

“Dawn”
John 19:38-42;
Luke 24:1-12; Luke 24:1-12
Rev. David Hutchinson
Sunday, April 21, 2019

If the events of Holy Week were a mini-series on Netflix - -

it would be DAWN on the morning of Episode 4.

In episode ONE Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to a cheering crowd.

But there was an ominous nature to the parade.

As episode one progressed, it became clear - Jesus was headed for a crisis.

People had been out to get him since he started healing and preaching.

In episode TWO an upper room was prepared, and Jesus ate his last supper.

His disciples gathered and questioned him about the future.

Episode THREE was rated R for violence.

It was not suitable for broadcast on the TV networks

which is why it ended up on Netflix.

Jesus was executed on a cross.

Episode FOUR begins at DAWN.

Keeping watch at the tomb.

John's gospel says that they went there when it was still DARK.

Anyone ever watched the SUNRISE?

When Nancy and I were in Bryce Canyon we got up at 4:30...

while it was still dark...

and went to the cliffside - - to see the sunrise over the canyon.

So - - here we are - - sitting - - right where the story left off...

Sitting - - opposite a tomb.

Keeping watch - - at a grave.

This particular grave was because of a man named Joseph.

Joseph of Arimathea - - was a rich man. / Someone who could just go up to the governor - and get an audience. / So he did. / He went in to see the governor - - Pontius Pilate.

Joseph had a very expensive TOMB. / A grave package - - with all the trimmings. / And he asked for the body of this dead political prisoner - - the one who had caused Pilate so much trouble.

And of course - Pilate said - ok.

And Joseph took the body - - of Jesus and laid him in the tomb.

LISTEN to the account in John's gospel [read John 19:38-42]

So - - Joseph ROLLED a great big STONE to the door.

And with the STONE in place - Joseph went away -

- and some women - - including Jesus' mother -

- sat there.

Looking at the tomb.

Looking at that - - STONE.

That's where we were - when our story left off.

And maybe - -that's where some of us - are anyway - -

- - when it comes to - death.

Wherever YOU are - - with DEATH - - THAT - is where EASTER - - - - begins.

Well - time goes by.

During the next three days - - after Jesus' death - - soldiers and a guard are placed at the tomb. / The stone - - is made SECURE - - we are told. / And probably - eventually - the women went home to rest - and eat something.

But three days later - - they RETURNED to the TOMB.

At DAWN.

Which is where the story of Easter begins...

Dawn on the first day of the week.

Ready now - to make some final goodbyes - maybe.

And so they returned - - to that STONE door.

Early in the morning.

Near dawn. / When the sun - - was just rising. LISTEN...

[Read Luke 24:1-12]

Imagine the walk - - to that tomb - that morning.

Through the cemetery.

In the misty morning light.

Tom Long describes what it might have been like:

What the women - expected - to see - of course - was Jesus GRAVE. / A monument to sadness that they felt in the soul. / A confirmation of the cruel truth - that the world finally BEATS mercy.

The CRUEL WORLD - - finally beats righteousness to death.

But - - -

Somewhere along the PATH - - through the cemetery - - they left ONE world - and entered into another. / Without even knowing it - they had crossed a boarder.

They had LEFT the old world - -

- - where hope is in constant danger - - and might makes right - -
 and peace has LITTLE chance - - and the rich get richer - - and the weak all suffer - -
 under some Pontius Pilate or other - - and people hatch murderous plots - -
 - - and dead people stay dead.

They had left that old world...

- - and entered into another - the startling and breathtaking world of
 resurrection and life. / Jesus of Nazareth - who had been dead as a doornail on Friday -
 - - - - was NOT in his tomb that morning!! /

And so - having crossed that boarder - -

- - we come again to the tomb.

We come to that big - secure - stone.

But NOW - - there is an earthquake.

There is a great shaking - and rolling.

And there is LIGHTNING.

And there is FEAR.

And then - - great JOY.

That big secure - STONE - was rolled away.

