

Devotions - March 24-29, 2008

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Monday, March 24

Quiet Monday

It is quiet in our churches today. Very quiet! The Alleluias are stilled. The people are gone – the building is empty. The Easter breakfast smell of ham and eggs has just about left our fellowship halls. In Europe, "Easter Monday" is a holiday but not in the good old U.S.A. We are back to it on the day after Easter, back at work, or in many places back in school. We are leaning towards spring – perhaps expecting early flowers to pop out of the ground or maybe another big snowstorm will hit us. And Easter 2008 is past, a memory – or is it?

Is it quiet in our "Easter souls" today? Listen to Matthew's Gospel: (Matthew 28) *"After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.'"*

Most of us have listened to that text for decades. It is so familiar that we forget its impact. He was dead, now he is alive. The world was turned upside down and there were earthquakes and angels and shaking guards to prove it!

And now there is silence – the day after Easter! It is a good thing to be quiet and to reflect on the events of Easter Sunday. The world has shifted, the news is literally earth shaking and now we think about it in silence.

Listen to the story. Take a minute. And pray with me:

In the silence of this moment O God, let me hear your voice. In the silence of this Easter Monday, let me know your presence. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tuesday, March 25

Mary!

Nine months from today is Christmas! It is not hard to understand how the Church has decided to make this day, March 25th, the one we remember as the day the first word of the Virgin Mary's pregnancy is known. "Guess what" Gabriel says in Luke 1. "You are going to have a baby, it will be a boy and his name will be Jesus. And by the way, your life will be totally changed, and this Jesus will be a great one, and he will be a Son of the most High, and so that you do not get worried, God is with you."

Well, we know the rest of the story. We know all about the wedding at Cana, and the ministry of Jesus, and the suffering and the death on the cross. And the empty tomb – We all know that. But think of Mary. She knew nothing and she was anxious and, I am sure, even with the presence of the angel, she felt very alone.

Mary! Lutherans honor this young girl as "Mary, Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ." We confess that she was a virgin when she gave birth to our Lord and we believe that her example of humility and deep commitment to her son Jesus is a model for all women and men to follow. She indeed is a Saint. And even as we have just celebrated Easter, we know that the story of Jesus, his birth, ministry, and death is a story that must continually be told and re-told if all humanity is to believe in him.

Pray with me:

Lord Jesus, we praise you for the witness of Mary. May we be faithful and like her, eager to serve your purpose into his world. Amen.

Wednesday, March 26

The Easter Effect

A newspaper article last week in the Wall Street Journal told us that retail sales in America's stores may be less this Easter because the holiday is so early in the calendar year. "People don't want to shop this Easter since it is still winter in most of America." It is called the Easter effect and business folk around the nation know that the Easter holiday usually means the sales of flowers, chocolate, and clothing will increase around this time of year!

So what is the Easter effect in your life? How does Easter affect you? Does it make a difference that Jesus is raised from the dead? What difference does it make in your daily walk?

The absolute center of our faith is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without the raising of Jesus we have nothing all that important to share with anyone. Listen to the Easter Effect among the women at the tomb:

(Matthew 28) The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

So how did Easter make a difference in the lives of these women? These folks became "evangelists" or "good news tellers." The news made them excited. Have you shared the message lately? Are you reminding those in your family, at work or in school that Easter makes all the difference. Christ is raised and now we have a message to share. Share it!

Pray with me:

Help me to hear the news of Easter anew and then to share that message with the people I see. Make me an evangelist, O God and fill my life with you. In the name of Christ. Amen.

Thursday March 27

Easter Memories – Missing the Point!

A bitter memory of Easter for me is wrapped around a chocolate bunny! As a small boy, just before Church each Easter morning my parents would give my sister and me each a solid chocolate bunny. I remember being very excited each Easter morning and would eat just a little bit of it before going off to Church with my family. It was a delight! I would nibble off one chocolate ear and save the rest for later. Some years my Easter sweet bunny would last a whole week!

One Easter Sunday, about 1960 or 1961, I put the treasured chocolate bunny in the window of my room. The sun was shining and I was very happy – until I came home after Church and found the bunny was no more! In its place was a mess of running liquid chocolate. It was on the carpet, it was on the window sill, and it was running down the wall. I cried. My Easter was ruined – and at age 6 or 7, I thought the world was coming to an end.

