had a little seed and said that it would grow into a flower. Another had a picture of a small butterfly and said how this would come out of a cocoon. The teacher then came to Steven's egg. Steven was a very sick child who was also mentally handicapped. The teacher opened his egg and it was empty. She assumed that the assignment had been too difficult for him and didn't want to embarrass him so she went to the next egg. Steven started waving his hand and said, "Teacher, look at my egg." The teacher said, "I did Steven but it's empty." Steven said, "So was Jesus' tomb and that's a sign of new life." She got a big smile on her face and said to him. "You are right Steven." That little boy along with his classmates knew that Jesus' empty tomb meant life, eternal life for them.

A few months later Steven became very ill and died. At the funeral, during the service, the 7 classmates of Steven walked up and placed their eggs on his casket. All of the eggs were open and empty as the congregation sang "I know that my Redeemer lives." That, my friends, is the heart and core of our Easter message. When all is said and done, when a person's life comes to an end, what can be more important than the message? "The egg is empty and so is Jesus' tomb." What greater comfort is there when we are at the grave of a loved one than to know that on the last day, you won't find your loved one in a cemetery! There will be no reason for looking for the living among the dead. The empty tomb of Jesus means life, eternal life for all who believe in him.

This is why Easter is the most glorious day in the history of the world. It is even more glorious than the Last Day because without Easter, the last day would be filled with terror as God would send all people to their eternal destruction in hell. We don't have to worry about that because of Easter. As we look inside the empty tomb, as we think about the relief a living Savior gives and the sure hope of forgiveness and salvation that he won for us, how can we keep this good news and joy to ourselves? There are so many people all around us who only look at Easter as springtime or the Easter bunny; so many people who are walking slowly with all of their burdens, especially their burden of sin; people who have no idea about where they will spend their eternity; people who are going through life and basically just spinning their wheels because they don't know the tomb was empty. The only cure for them is to lead them to look inside the empty tomb. Every time we gather around the Word and Sacrament, we look up at the cross of Christ and then we look inside the empty tomb to find strength, comfort and hope. We know that our Redeemer lives. Isn't that something we want everyone to know? My friends, with your words and actions, with your offerings, spread the good news that Jesus' tomb is empty; that Jesus is alive; that forgiveness and salvation are ours through him. What joy it is to be able to say with big smiles on our faces! He is risen! (He is risen indeed.) Alleluia! Amen.