

**Still Empty Tomb
John 20:1-18
March 23, 2008
Easter Sunday
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Marquette, MI**

Christ Is Risen! (Christ is Risen Indeed!). Well... thanks for coming. Okay I'm pulling your leg. You should see the look on some of your faces. Those who were upset because you thought I was done, and those of you now who are upset that in fact I am not done.

In all seriousness there are those who on this day wonder what else needs to be said. Then there are those who come on this day desperately seeking that word of hope. The word that somehow maybe this year we can make sense of this whole resurrection thing. The funny thing is, that's what the women and the disciples were also thinking almost 2000 years ago. No matter how many times they look, the tomb is still empty. He is not there!

Many of us come to worship today, wondering what this means. Can we literally believe in this resurrection without any corroborating evidence? The example we can take is from the beloved disciple. With only the rolled up burial garments, he saw and believed. That

was all he needed. Gail O'Day comments that the reason he believed is because he believed. What she meant is that he already believed. He saw the empty tomb and knew that Jesus had triumphed over death. He needed no appearance, no dramatic encounter to know.

That being said, there are still things he did not know. How did Jesus actually do it? How will Jesus manifest the resurrection to others? How will the resurrection impact the community and the world? The beloved disciple does not know these things. They have yet to play out. However his belief led him to know, that Jesus had risen.

That is why we are here today, to believe and also to be. The empty tomb means that just as Jesus is (the resurrection and the life) we also can be. I saw a church sign a few years ago that said: "We preach Christ crucified every week." Being the smart aleck that I am I said, "Then Easter must be a real disappointment to them." To believe in the risen Christ means that we believe in the new life now. It also means that new life that lives within us, and carries with it also a calling to be faithful. A calling to be the hands and feet of Jesus

empowered by God as we live in the resurrection. On that day death no longer has the meaning. Even though we die we may live because Jesus died yet he lives.

Recognizing the empty tomb means we are first of all to live our lives as agents of God. We do not fear death nor do we live according to others rules of conformity. We live according to the grace and hope that we receive in the new life of a risen Christ.

The Empty tomb also means we die to ourselves. Now that has often been an overused and misused term. We often think that means doing things that we are not comfortable or even capable of doing. Jesus never asked nor does he ask that we do what we are not capable of. Dying to ourselves means that we have a different motivation for what we do. It is not for awards or accolades, though those may come, it is not out of what is in it for me, but rather we act and we serve out of the sense of what we have to give in order that the whole world might live. We don't serve for ourselves instead we serve for Christ. In that sense, we die to ourselves.

To piggy back on that point, just as Jesus was buried, so that he might live, we too must also bury our past so that we too can live the new life. Again here is something that we can steer the wrong way if we go too far. Our belief in the empty tomb means that we have a new life, but many of us want to dwell more on the old way, the way things were. What happened in the past, no matter if it is guilt for past sins or broken relationships, or for sins of omission or sins of commission. We must remember that everyday can be a resurrection experience and we must bury those things in the past that would have power over us. It does not mean that we forget what has happened. This past holy week reminds us of that. However, we also must remember that it is not the end of the story. The past is the past, which cannot be changed. But if we live in the new life and follow the calling of Christ, those things have no power, for our power comes from the living Christ.

That is where we experience resurrection. And it is not simply dependent on if we see his body, but as the Apostle Paul reminds us we are his body redeemed by his blood. We are living in the resurrection everyday as we fulfill our calling through prayer, service,

using our gifts for the glory of God. The tomb is empty and we must live like it still is because it still is!

Today as we have dressed up in our Sunday Best, and will gather with family and friends, we are reminded that even though there is still snow on the ground here, new life is blossoming. New life can blossom in us. The risen Christ calls us to allow our lives to be formed in his image and to be freed to do what it is we are called to do. The tomb is still empty. We cannot nor will we ever find him there. We will find Christ in the people of our churches and the people of our world serving with the gifts that we have been given. If we come looking just like Peter, we will not find him. If we come with the expectation, him we may not recognize him even when we are in his very presence as Mary did. But just like Mary, just like the beloved disciple, we can believe, because Christ calls to us to live for him as people of the resurrection. Thanks be to God that Christ is risen the tomb is still empty and Christ lives as we will live forever more. Amen.