

EASTER...March 27, 23016 “What A Wonderful Day” Luke 24:1-12

He is risen! With this exclamation we begin our celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Up the hill, at St. James Roman Catholic Church they have been and are celebrating the same truth. At Grace Bible Church...the same proclamation. Over at the United Church and the Anglican services the same cry goes up. At the Pentecostal Assembly, and among the people who participate at The Gathering...He is risen is the watchword of the hour and the reason for celebration. It is Easter and therefore we know what the service of worship will involve...declaration of the resurrection of Jesus. It is a wonderful day.

And I do not mean simply that it is the day of good news! After all, for the whole of Lent, and during this last week, we have focussed so closely on Luke 23...the way of the cross. Arrest, betrayal, trials, beatings and abuse, the whipping, the verdict...even though Pilate did not believe Jesus guilty of a capital offence...and finally crucifixion...and then denials on the part of Peter and the running to hide on the part of others from the 12. And now we celebrate the discovery that, if there was a battle it was not between the Romans and the Jews, or Jesus and His human detractors. All along, even as Jesus said it has been between God and Satan. A battle for the souls of men and women, their children and young people. Jesus died! But Jesus is alive! Its a wonderful day. Not just good news...but the awesome wonders of God, and all the signs and wonders that the word wonderful implies.

I made a list. And even I am surprised at its length. Every one of them makes the point this is a surprise. Every one of them rocked the best friends and family of which Jesus had been a part.

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Every one of them produces faith because of the twists and turns involved in the adventure. And remember each of these wonder producing details is in the one Gospel that literally rewrites the textbook on how history should be written...from the beginning...a sense of time and order...inclusion only of details that could be proven beyond question at the time. Remember this! It is a matter of history. No one wrote a document refuting the claims made by the disciples, and the women and the circle of 120 which almost immediately grew to be a circle of several thousand, including some of those pharisees and saducees and teachers of the Law who were oponents of Jesus and his followers.

Luke's list of wonders. First. It is the first day of the week. Not the Sabbath, Judaism's holy day. The day of rest. No, it is the anniversary, happens every week 52 times a year, regular as clockwork...the anniversary of the first day of creation. The day associated with "in the beginning". How wonderful! To use computereze, it's God Almighty's reboot of creation. Death remains as a point in time, but is robbed of its power. Bowing to God and His will, accepting God's love, and taking it very personally becomes the "admit one" to eternal life. It leaves me so full of wonder and awe. That it could be that simple...new life...peace...forgiveness...being forgiven for everything I ever did that was covered by the words sin and sinful. First day of the week. We call it Sunday. Some of our forbears said, it can't be that simple we will call it the Christian Sabbath! But Sabbath is Saturday. This is Sunday...the beginning of a new week. I'm always surprised by the printed paper calendars. Take a look when you get home...Sunday begins each new week. It's in our mindset. All because of what Luke and Mattew and Mark and John have taught...the world.

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Wonderful Day. Wonder filled day. Second on my list is the fact of the women. First day of the week, very early in the morning. Probably first light. As soon as they could see where they were going. There's that sensitivity to timing, and tying details down to a time line. The women headed for the tomb in which Jesus lifeless body had been placed. Joseph of Arimathea, one of those Jewish priests who listened to Jesus on numerous occasions, perhaps debated with Jesus...at least in his mind...but who became an admirer. May have disented from the decision to destroy Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea donated the tomb. It was the tomb of a rich man. Hewn out of the rock. A circular stone door. Never used, probably where Joseph of Arimathea intended to retire when he expired. The women went to complete the burial rites of their Jewish culture. To annoint the body of Jesus with spices. They had not figured out how they would roll the stone away...it was massive.

And that brings us to number three. I will skip back to the rest of number two later. It was the women who found the stone had been rolled away. The posted guards are gone. That stone door weighed tons. It's carved track made it fairly easy to close...it ran downhill. Gravity helped close it. And gravity made it all that more difficult to open...uphill. Engineers could probably tell you how that multiplies the weight of the thing. The wonder is the women never had to figure out how to open it. It is open. Culturally...that's unthinkable. Disturbing the dead. But there it is. Open. No one has ever denied that fact in Israel, in Judea.

Fourth. The women did not stand outside, in fact they rushed inside. Their first fear is that someone has desecrated the body of Jesus. But they make the discovery there is no body to either dress of desicrate. It's gone. The tomb is empty. And that is where

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we have to do a mini revisist to number two. This is not Peter and John. These are the women. Mary (mother to James, and mother to Jesus), Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and a number of other women identified simply as part of that cluster of females who told the disciples the tomb was open, no body, and the news...He is risen. Women have no legal rights. They are the property of the men to whom they are attached. Here is the wonder of it all. In the economy of God Luke tells us...the women are the ones God calls to discover the resurrection fact, and they are the first to proclaim that fact. For us as Presbyterians this is the chief reason that in 1966 we moved to recognize the legitamy of women's experience of the call to ministry. They and not men were the first proclaimers of the resurrection of Jesus.

Fifth. Angels. Two of them. Why two? In the Jewish experience, and all of these women are Jewish, and all of the men to whom they carry this news of Jesus being risen from the dead are Jewish. Two witnesses, speaking in agreement, means it is the telling of the truth. Remember Luke wanted Theophilus to recognize the certainty of these things? Angels proclaim Jesus birth. Angels minister to Jesus and they bring the good news to the world through these women. You can be certain...because it is the truth. And yes I am also saying we do not take angels seriously enogh.

The Sixth Wonder. It is not as though this rising the 3rd day thing came out of the blue. It is not the first time these women have heard about it, nor will it be the first time the disciples of Jesus, the men heard about it. The angels support their statement by reminding everyone involved Jesus talked about this back in Galilee. Weeks ago! We wonder how we could forget that. Or is it just that we are skeptical...we doubt...well the angels say stop it. Be filled with

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wonder at the power and the grace and the love of your heavenly Father. Jesus is risen from the dead.

Seven. We men take a bit of a beating in this. Well, let me say, the women won't get what is so wonderful about this one. The women did what they were told to do. They obeyed the angels and went and told the disciples, the majority of whom are men. If I am wrong in using that word majority, the 11 who remain, Judas having disappeared and who took his own life...the eleven are certainly men. The ones who think they are in charge of things in general, who wanted to be officers in the Kingdom of Jesus are all men. I think it takes a man to react to this news with...I'm not going to tell anybody. They will think I'm crazy.

The Eighth wonder. It takes very few words and I won't even try to expand on it. The response of the men to being told by the women that Jesus is risen from the dead is...Nonsense! You're crazy. Be rational. He is...dead.

Which brings us to number 9 on my list, or Luke's list. Peter, ran to the tomb. And Peter looked inside. He saw the cloths that had covered the body of Jesus. They are lying there where they appear to have been thrown. He is not confronted by angels. He sees no angels. He hears no angelic proclamation. And to Luke's credit as a historian, he tells us Peter walked back home, wondering...what in God's name has happened? He has all the questions. He does not know yet...that he has all the answers. The world has turned upside down. This is why Luke is so...believable. It is not a device. He is so willing to admit...we (the men) could not believe it!

He is risen! By the grace of God...it is a wonderful and

wonder filled day. May God richly bless you in the balance of this day's celebrations.

Let us pray;

Heavenly Father thank you for the good news which annointed by your Holy Spirit, becomes faith in us as men and women. Thank you for the hope of life eternal. For conviction about your saving love. Grant us the strength to serve you and the people among whom you have placed us, to the glory of Jesus wonderful name. Amen