

Theme: To and from the empty tomb

A very different mindset exists between the yawning person lacing up their shoes for a casual trot and the person stepping into the blocks at the Olympics. A very different mindset exists between the professional runner and the person who is running for their life. This level of urgency is not relatable for most of us. When running for one's life, no matter how raw a person's throat is, how blurry their vision becomes or how loudly their body is screaming in pain and exhaustion, that person has tapped into the primal desire to live, so they run.

This level of intense emotion is exactly where Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, and the other women were early on Sunday morning. They watched as Jesus was crucified, saw him die. They watched as two believing Pharisees, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, took Jesus' body off the cross and prepared him for burial. These women of faith were the last to see Jesus' body as the stone was rolled into place. Had they even slept since then? Not likely because they second they could, they set out in a hurry on little or no sleep, exhausted, and carrying loads of spices determined to anoint Jesus' body.

Where their hands and arms screaming at them only to drop everything, jaws included, once they arrived? A sealed tomb they did not see. Instead, an angel who looked like lightning caused an earthquake when rolling away the grave stone and was using it now as a couch. This is how the kingdom of heaven views death! What a statement! At seeing it, the guards shook and went comatose with fear. The women were afraid too, but the angel said, "*Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.*" Why not? Because the promises are kept! Jesus was crucified. Was! He has taken away all sin on his cross and in doing so kept every promise he made about saving people from their sins. Jesus was the offering, he did give his life, did pour out blood to wash away sin. All this Jesus did perfectly. The angle explains how you know, "*He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.*" This is the greatest negation of all time! "He isn't here! This is a place of death. Sisters, you will not find the living Jesus here in a tomb!" This is exactly as Jesus said because when Jesus says he will do something, he does it. Jesus said he would die for the sins of the world. He did! Jesus said he would rise as the life of the world. He did! The empty burial linens wrapping Jesus' body not too much earlier were more proof.

The angel gave the women no time to process but specific and urgent instruction because Easter is joyous urgency. The women weren't to linger wondering about the particulars, they were to quickly go and pass on to the disciples what is of first importance, that Christ is risen! There would be plenty of time

to marvel about God's goodness between conversations about the good and saving news of Jesus. "*Now I have told you,*" the angel said. The angel's obligation had been discharged and the command from God given to the women to be evangelists.

In fear and great joy, they ran from the tomb but didn't make it far. "Good morning!" said a familiar voice. Do you think they gasped when Jesus met them on the road into Jerusalem? This was very different than how they saw him on Friday! Not blood caked, not shamefully displayed, not in burial cloths, not dead. Now when they looked at Jesus, they saw life and the glory of God on full display and reflexively, instinctively, joyously they worshiped the Savior. Jesus assured them, "*Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.*" With Jesus alive, there was no reason to be afraid. In the peace Jesus gives and from the joy of knowing he is life and gives it, they were able to do what Jesus said, they ran to announce the resurrection.

Don't ever let the first target audience of Jesus' resurrection announcements fall by the way side, especially because of the term he uses in identifying this group: my brothers. How would that have struck the ears of the women? Would they have been immediately moved to tears at the forgiving love of Jesus? They understood the weight of word "brothers" given all that had gone on in the previous days. This would have been beautiful for them to hear since it's more confirmation of what Jesus taught and promised about love and grace filled forgiveness being the defining characteristic of his kingdom was true and it was true for them also. For a group of men who deserted him, betrayed, and denied him, what higher and more humbling honor could there be than this? What could be more comforting for us, sinners who do very similar things? His brothers would see him in Galilee where, away from the scene of such spiritual trauma, away from the seat of Jesus' enemies, and in familiar territory would Jesus continue to help them heal and process and be at peace, to fill them with his love to do the work he still very much wanted them to do.

The first person to see the living Lord Jesus in his glory was Mary Magdalene out of whom Jesus had driven seven, who loved Jesus, who watched the stone roll shut. After finding it flung away, she saw Jesus, she spoke to him, and she left her interaction with the risen Jesus running. Still on barely any sleep, still exhausted, lungs and legs screaming, but now, in spite of all that, a smile was spread across her cheeks instead of tears streaming down them because she knew Jesus was alive and needed to tell those who didn't.

How'd you get here this morning? Walked to the car. Walked from the car to the church, maybe even told your kids not to run on the way in. But why? Why didn't you run here as fast as you could? Is the news any different? Is it any less impactful, excellent, or life giving? Is Jesus' order to announce his resurrection? Of course not!! Yet, I don't see us all running desperately but eagerly and happily to tell anyone who may not have heard that Jesus has risen from the dead. Why not? This is precisely what we must do! When grief closes in, when guilt crushes, when doubt and fear drive you to desperation, run with desperation to the tomb and hear the words of the angel again, "Jesus is who you are looking for. He was crucified. He's not here! He has risen just as he said!" Hear Jesus say, "Don't be afraid. I died and came back to life for you to save you so you can be with me forever. Go. Run! Tell everybody!" Jesus knows perfectly well that there are people who are afraid, who don't have peace, who don't know he's their savior who died and rose for them. Who will tell them? Who will announce? You will! There is no one better than you, a sinner who knows free forgiveness, God's love, and the hope of heaven. Run from the empty tomb filled with great joy to tell others what drives away your fear and sadness. You don't have to come up with a new and snappy way to say it. Keep it simple. Just announce what you are so happy to hear yourself: Jesus has risen. Amen.