

**April 19, 2009**  
**“Empty Tombs”**  
**Isaiah 53:3-5 (NLT)**

How many know that Jesus is as much alive today as He was last Sunday? How many know that the tomb is just as empty today as it was last Sunday? The stone was rolled away and Jesus was free of the tomb. I want you to notice the people Jesus went out of His way to make sure they knew He had risen and was alive. People like Mary Magdalene, Peter, Thomas, and the two on the road to Emmaus.

The crucifixion was a shock to the disciples. It is not what they were expecting. They didn't get it. They didn't understand that according to their scriptures the Messiah had to die on a cross and three days later arise from the dead. When the crucifixion took place their faith was rocked. But after His resurrection we see the risen Lord seeking out these discouraged, disheartened disciples. Now He could have treated them as they had treated Him. They weren't there for Him in His greatest need, why should He be there for them now? But no, the Lord sought them out.

The first is Mary Magdalene. She was called that because her name was Mary and she came from Magdala. Magdala was a city on the southwest coast of the Sea of Galilee that had a reputation for prostitution. Some believe that Mary had been a prostitute. Though it can't be confirmed she is often associated with the person described in Luke 7: 37-39 as the immoral woman who knelt at Jesus' feet, weeping. Her tears fell on His feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. (V39) “When the Pharisee who had invited (Jesus to dinner) saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!’”

Mary is also associated with the woman caught in adultery who Jesus saved from stoning. However, again, it can not be confirmed that this was Mary Magdalene. We do know for sure is that Jesus cast seven demons from her, and after that she became one of His followers.

Mary witnessed most of the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus. She heard Pilate pronounce the death sentence, she saw Jesus beaten and humiliated by the crowd. She stood near Jesus during the crucifixion, and she was at the tomb early Sunday morning.

Jesus appeared to her on that first Easter Sunday morning. Why? Why her? The events of the last few days could make her question if she was really forgiven. If Jesus is not the Savior, she is still in her sin. And if she was a prostitute I'm sure she had much regret, shame, and hurt in her life. And so she is the first one the Lord appears to in order to assure her.

Next let's talk about Peter. When Mary Magdalene, went to the tomb just after sunrise, (with some others) they noticed that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Don't be alarmed. "You are

looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.... But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

Why did he say go, tell the disciples AND Peter...I mean why not, go tell the disciples and James or and John? Why Peter. Peter had denied knowing Jesus, was made aware of his guilt, and cried bitterly. Imagine how he was feeling. A mans man who had a profitable fishing business at one time; who prided himself on saying, "If everyone else deserts you I wouldn't. You can count on me. I will die with you if I have to." Then acts like a complete coward to a servant girl's statements. That is why he broke down and wept bitterly. Peter needed to be restored, so Jesus makes sure that Peter knows of His resurrection.

Thomas wasn't there when Jesus appeared to the disciples. Thomas was skeptical of the disciples reports that Jesus was alive and that they had "seen the Lord." Jesus comes back when the disciples are together this time with Thomas present. And it seems to me that Jesus came back just for this one person, Thomas, to rekindle his faith.

And how about those two discouraged followers of Jesus walking to the village of Emmaus? Jesus seeks them out and as He speaks with them their heart reignite; their hearts were moved and burned within them, then they realized it was Jesus who came to restore their hope.

You see, the resurrected Jesus reminds us that God is a God of second chances. Jesus died to forgive sin and to make us new and whole. I am finally getting to our Scripture reading for today, Isaiah 53:3-5 (NLT)

He was despised and rejected—  
a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.  
We turned our backs on him and looked the other way.  
He was despised, and we did not care.  
Yet it was our weaknesses he carried;  
it was our sorrows that weighed him down.  
And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God,  
a punishment for his own sins!  
But he was pierced for our rebellion,  
crushed for our sins.  
He was beaten so we could be whole.  
He was whipped so we could be healed.

Isaiah wrote that Jesus would die for our sins, and He would also carry our weaknesses and our sorrows. Our weaknesses and sorrows include our anxieties, our sickness, our grief, our hurts, our pains, our mental anguish, our heart break, our shame, our guilt which is lifted from our shoulders and put on his.

Jesus said (John 14: 19b), “Because I live, you also will live.” Jesus was not just talking about life after death. Of course that is part of it. Because He arose from the dead, we will live even after we die, we have eternal life. But Jesus is also saying that because He lives, and because we who believe are branches connected to the vine, that is, we are attached to Jesus, we are in Him and He is in us, therefore, He is our life. Our life is dependent on His life. No death is final whether physical, emotional, or psychological.

During your lifetime you have experienced many deaths. They came because of disappointments, betrayals, failures of others. They came because of abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. They came because of divorce, job loss, or the loss of a dream and something inside you dies. Then you put up walls of protection, and they work to some degree, you feel protected ...but dead. You are in a tomb covered with a large stone. But listen, just like physical death, these deaths are not final because of Jesus.

I received an Easter greeting from our District Superintendent, Rev. Art Alexander. He wrote about Maya Angelou. Here’s what he said:

“Perhaps one of the better known poets of our time is Maya Angelou. When she was seven years old, one night she was raped by a neighbor. She told her grandmother, who called the police. Her assailant was arrested and put in prison. Even criminals in prisons have codes. So they tortured and killed her assailant.

“In Maya’s seven year old mind and heart, already severely traumatized by the rape, she couldn’t deal with it. Quite naturally, she blamed herself. The effect of this was so severe that for almost ten years she was unable to speak. She was put in special schools, seen as retarded, abnormal, handicapped. And this, too, was psychologically and socially devastating. It’s hard to imagine a more wounded, broken childhood than hers.

“But she recovered, learned to speak again, and became a gifted speaker, opera singer, writer and poet. More importantly, you can’t find a woman more fully alive than her. Vibrant, gracious, she has style, warmth, gracefulness, faith, and love, and an exceptional sense of humor.

“She was truly dead in every sense of the word but physically. When Jesus died on the cross, and then rose again, He defeated all deaths. He can bring life back up when it’s in total defeat. There is resurrection. And this puts all wounds and deaths into a completely different focus.

“I believe that Jesus was resurrected from the dead because of the many Maya Angelous that I have known.

“I once saw an Easter card that ended with this prayer ‘May you leave behind you a string of empty tombs.’”

Start today to leave behind you an empty tomb. What is your place of death? Jesus wants to carry your weaknesses, sorrows and sins so why do you still try to carry them. He has step out of the grave, so you can step out with Him, in Him. He has rolled away the stone, opened the door, but it is up to you to step out of death into life. You must trust Jesus and not your strategy which keeps you in the tomb.

Imagine a door in front of you today. On one side is death, on the other is life. Will you walk through? It's frightening. It feels safe on that side, you feel dead, but safe. You will leave death, but you will also leave behind the way you have learned to cope with life. A strategy that helps but leaves you empty inside. Stepping through this door to life feels more like death. But you know that you need to leave that old life behind and live by faith in Jesus.

Jesus removes the stone so that you, with Him, can walk out of the open tomb. Maybe you have doubts or fears today. Maybe you have hurts, pain, guilt, shame. The same Jesus who restored Mary, Peter, the disciples on the Emmaus Road, and the skeptical Thomas, will restore your faith your hope...can restore you. You too can discover that Jesus gives second chances. Today because of Jesus you can walk out of that tomb of fear, shame, guilt, death to have your love revived, trust restored, dreams rekindled, and hope renewed. Because He lives, you can face tomorrow...triumphantly!