

John 20:3-9  
Easter Festival Service  
April 4, 2010

**John 20:3-9 (New International Version)**

<sup>3</sup>So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. <sup>4</sup>Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup>He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. <sup>6</sup>Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, <sup>7</sup>as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. <sup>8</sup>Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. <sup>9</sup>(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

Splendiferous! That's the word that comes to my mind about Easter (yes, I checked, it is a word). Easter is not your ordinary day. The Savior returned to life. We try to reflect that splendiferous nature of the day with the joy and celebration of our service with the return of all the "Alleluias" and joyous hymns and the festive surroundings. Yet some people have difficulty with Easter. Because it's not your everyday experience they think it can't be true. The false report that the Jewish religious leaders bribed the guards to tell namely, that they fell asleep and the disciples came and stole the body of Jesus, still circulates. We need not let such claims dampen our celebration. There is abundant proof of the resurrection, for example, all the witnesses of the risen Lord mentioned in an earlier reading. As we consider the final cross piece presented in the text we note

**EASTER IS FOR BELIEVING - We look at**

**I. The evidence in the tomb v 3-8**

**II. The testimony of Scripture v 9**

There is evidence in the tomb for us to believe the Easter miracle. Peter and John made the trip there because they had been summoned by Mary Magdalene. She was part of the group of women that had headed out to Jesus' burial place with spices early that Sunday morning in order to finish anointing His body. When they arrived they discovered that the stone was gone from the entrance. Mary right away rushed to tell Peter and John, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

Such a report sparked their interest so they headed out. Along the way the text actually says, "They began running." Something happened to spur them on. It is likely they met the rest of the women who had stayed longer than Mary, heard the angels affirm the resurrection and remind them of how Jesus had said He would rise. They took off, with John running faster and arriving first. He was likely younger than Peter.

What he saw riveted him to the spot. As the women had said, the tomb was open, although he saw no angels. As John stared inside, there were the strips of linen that had been wound around the body with spices between the layers, right where His friends had left Jesus' body on Friday evening, except they were empty, with no body inside. Peter caught up with John, rushed right in when he got there and saw the same scene. It didn't seem like the scene of a robbery, for grave robbers would want to get away quickly and would take body and all. If friends had come and rewrapped His body not all would be so precisely and neatly in place. What then had happened? Jesus had returned to life, now in a glorified condition, no longer subject to our normal limitations of space and time. It had been more than a case of waking up from a coma and struggling to get free or cutting off the linen. The linens were

undisturbed. There to the side was the burial cloth that had been around His head, neatly folded or rolled up. Again, it reflected a deliberate, unhurried departure.

The sight produced a result. "He saw and believed." That sentence is referring to John. It must be true. Jesus was alive. But where was He? I even once heard some pastors note with a tone of disappointment in the lectionary cycle in one of the years like this, when the Easter gospel was not an account of meeting Jesus, about how odd it is to have Easter without seeing Jesus. Something like that must have played on the mind of John as there is no mention of his sharing his conclusion with Peter or anyone else. He believed but his faith was weak. So he was not bragging. He was admitting he was no stronger than Thomas, whose experience John records at the end of the chapter. Remember how Thomas had to see in order to believe. John's faith in the resurrection was based on sight alone at this point.

Peter could have used some encouragement from him. Do you recall the statement Luke made about him in the first message we heard in this service? "He went away, wondering to himself what had happened." There was not much joy in this scene. Easter is for believing and their faith was not glowing yet.

## II.

More proof was available and it would come to them in the testimony of Scripture. Easter had to happen. John noted, "They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." In time, they would be reminded. It was there in the Old Testament. Isaiah 53, the grand chapter that told of God's suffering servant who was despised and rejected, brought as a lamb to the slaughter bearing the iniquity of us all, also said He would see the light of life, see his offspring and prolong his days. The psalms also alluded to a living Savior, most notably Psalm 16, where David asserted, "You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay," a reference that clearly did not apply to David himself. The Messiah was also termed a priest forever and described as ruling forever.

The thread of such truths God weaved throughout the Scriptures. Jesus explained the prophecies to the pair of believers walking to Emmaus on Easter afternoon, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets." That evening with the whole group of believers gathered in Jerusalem He said, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." There were types and imagery of the Savior in events from the past. Jesus previously had referred to the sign of Jonah, who was three days in the great fish, picturing His stay in the tomb. There was the time when the crowds mistook His words for the temple in which they worshiped instead of His body. He had said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." If the Bible said it (and it did) it had to happen. God does not lie. Jesus also foretold the disciples of His suffering and dying, but also rising again a number of times. Every prophecy of the Word concerning the Savior Jesus fulfilled completely. He didn't leave even a t uncrossed. He did it all.

There is another part of the necessity. The only way you and I could be saved was by Jesus. We couldn't lift a finger to remove our sins. It took the God-man to live a perfect life and to die innocently as our substitute. Easter was the Father's stamp of acceptance on His payment for us.

Easter is certain. Scripture's testimony is there in black on white. Our faith is not based on emotions. That's another claim of the skeptics. Some maintain that the wishful thinking of Jesus' followers so possessed them that eventually they convinced themselves that He was alive when He wasn't. When we see the fear they had that weekend and their slowness to accept the fact that Jesus had truly risen, we realize it was anything but wishful thinking or gullibility on their part.

There was no faulty vision either. There are times when we are positive we heard or saw something that did not truly occur. Desert travelers are famous for seeing mirages of places for refreshment. The Bible's record is absolutely reliable. It's what produces the faith that meets God's approval as Jesus told Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet

have believed." That fits us. We were not there to talk to the risen Lord but we have been convinced as the Holy Spirit worked through the testimony of Scripture.

That Easter faith exerts effects. There's a story about Martin Niemoeller, a German pastor who was imprisoned by the Nazis for several years. After his release he was invited to speak. The press thronged to hear him, but many walked away expressing disappointment. "All those years in a Nazi prison camp and all he wants to talk about is Jesus Christ!" You and I aren't surprised, are we? We share his passion for our risen Lord. Don't be quiet like John was on Easter day. A famous atheist has commented, "If I believed in a risen Savior, I would do a lot more telling about it than you Christians do." We have reason to spread the news through all the world. Everybody needs to know the Good News of Jesus. Let's tell them!

Easter changes our entire existence. It alters the purpose of life now. We don't live for ourselves but "for him who died for us and was raised again." Our goal is not the accumulation of a pile of earthly goods (In other words, life is not summed up by the slogan once promoted, "The one who dies with the most toys wins."). Nor is the desire for fame our driving force. We want to glorify Jesus with our lives. We strive to obey God's commands, not wishing to return to the sinful ways that caused Jesus' suffering and death. We witness to our Savior and share the great news we celebrate today.

Above all Easter changes our eternity. Because our sins have been removed we will follow Jesus in rising from death. On the Last Day our graves will be opened and we will come forth with a glorified body like His resurrection body, reunited with our soul to spend forever in heaven. Jesus provides an Easter gift that is better than any candy or eggs. And it will never be used up or worn out.

The testimony of the linen strips and most of all, of Scripture, tells us Easter is for believing and for celebrating with joy. Jesus lives! The victory is won. Alleluia! Amen.