I had missed the point. Perhaps, a small boy can be excused for "majoring in minors" and forgetting the meaning of Easter. Perhaps a child can be forgiven for thinking of Easter bunnies when the news of Easter is much, much more.

So what is the point? For God so loved the world, that he sent Jesus to live in our midst. And even death could not end that presence. That's the point! The tomb is empty and the promise is that death has no eternal control over us. Wow! My friends – that is BIG, BIG news!

Every time I see an Easter Chocolate Bunny, I think of my "melting experience" almost fifty years ago – and I remind myself to focus on what is truly important.

Pray with me:

We age, we error, we fail, we trust in things and in people that do not last or who walk away from us. Even when we succeed we never stop the need for your Holy presence in our lives. Keep us focused on what is important, what is lasting, and what is eternal. May this be our prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Friday, March 28

Like Lightning!

I love lightening storms – well, okay, maybe I only "love them" when they are over and we are all safe. My dog gets very nervous when we have thunder and lightning. She will run and hide under the bed or sit in the window-less bathroom until its over!

There is something absolutely beautiful about lightning. When it's a big storm and the electricity goes out and you wait in the dark for the lights to come on – and there is a big lightning bolt arching across the sky – one sees creation and the wonder of nature in a brand new way. One moment it is pitch dark – and the next, a brilliantly visible light makes all things clear.

Read the Easter text and think about how a lightning-like appearance makes it all very clear!

From Matthew 28 – *"After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow."*

The angel's look was like lightning. What does that mean? Does it mean he was too bright to look at? Does it mean he was scary? Or could it mean that when the angel showed up – the darkness of despair turned into the bright light of a new world. When the angel came and gave the word to the women at the tomb – the world became very different.

Again from St. Matthew: *The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."* So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

The angel appeared like lightning. He had a message – and now with that message, the tears and depression of the women and all the disciples would turn into joy, happiness, and a movement that would change the world forever was being born. Like lightning – the world could now be seen for what it was: a place of God's hope in Jesus.

Pray with me:

Appear to us O God in the Word and breaking of the bread. And may your presence change us all to be more like you. In the name of Christ. Amen.

Saturday, March 29

Dear God ...

"It has been a long week God. In fact, it has been a long year and we are only a few months into it! And God I am tired. It seems Lord, I always come to you tired and a little "beat up." The days take their toll. I know that I am not as young as I used to be. I know that the mirror does not lie. I see myself and I wonder, some days, where is the energy, the vitality, the "get up and go" that I used to have. Maybe I am just tired of not being able to control everybody and everything. Maybe, I am just tired of not everybody doing what I tell them to do – or of being disappointed by all the people in my life who have failed me or who I have failed. Maybe, I am just tired of being so self-centered. I am sorry God. I know I have failed you. I know I have sinned. Forgive me.

I look at the world Lord and I see how beautiful so much of it is and that you are responsible for all of it. I drive along the lake shore and I see the beautiful forests you have strung together up here in this part of the world. I see the days getting longer and I see how the earth is getting ready for spring. I, too, look forward to spring and to re-birth and to long sunny days and warm nights. Thank you God for giving me this time on earth, for placing me here in the world in the year 2008, and giving me a family, a responsibility, a calling.

It has been a long week God. And I am tired. But I am not discouraged. You, O God have provided for me. You have given me a Savior. You have given me the Lord Jesus who loves me. And you have given me a Church – a group of your people who gather around the Word each week. I am needed by the Church and I need them to remind me of your love. Along with my sisters and brothers in our congregation, I drink the wine and eat the bread. I hear the Word. I cry and I laugh and I know that I am a part of your work in the world. Thank you God for giving me the Church.

Tomorrow is Sunday God. I need Sunday. Sunday is my weekly reminder that you live. Sunday is the reminder to the world that we together are your people and we welcome all to the family of faith. Thank you God for giving me Sunday.

I love Easter God. Help me to live in Easter today and every day. Be with all whom you love. And give me the strength of faith to serve the world for which you died. Thank you God for Easter. Amen."