

**EASTER EVE SERMONETTE     APRIL 10, 2004**  
**St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI**

**WHERE IS HE? YOU EXPECT ONE THING AND FIND ANOTHER. John 20:1-9**

When you go to visit a cemetery what do you expect to find? We normally expect that you will find graves that are filled with the remains of people who have died. If you have gone back to the grave of a loved one a day or two after you buried them, you expect to find a mound of dirt and possibly a bouquet or two that are turning brown and are dying.

When Mary Magdalene went to the garden and the tomb where Jesus had been buried on Friday afternoon, she expected to find the large stone that had been rolled in front of the grave when they had left that place on Friday. In fact, she and the other women were wondering who they were going to get to roll the stone away so that they could finish the process of putting spices on Jesus' body for burial. Remember on Friday Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had brought 75 pounds of spices to put on Jesus' body and they wrapped it in strips of linen in keeping with Jewish burial customs. Mary and the other women were now coming back to complete the preparation of the body.

As we consider Matthew's account of what happened we will focus our attention on the question: **Where Is He? You Expect One Thing and You Find Another. I) Why Was Mary Upset? and II) What Had Happened?**

**WHY WAS MARY UPSET?**

If you went back to visit the grave of a loved one and found that the body was gone, wouldn't you be upset and disturbed. Remember a few years ago people who had their loved ones buried in a cemetery in Milwaukee found that their loved ones were not in the graves that they were supposed to be in. This caused quite a stir and even some lawsuits.

Just think how Mary must have felt. She had seen where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had put Jesus' body. She knew that they had rolled a large stone in front of the grave. Now when she came back to the tomb on Sunday morning, the stone was rolled away and the body of Jesus was missing. What did she do? She ran to tell two of Jesus' disciples, Peter and John. She said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put him." (v. 2)

What did Peter and John do? Well, seeing is believing right? So they run to the graveyard to see if what Mary told them was really the case. Sure enough. John gets there first and looks in the grave and sees the strips of linen lying there but no body. When Peter gets there, he doesn't stand outside, he immediately goes into the tomb and finds the strips of linen as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head lying there. John followed Peter into the tomb. Matthew tells us that John saw and believed. The men were now convinced that Jesus' body was gone. But how strange. The burial cloths were still there. Whoever had taken the body had left the strips of linen that had been wrapped about Jesus' body and the cloth that had been put around his head was still there carefully folded up. That's a mystery isn't it? If someone had taken the body, why had they removed all the burials cloths? It certainly would have been easier to carry the body carefully wrapped up then removing all the strips of linen that had been carefully wrapped around our Lord's arms, legs and body.

**WHAT HAD HAPPENED?**

What had happened here? Matthew comments at the end of our reading, "They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." (v. 9) After being with Jesus for three years and hearing him tell them that he was going to die and then rise again, they did not understand that. What had happened? Jesus had

risen from the dead. He was alive. He had defeated our final enemy, death. The grave could not hold him in. He had come back to life body and soul intact and well. This is the message of Easter. Death has been conquered. The grave is not the end for any of us or our final resting place. It is merely a place where our bodies will be placed when our souls are separated from them. There is a day appointed when the bodies and souls of all people will be reunited. All believers in Christ will then body and soul emerge from their graves and we will be changed. We will be perfect and holy – both our bodies and our souls. Why? Jesus rose from the grave. He tells us, “Because I live, you also will live.” (John 14:19b) This is the good news of Easter. This is the foundation of our Christian faith. That is why we are here tonight to celebrate and that is why we gather weekly to rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave.

We don't have to be sad any longer. We don't have to mourn and sorrow as people who have no hope. We can even face our own death and the deaths of fellow believers with confidence and peace. For we know that Jesus Christ rose from the grave and because he lives, we also shall live forever and rise victorious from our graves.

Amen