

Laurentian Wesleyan Church
Easter Sunday, March 27, 2016
Series: Encounters with Christ
Sermon: This Is Not The End

It's the Sabbath.

Waiting.

Jesus was dead.

The events of this past week are hard to take in. The week had begun with so much promise. So much hope. But that was all gone now. Jesus, the Messiah, the one who was supposed to free us from the tyranny of Rome, was dead. And the hope for a better future maybe died with him. It's hard to know what to do now. We're not allowed to do much...the Law forbids all work from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday.

Even before Jesus, this was always a busy week. Getting ready for the Passover festival. Sometimes I wonder what our forefathers would think of us. I mean, the Passover used to mean something. It was a reminder of how God saved us in the past, and how He would again. But it was usually just another holiday for me. But not this year. This year was different. We didn't really catch it at the time, but Jesus was preparing us. I can see it now. It all happened so quickly.

The betrayal.

The arrest.

The trial.

The flogging...oh, the flogging. Part of me prayed that Jesus would die then. So much pain. It's a wonder Jesus survived.

I watched and heard the terrible cries of "crucify him" by the crowd. I wanted to speak up. I wanted to ask them why they would want to kill Jesus. He had done so much good, for so many. Brought so much hope.

The amazing teaching. He spoke with authority, like no one I had ever heard. The other teachers, they were ok, but Jesus seemed to really want us to get it...to understand. It's a wonder he didn't give up...we can be so hard headed.

There was his teaching, yes, his miracles too. I mean, wow. I wanted so badly to yell out and say stop it, don't crucify Him. I was there when he gave that man back his sight. I was there when he touched that man with leprosy. TOUCHED HIM! You just don't do that. Jesus healed him. And there was that...oh, what was her name again...Jairus' daughter...he brought her back to life. One or two miracles, I suppose even I could have dismissed them as hear-say...or coincidence. But there were so many.

But I didn't say anything. How do you make someone believe when they're determined not to. Well, I guess he showed us how. I mean, Jesus got through to me. It wasn't really the teaching as good as it was, or the miracles as amazing as they were, but his love for people, for me. I suppose that sounds weird for a man to say. But I saw it. I felt it. He seemed to actually care about people. He saw through their outward masks

and walls and saw what they really needed. I watched that paralyzed man be lowered through the roof, just so he could get to Jesus in hopes of being healed. Now those are friends...willing to do that! But you could see that Jesus saw through the man's defenses...and Jesus forgave Him all His sins. He loved him, for who he was. A cripple. I knew that Jesus words would make him some enemies that day. I mean, you just don't go around forgiving people's sins. The teachers of the Law were upset. But Jesus didn't care. It was like Jesus always put you first...and only the proud get up tight about that happening to others. Oh, by the way, Jesus did also heal that paralyzed man. It was a miracle. It was awesome.

You know, it might sound odd, but even the day that He cracked that whip and drove out all the money changers from the outer temple...there was love there too. Oh, don't get me wrong. He was angry. But it was kind of like the anger he had at the disciples when they kept the children from seeing him. They money changers were preventing people from praying, from worshipping...they were putting up barriers. Jesus loved to ignore barriers or tear them down. That time we came to the well, and there he was alone with that woman. It was pretty obvious what kind of woman she was. I mean, we trusted Jesus...but he didn't seem to care who you were or what you did. He treated you with compassion, respect and love. I mean, just a few hours ago, I heard him say from the cross of all places, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." I saw the faces of some of the soldiers. They were pretty tough skinned. They were used to insults. They were used to violence.

But forgiveness?

From the cross they put this man on?

I was shocked myself.

And then Jesus died.

There was confusion.

Darkness.

The ground shook.

The soldiers were in a bit of a hurry. It was about three hours from sun-down and the Jewish people would not permit someone to be left on a cross over the Sabbath, let alone the Passover festival. Not only would no one be allowed to take the dead bodies down because they would be working on the Sabbath, but it would cast a shadow over the whole land of uncleanness. So, the soldiers broke the legs of the two criminals to make them die faster. But when they came to Jesus, he was already dead. And they pierced his side and blood and water flowed out of the wound.

Jesus was dead.

It was a race against the clock to get Jesus taken down and buried before sun-down. What would we have done without Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. I'm sure it was risky to expose that they were followers of Jesus. The Jewish leaders wouldn't be happy. But if they hadn't taken his body and placed it in that borrowed tomb, Jesus would have been buried in an unmarked grave with other criminals.

At least he had a burial deserving of a king. You know, I was there when Mary poured that nard, that expensive perfume on Jesus awhile ago. It was worth a full year's wage. I admit, I thought it was a waste too. But this time was different. Nicodemus brought 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes to prepare Jesus body for burial after his crucifixion. It was about 100 times the value of Mary's gift. But it seemed right. These were rituals deserving of a king when he died. And Jesus was our king.

The waiting.

The Sabbath Saturday seemed to go on forever.

Salome, and some of the other women were talking about going to the tomb in the morning. It kind of seemed pointless to me. I mean, what would they do when they got there? The tomb was covered by a huge stone. And sealed. You couldn't open it on penalty of death. And it was guarded too. But they were insistent. The waiting made them anxious...I know how they feel. They had to do something. Jesus meant so much to them, they couldn't just move on. So they collected the spices they had and went to the tomb.

Scripture: Mark 16:1-8

1When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.

2Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb

3and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

4But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.

5As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

6"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.

7But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' "

8Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Salome told me they didn't know what to think. But the story got out. Jesus was alive! Alive, could it be? I mean, I watched him die. You don't come back from that.

I wanted to believe.

I prayed and asked, "could it be true?"

We were emotionally spent from the roller coaster of the past week.

And then, there Jesus was. Among us.

Oh there was no doubt it was Jesus. It's pretty hard to fake scars like that as Thomas found out when Jesus asked him to put his fingers where the nails were.

It's amazing what a few hours can do. Just hours ago it seemed that hope was extinguished. The forgiveness, the love, were just memories. But Jesus, he really was alive. The hope had been born again. A stronger hope. A better love.

I remember, on Friday, Salome saying, "When they buried Jesus and rolled that stone over his tomb, it seemed like the end. That it was all over. That maybe God didn't much care about us after all.

But, this is not the end.

An empty tomb! The challenges of life. These trials. These difficulties. They are not the end. He is Risen! There is hope. The waiting is over.

"Where, O death is your victory?

Where, O death is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

-1 Corinthians 15:54b-57, NIV

Is it hopeless?

Do you feel lost?

Are you consumed by fear?

Are others around you feeling these things?

Receive the hope found in the risen Christ!

He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!