

"Not with a Shout, but with a Whimper"
(A Sermon for Easter Sunday)

Text: John 20:1-18

Lectionary Texts: Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2,14-24; John 20:1-18; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Subject: Tapping into the power of the resurrection.

Desired Response: Learn how to acquire that resurrection power.

How To: Get alone with God in quietness.

How Long: Start with at least one session this week.

Sermon in a Sentence: "In those moments of quietness we spend with Him, God imbues Christ's resurrection power into our hearts and minds."

Worship Theme: "In the quietest moments of life, God often reveals the power of His Son's resurrection."

Let's just come right out and admit it: in some of the most important aspects of life, women are wiser, more intelligent, harder working, more sensitive, more understanding, and more motivated than men. If you doubt this statement, just look at the greatest percentage of television commercials, where women are rightly portrayed as much smarter and far more clever than men.

Now, I know you know that God created two very distinct genders with the intention that each gender would complement the other. Like pieces of a very complex puzzle, men and women were created so that together they would become a single entity that is far better than each of them is individually. That is not to say that all men and all women are intended to marry in order to form that cohesive unit. But, for the vast majority of humans, Scripture seems to make it clear that God had that intention.

Nevertheless, it is very important for men to realize what I said at the beginning. Namely, that in some of the most important aspects of life, women are wiser, more intelligent, harder working, more sensitive, more understanding, and more motivated than men.

But, what does that have to do with Easter Sunday?

As a “Christ’s-one” or Christian—a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ—the ability to more and more live a life devoted to serving His Kingdom demands power beyond our human abilities. That power comes to us through the Holy Spirit. It’s source—the source of this magnificent and much-needed power—is found in the resurrection. Easter Sunday is the high point of the church year because we celebrate the very first expression of this power—revealed through the fact that God raised His precious Son from the dead.

Let’s go back to that first Easter Sunday morning. Even though today we celebrate the resurrection with great fanfare, on that first Easter morning the resurrection was revealed not with a shout, but with a whimper.

For a moment—and men, of necessity, you must imagine that you are a woman, for the men come into this story much later—I would like to ask you to imagine what it would be like if you purposely awoke very early in the morning, well before sunrise. You have an important task at hand. You are up early because, well frankly, this is a task that, through no fault of your own, was ignored. Not only is this an important task, it is a critically important task, one that is driven by your deep religious beliefs and sense of devotion.

You see, in the late afternoon on Friday, someone you deeply loved and cared about was put to death in the most horrible fashion known to mankind in your day. This man you loved, a fellow Jew, was nailed to a Roman government cross of torture on a hill above the city where you live.

The sun beat down on him. His pain was utterly excruciating. Blood flowed from the wounds created by the large spikes that had been driven through his hands and feet. The full weight of his body was constantly responding to gravity and pulling down upon his chest, constricting his lungs and making it very difficult for him to breathe.

He hung on that cross for hours upon hours while you waited nearby, wracked by grief. In fact, you shed so many tears over what your friend was enduring that you became significantly dehydrated and your body finally stopped producing any more tears.

Eventually, your friend allowed death to overtake him. But, even though you could see from a distance that he had died, the Roman soldiers weren't satisfied. So they took a spear and thrust it into his side: a final act of humiliation.

Your dear friend was taken down off the cross and moved immediately to a donated tomb where a large stone was rolled into place, sealed with a Roman seal of authority, and secured by a posting of Roman soldiers.

Your sorrow was compounded by the fact that this dear friend was not afforded the proper rights of burial that all Jews received at the hands of their loved ones. And, since the sun was setting and Sabbath had begun, there was absolutely nothing you could do about it—at least in that moment of time.

Sabbath comes and goes. Your heart is heavy with sorrow and regret—sorrow at the loss of your dear friend; regret that you could not properly attend his body in death.

We pick up the story from Scripture, namely John 20:1-18:

¹ *Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.* ² *So she came running to Simon*

Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Here was one of the most despised women of Jewish society. And yet, she was overcome by the insistent desire to minister the rites of burial to this man who had shown her the way to eternal life. She had arisen very early in the morning before dawn and made her way to the tomb. She knew it was protected by a large stone and by Roman guards. She had no idea how she was going to gain entry in order to bathe and perfume Christ's body and dress Him in proper burial clothes. Nevertheless, she was determined to do so.

Luke 24:1-12 gives us some additional insight:

¹ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ 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? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " ⁸ Then they remembered his words.

⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Sometimes in life, we do things out of a sense of duty. We are driven to take action because, well, it's the right thing to do. It's what we've been taught. It's what we're accustomed to do. It's what we know those whom we respect expect us to do.

Here’s a personal example: we often hear the phrase “The Greatest Generation” used in reference to the generation of those men and women who fought in World War II. While some did volunteer, the vast majority of the men were individuals who were drafted into the war. They did not volunteer, as soldiers do today. They were plucked out of their normal daily routine, sent to boot camp for initial training, moved on to whatever specialized training they might need, and deployed to one of the two theaters of the War. The experience changed their lives forever.

