

Someone once said that a walk through a cemetery is a good way to regain one's perspective. Here are some fascinating and true inscriptions on some old tombstones. "Here lies an Atheist. All dressed up and no place to go." "Here lies Ezekial Aikle, Age 102. Only the good die young." Here lies the body of Jonathan Blake. Stepped on the gas instead of the brake." Finally in a cemetery in England we find this one: "Remember as you walk by, As you are now, so once was I. As I am now, so shall you be. Remember this and follow me." Someone actually wrote a reply on that tombstone: "To follow you I'll not consent. Until I know which way you went!"

Today we enter the garden of the empty tomb just outside Jerusalem. Perhaps some of you have actually had the opportunity to visit one of the real-world locations in the Holy Lands. I myself have been fortunate enough to visit there once when I was 13, and again after I graduated from College. As far as cemeteries go, it is a peaceful and quiet place. Although there is debate as to whether the Garden tomb site is the actual place where Jesus was buried on that first Good Friday, it does give one a powerful image of what that first Easter must have been like. There is a cave in the rock—just as described in scripture. And a large stone has been rolled away from the entrance, just as it would have been found on that morning long ago.

In our narrative this morning we observe Mary Magdalene and the other Mary on their way to see the tomb of Jesus. The Sabbath day of rest is over, and it is dawn on Sunday, the first day of the week. Just a few days earlier they had watched Jesus die on a cross, had witnessed Joseph of Arimathea take Jesus' body, wrap it in clean linen, place it in a new tomb, and seal him inside of it. So more than likely the two women expected to see nothing but a tomb containing a corpse. After all, no one, to their knowledge, had ever been brought back to life

without the help of a Prophet given power by God, or by the Lord Jesus who they believed was still inside!

Suddenly there's this huge earthquake. An angel of the Lord descends from heaven, rolls back the stone of the tomb and sits on it. His appearance is like lightning and his clothing is white as snow. In fact, his appearance is so shocking to the guards at the tomb that they shake and become like dead men. The angel then anticipates what the women are wondering. He gives them an answer to the biggest question of all time: *Where is Jesus?*

We too may wonder the very same thing in the days after a loved one has died. Where is my wife after her long and painful bout with cancer? Where is my husband after the shocking heart attack that took his life? Where is my brother who was killed by a drunk driver; my sister who died unexpectedly on the operating table? - Where are all those who have been laid to rest in a grave or in a tomb?

"Do not be afraid," says the angel to the women; "I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised." The women wonder: *Where is Jesus?* The angel answers: He is not here. And why not? He has been raised. This angel provides the answer to our biggest question. Following the loss of a loved one, he tells us that they are not trapped in their graves; they have been raised. On Easter morning, we discover that the solution to death is discovered in an empty tomb.

As we recall the promise Jesus made to his disciples before he died, perhaps like the women in our story, we need to take some time to think about the ways we continue to look for the living Lord among the dead? Maybe we need to discern and consider our actions –ritual or otherwise, concerning our faith in Christ. Do we assume he is dead and just go through the

motions of good and right and proper rituals, or do we assume he is alive and active in our lives, in the world, and in our repeated rituals of singing, praying, worshipping, baptizing, and communing? I've heard it suggested that many people who sit in church pews on Sunday mornings are functional atheists. They may confess their belief in the living Jesus, but they often function as if there was no God.

In other words, do we live our lives as if Jesus body is still lying in that old rock-hewn tomb, or do we live each day celebrating the fact that Jesus is alive, and his Spirit is out in the world! His hands, his feet, his body, is at work in the world through the church, which his early followers helped form. I'm sure we can all come up with a huge list of the ways in which our congregation and the congregations in our community and throughout the country and world, help the hopeless, the lost, the poor, and the meek. As members of the body of Christ we are called to continue the ministry and mission of God that Jesus began on earth.

When someone we love dies we honor and remember them in different ways. Perhaps we connect our memory of them with a particular object like a piece of jewelry, an article of clothing, a picture of them. Maybe we make certain attachments to those who have passed away as we observe the beauty of nature? My mother loved rainbows and so whenever it rains, afterwards when I see a rainbow in the sky I remember her and feel as if she is with me again.

