

Matthew 28:1-10

Even though they're being told not to do it by the Transportation Department, St. Louisan's by the scores are going down to Interstate 44 from Pacific to Valley Park; and when they get there, they are expecting to see history in the making. This is a trip they normally wouldn't make. But to see record-setting flood-waters, they're leaving their homes and packing their cameras to catch a glimpse of this tragic spectacle. That's why the two Mary's left their homes early on Easter morning—not simply to catch a glimpse of the tragedy which was the dead body of the Son of God, but to go to the tragic scene and finish anointing His body with burial spices.

Imagine how disappointed all these St. Louisan's would be if, after arriving at the Meramec River, there was nothing to see. No flood, no highway signs covered up to the top with water; just a normal, everyday scene along I-44? Who would want a picture of that? They'd put their cameras back in their cases and grumble all the way home. But that's exactly what happened to the two Mary's. They arrived at the tragic scene and there was nothing to see. Well, there was an angel there, but Jesus' body was gone. The angel even said, "I know why you're here; you're looking for Jesus who was crucified; He is not here." Now they didn't grumble all the way home, but they were surprised, and shocked, and bewildered.

But that's exactly how it had to be. It had to be nothing. If there had been something—anything at all, there would be no Christian Faith, no Church, no Easter Service. Of course if the body of Jesus had been there in the tomb all neatly wrapped, and stiff and cold, that would have been the end of everything—and you can see that. For without the resurrection, there is no Christian Faith. If Christ is not raised then we are still in our sins, and we have no hope. But what if the women had found a note, a scroll rolled up perhaps, with a scientific explanation of how Christ had done it, and how God will pull it off with us one day—raise us from the dead, that is. I mean, if there had been anything more than nothing, Christianity is dead, because Christianity is not an explanation—it's a faith.

One of the more difficult assignments for the Christian pastor each year is the Easter sermon. It's not easy, even for a preacher, to use up fifteen minutes to talk about nothing. And he's supposed to hold your interest as he does. The reason he can bring it off at all is simply that in the fact that the Mary's found nothing in the tomb lies everything that means anything in the Christian Faith. Never has so little meant so much.

What about for you? You did not leave your homes this morning and come out here to this little church in Augusta expecting, like the Mary's, to see the body of Jesus. You knew that you would see nothing here, not even an angel. But I hope you don't grumble all the way home because Easter is not about seeing, it's about believing. The women were to believe the angel's message that Jesus had risen, and that same message is preached to you today. The message is not: "Jesus is not here." The message is: "He is risen!" The very fact that you believe this message is proof that He is here. "Apart from Me, you can do nothing," He says. Without Christ and apart from Him, you and I would resemble not the two Mary's, but the soldiers...the guards who became like dead men. Without Christ living in us through His Word, we would not come out with joy to an Easter service; we would not come up in faith to receive our Lord's body and blood; we would not care if He was dead or

alive; we would have no faith, no hope, nothing to live for—without Christ. It's not that nothing brought you here today—Jesus did. But not to see with your eyes, but to believe with your heart.

Now I suppose you could use the expression, "Pastor, you're preaching to the choir. We believe Jesus is risen; that's why we're here!" I'm not so much trying to convince you that Jesus rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. I don't think you're scoffers and unbelievers about this. Rather, I appeal to you, as a fellow believer in the Risen Christ, that you live as though Christ's resurrection means everything to you. Anyone can come to church on Easter morning. Anyone, believers and unbelievers, can sing along with the Easter crowd and shake the pastor's hand on the way out the door. The soldiers were there on that first Easter morning, but they were unmoved by Jesus' resurrection—so unmoved, in fact, that they became like dead men.

What I'm saying is that if Easter really is important to you, then show it by how you live for the next 365 days. Don't wait until next Easter to speak of your Risen Lord. Speak of Him often whether here in church, or at home, or wherever you are. Don't wait many weeks and months to hear your Living Lord's Words of Life; come out of your home each Sunday morning to hear them...open His Word for you every day. Don't act like the soldiers who became like dead men. Don't live as those who are spiritually dead. Act like the two Mary's—perhaps a little confused and bewildered at times, but we know that they went out and lived their faith.

You have faith, don't you, not in "nothing," but in Christ Jesus who was crucified for you and was raised to life to be your Living Lord? This kind of faith doesn't appear once a year on Easter Sunday. It carries us through every day of the year. It allows us to serve God by loving our neighbor. It causes us to support Christ's Church with our income. This faith keeps drawing us to hear the preaching of His Word. It brings us, again and again, to His Meal of Grace. This faith enables us to bury our loved ones in Christ with hope. It helps us to endure the trials of each day, and lets us fall asleep in peace each night.

You're not spectators who have come out here this morning to see what's going on. Leave your cameras at home. There is nothing here to see. But there is something here to believe. Christ is here. He is here for you. Jesus is here in the spoken Word of Grace. He is here in the bread and wine. He is here to forgive you. He is here to give you life and salvation. The same life He now lives He gives to you. You're not life-less soldiers. Christ gives you eternal life here in His Word and Sacraments. You don't have to tremble in His presence as the soldiers trembled. Jesus does not come to you with a violent earthquake. He comes through His humble servant and He declares to you that He is full of pardon for you. Even if you have lived apart from Him the past year, Jesus today forgives you. Even if you have been a drunkard, an adulterer, a gossip, a thief...Jesus today forgives you. Christ didn't rise for nothing. He rose to be your Savior every day. He rose to give you all the gifts of heaven freely. He rose so that your sins, no matter how great and grievous, are completely covered by His blood given here for you in His Sacrament.

"Christ is risen!" ("He is risen indeed!") If you believe these words then live them, not just today, but everyday. He lives for you, friend. He lives within you. He lives, and you therefore, will live with Him forever. Amen.