Some of you remember those days. Others of you grew up hearing about them. Still others of you have no idea what such a time was all about. You’re too young. You’ve been spared. Or, have you?

My father was 34 years old when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on that fateful day in December of 1941. A few weeks later, in early January, he and five of his buddies, overcome by a sense of duty and patriotism, drove up from Bradford, Pennsylvania, to the military recruiting center in Buffalo, New York to enlist. Of the six of them, my dad was the only one physically fit enough to make the cut. He promptly enlisted in the United States Marine Corps.

Growing up, I heard many stories about his time in the Corps. But, one statement stood out—one he repeated many times: “Serving in the Marine Corps changed my life for the better,” he would say. “I learned discipline, how to respect authority, how to take orders, and how to keep working at something until I could do it well.” That’s what devotion to duty is all about. Now imagine hundreds of thousands of men and women from the United States of America who experienced these same lessons and you will know why we call them “The Greatest Generation.”

These women who went to the tomb so very early on this first Easter morning did so out of a sense of duty and devotion. But, instead of completing the task they intended, they became the first ones to learn that God’s Son had won a victory over sin, death, and Satan. In the quietness

of that early morning outside the garden tomb, these loving and caring women experienced first-hand the power of Christ’s resurrection.

We think of Easter as a great day of celebration. We use brass instruments, the powerful church organ, songs that we sing heartily—and all of that is very appropriate for this most important day in the church year. Are we overcome by joy, as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus? Yes! Of course we are and rightly so. In fact, we make a point of celebrating the resurrection with a great shout of joy: “The Lord is risen!”

But, the most intense power of Christ’s resurrection—the power that enables us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and devote ourselves to the work of His Kingdom—is often experienced most completely in moments of quiet when we approach the obstacle at a “tomb” in our own lives where a large stone will hinder our entrance and where Roman guards bar our way—at least metaphorically. It is in this moment of quiet, where our whimpers of frustration and despair reveal the overwhelming power of the resurrection.

The key truth I’m attempting to share with you this day goes something like this: *“In those moments of quietness we spend with Him, God imbues Christ’s resurrection power into our hearts and minds.”* Said again: *“In those moments of quietness we spend with Him, God imbues Christ’s resurrection power into our hearts and minds.”*

From time-to-time, when we are moving forward in our lives with determination to complete whatever task we are driven to complete, we come up against a roadblock so intimidating that we must stop in our tracks. We knew what we had to do, but now we’re blocked from doing it. It’s not a matter of motivation. We have all the motivation we need. It’s not a matter of a lack of work ethic or skill. We want to do the task at hand and we have the skill to do it. It’s not that we doubt what we intend to do. We know we intend to do exactly what needs doing. But, we’re blocked. We’re stopped. We’re unable to move forward.

Suddenly, it's as if we've arisen early in the morning while the mist is still rising off the warm ground. The morning sun has not yet risen. It is so quiet we can hear the leaves rustling in the gentle breeze. It's warm, but not too warm. We can even hear the crunch of the grass under our footsteps as we move toward our goal. It is so very, very quiet. This moment in our lives is very much like the experience of the women who approached the garden tomb not knowing how to overcome the blockade they expected to find there.

And, in that moment of quietness, God manifests the power of Christ's resurrection and everything changes (click) in an instant. What was blocking us is suddenly gone. It's a new day. Even the very task we intended to perform has taken on a new and different meaning. Where our vision was shrouded in darkness, now we can see clearly.

In our society today, we are surrounded and overcome by “noise.” Much of that “noise” is human-made. We even make much of our own “noise”: social media, radio, favorite television programs, streaming video, demands from family members, and on and on. This “noise” keeps us from hearing clearly and even seeing clearly. We need—desperately need—moments of genuine quiet. But, the only way we can have such moments of quiet is to purposefully seek them.

So, what can we do about this “noise”? Let me offer you, today, one simple suggestion. We can quiet this noise that blocks our clearest thinking. We can set aside some very deliberate moments each day where we retreat into a place of quiet. Even if we can only spend a few minutes totally silent, able to soak in the peace of our place of refuge, we will emerge refreshed and renewed—in fact, empowered.

I urge you to try it today. Before this day ends, determine to put my suggestion into practice. Find some time on this busy Easter Sunday to locate a place where you can enjoy even ten minutes of absolute quiet. In that quiet place, open yourself up to the power of the resurrection. Let the Holy Spirit minister to you through the words of favorite verses of Scripture, or the

lyrics of beloved hymns or gospel songs. Let those words flood into your mind. If you do, I can guarantee that you will have begun a practice that, if you purposefully carry it on day after day, will help you begin to experience the overwhelming power of Christ's resurrection.

The first part of Isaiah 30:15 declares:

This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says:

"In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength..."

As we do indeed celebrate the resurrection of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ this Easter Sunday morning with a shout of great joy, I also urge you to learn the lesson that the women who followed Jesus learned on that first Easter morning. Namely that: *"In those moments of quietness we spend with Him, God imbues Christ's resurrection power into our hearts and minds."*

Amen.