Joseph of Arimathea - had put it in place.

Guards had secured it.

But God - - and an angel of the Lord - had ROLLED it away.

That STONE - - symbolizes the FINALITY of Jesus death - and of our death -
 and of all death. / Its FIXED-ness - - its immobility - - is our immobility in the face of
 death.

But there is a greater power.

There is a greater - - steadfastness - - than that.

Greater than the steadfastness of death - -

- - is the steadfastness of God's love for us.

The Apostle's Creed - - says, "I believe in the resurrection of the BODY"

We affirm that - time and time again - as Christians.

The good news - of Easter: the RESURRECTION.

And yet we may struggle with this idea.

How could our BODIES - with all the problems - wounds - weak limbs - and lusts
- and temptations - - - - be - - - - proper objects of RESURRECTION?

So asks another preacher - Marguerite Shuster.

Christianity is unabashedly affirmative - of the GOODness - of MATTER.

God created - - and LIKED it. / God called it GOOD.

Paul wrote that there is a RESURRECTION BODY. / Different from the
physical body - YES - but however CHANGED - - - it is still the SAME person.

Jesus rose - with ALL the marks of his suffering - still on his BODY.

And the bodily resurrection - affirms our identity - as created by God.

All of which is AMAZING - - and STRANGE - - and WONDERFUL!

Like is was - - with the women at the tomb - who departed -

- - with fear - and great joy.

There departure - - as they leave BEHIND - that great ROLLED away STONE - -
reminds me of some OTHER - - GRAVE stones.

These grave stones are found in Puritan New England.

The Puritans - shunned any form of religious or figurative art. / They went in
for the stripped-down and somber. / Shunned dangerous excesses.

And YET - - when someone DIED - - a loved one - - the Puritans forsook
austerity - - and JOY-ously celebrated the passage - - with beautiful carvings.

An article in the “Simthsonian” magazine records the faces that they carved on
gravestones. / Thousands of these gravestones - mark the countryside in New England.

[look at the four images now...]

Almost forgotten. / Yet there in stone.

The FACE - - known as the seat of the soul - - was often carved into the
gravestone - - with astonishing expressions - - and EYES WIDE OPEN.

Wide-eyed faces - - carved in stone.

The surprise of the soul upon entering the unknown.

Surprise - portrayed in a very BODILY way.

In the EYES.

And standing in stone - as a testimony - to the JOY of these Puritans - - as they
brought their faith - to bear - on their understanding - of the power of death - - and the
power of the resurrection.

As we consider that - - the story continues...

Episode FIVE of our Netflix series is about what happened AFTER the empty
tomb. / Jesus appeared to some of his followers...

This is AFTER his execution and burial, according to Luke.

Listen to the account:

[Read Luke 24:36-49]

As I thought about this, I imagined ONE of those disciples, let's call him
Bartholomew - - writing a letter - - about his experience.

I'll close my sermon today with his imagined letter:

Dear Mom,

I've just spent some amazing days with the best listener I've ever met.

I know you'll appreciate it, because of how well you listened to me.

For me, no one could quite ever match you.

Until now.

I know you were SAD when I left home to follow him.

You were right about how dangerous it would be.

The church and the government were out to get him.

Now that he's been executed WE might be in trouble too.

But there's MORE to this than the DANGER!

Jesus is still ALIVE!

His SPIRIT is ALIVE in me!

That's what I mean about him being a good listener.

After Dad died, and cousin Samuel was killed, I didn't really believe anything.

I didn't have ANY HOPE.

But the thing is - - NOW - - I know that DEATH is not the END.

Death is not the worst thing.

Being lonely and unloved

and all the violence and evil in the world,

THAT'S much worse than death!

Especially dying for something you believe in!

Mom - - he stood there EATING FISH!

We all saw him - - after the execution - - on a beach.

I know it sounds crazy.

But it was not a ghost.

He ate a FISH!

And THAT was exactly what I needed to see - - to believe.