During Holy Week as we walked with Jesus to the cross, we remembered the sacrifice he made for us, and for many of us the journey we made brought that same pain, suffering, and sorrow, into our present lives. On Maundy Thursday we witnessed Jesus showing what true love and greatness is all about as he took on the role of a lowly servant. On Good Friday we remembered that Jesus went willingly to the cross, recalling that he paid the price for every sin

that we have committed and continue to commit. Every time we read scripture, it becomes the living Word, it represents the historic life that Jesus lived on earth, and it enables us to be active participants in Christ's life.

Every Sunday when we receive communion it is more than just an act of remembrance, but it is also a way for Christ to be physically present among us in the bread and wine! As it nourishes us, as we experience the grace and forgiveness of God, we also remember that Christ is alive. He left the tomb! Our Easter lives do not end with us remembering, but rather they continue on as we seek experiences with the Risen Christ and as we share our faith with others through our words and actions. The women are told by the angel to go and share the good news of Christ's resurrection with the disciples, so it would seem that if we really believe that Jesus is alive we should be willing to tell others about it.

Today it is time for us to rejoice! We have just heard the Easter Gospel proclaimed. Christ is Risen! The dark night of weeping is over, and the dawn of resurrection hope is shining in all its brilliant glory. Today—if only for a moment—we can lay our sorrow aside, and shout for joy. The one we thought was dead, is alive. Our Savior reigns now and forever. Christ has triumphed over sin, over death, over the devil.

Perhaps you remember St. Paul's words to Galatians? "*It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.*" When the Risen Christ becomes our life, everything changes. We see life from a new perspective, we are more hopeful, more grace-filled. Christ's Spirit within us helps us recognize that each day is a gift and a treasure. No matter what our circumstance, no matter how difficult the path may be at times, we remember that we never walk alone. For it is the Risen Christ who walks beside us and among us.

Have you heard the story about Dr. Chauncy Crandall, a Christian doctor who practices medicine in Palm Beach, Florida and who prays with his patients? “The reason I pray for people,” explains Dr. Crandall, “is because I found early on in my practice that miracles still happen.” Yet when a man named Jeff Markin walked into the Palm Beach Gardens Hospital Emergency Room, and promptly collapsed on the floor due to a massive heart attack, the most astounding miracle was yet to be witnessed. According to a news report, Markin could not be revived even after many efforts of the hospital staff, nearly an hour had passed when the call went out for Dr. Crandall. The doctor tells the story: “As I entered the ER it was like a war zone. Here was this lifeless body on a stretcher. His face, arms, legs were pitch black with death. So I said, let’s just call the code; let’s end it because there’s no life left in him.

But just as Dr. Crandall was walking out of the room, he heard from God. He recounts, “A voice told me to turn around and pray for that man. I looked down at the body, and I said, ‘Lord, what can I pray for? This man’s gone.’ All of a sudden these words came out of my mouth: ‘Father, I cry out for this man’s soul. If he does not know You, raise him from the dead that he might believe.’

Although the hospital staff was already preparing Markin’s body for the morgue, Dr. Crandall asked for him to be shocked one more time. When they finally did, Markin’s heart began to beat perfectly, and he started breathing on his own. Jeff Markin wasn’t a believer before the day he was resurrected. But he is now and attends church on a regular basis.

Resurrection power. Resurrection faith. Why should we doubt or be skeptical when we believe in a God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead? This is the same God who can raise us up anew each day. Who can raise us from our tombs of distress or despair, who can take the

ashes of our lives and make them into something new and vital. Who can breathe new life into our tired spirits; who can give us renewed energy and purpose in our life together.

This should give us hope not just for eternity but for life now, for each new day. Today—this Resurrection Day—is the first day of the rest of our lives. Just as Jeff Markin was given a new chance at life, so are we. We can live life with an Easter faith. We can live each day in the hope and promise of a resurrection victory, something we should always remember and never forget. Thanks be to God. Amen.