

Grace and peace to you . . .

It is Easter morning. The golden sun is rising in the east and casting its bright beams over the city of God, Jerusalem. The tragedy that occurred only Friday now seems long forgotten. The city is wrapped in peaceful slumber. But some do not sleep. At the break of day, "very early in the morning," three women are wending their way to God's grave: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. They had seen where God was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. The One whom they loved more than any other, the Lord God, was dead. They set out to anoint with spices His cold corpse.

Who can describe such deep sorrow? These women know that the Holy One of Israel has been crucified, He who was their dearest Friend, He who was their Joy, their Peace, their All. How must Mary Magdalene have felt, from whom the Lord had cast out seven demons? How must the others have felt, whose many sins Christ Jesus had forgiven? He was the salvation of Israel. Now He was dead! With bowed heads and sealed lips the women plod forward, occupied with their sorrowful thoughts. Grief is often so deep that it cannot be expressed in words. So it was that Easter morn.

In these three women, you see a picture of yourself. You also are wending your way toward the grave. Along the way, you pause at the graves of those who have gone before you. Your summons will come, sooner or later, and you will join the caravan of those who have already crossed the Jordan of death. Death raises his scythe over all. Your nearest & dearest are taken from you by death's ruthless hand. The wife must leave her husband; the husband is separated from his wife; the little child, upon whom you set your hopes & affection, must be laid under the cold sod. With bowed head and sealed lips you plod forward with these three women, mourning those who are in their graves with grief too deep for words.

As they approach God's sepulcher, the women dispel their somber mourning with more practical thoughts. "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" They had not thought of that before, nor of the seal affixed 'round the stone, nor of the guard stationed at the grave. They only thought of God, that they must anoint Him, seeing one last time the body of their Master. The stone & the seal & the guard had not occurred to them.

How like you these women are! How often do you walk through life, blind-folded, as it were? You do not see the obstacles that are in your way. Then, when your more sober, second thoughts perceive the difficulties that would prevent you, God has already removed them. So it was for those women. Lifting up their eyes, they see that the great stone had been rolled away. Boldly, trembling, fearing, they enter the cold tomb. And what a sight met their eyes! They do not find the body of Jesus, but a young man sitting there in white, whose face was like lightning and whose long robes were as white as snow.

God's grave is empty! The door is wide open. The tomb is not a dark, deep dungeon, but alight with the glory of the Lord. This is not the realm of death. This is the victory of God! The women were amazed. The angel (for that is who the young man was) immediately silences their fears, "Do not be alarmed." They are in a tomb, and they have no reason for fear. This is the message of Easter.

This is the message that takes away all dread from the abode of the dead. Where are most tears shed? At the coffin; at the grave. What thoughts trouble you there? Thoughts of death, of the shroud, and of the pall. In the midst of such, the women are told, "Do not be alarmed." Though you be in the very den of death, you have no reason to fear. Other may fear; unbelievers should fear; but you have no reason to fear. The guards were so struck with fear that they were as dead men, but you, through faith in Christ, have no reason to fear.

Whenever you stand at the grave of a loved one, whenever you contemplate the end of your own life, there comes from the tomb of Christ this tender message, "Do not be alarmed." For you, who have faith in Christ, the grave has lost its terror. Your tomb also is alight with the glory of the Lord. It is not the dark and gloomy dungeon you once thought. The grave is not your end. You sing triumphantly in bold defiance, "O grave, where is your victory?" Whenever you hear the words of a Pastor over a grave, words of consolation and hope and peace, you know he is merely echoing the Easter message of this young angel, "Do not be alarmed."

It is not only for comfort at the end of life that Christ is risen from the dead. The empty tomb gives you comfort even now, even as you face the ups and

downs of every day. For Christ was delivered over to death to pay for your sins, and He is risen from the dead for your justification, to make you right with God. Who can lay anything against you, whom God has chosen? God declares you righteous! God has begotten you anew “to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” [1Pe 1:3] You are begotten of God; that makes you His son, His heir. He has begotten you, “to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation.” [4-5] In your place, Jesus entered death, defied the devil, and defeated all your foes. He is victorious, and has brought life and immortality to light. He is free from death, and so then are you. The handwriting that was against you has been blotted out by the pierced hands of God. Christ is risen; your faith is not in vain. Your sins are forgiven; you have nothing to fear.

This Easter message means even more than that. “Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” [1Co 15:20] His resurrection is the guarantee of your resurrection. “He is risen! He is not here” said the young man to the women. The same will be said of you. For what can death do to you who are in Christ? Job has the answer, “I know that my Redeemer lives, ... And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God.” [19:25-26] In your flesh, you shall see God; you shall see Him with your own eyes. Though your flesh be dissolved for a thousand years, God will raise you up and glorify you in the flesh, as St. Paul writes, “[Christ] will transform [y]our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body.”

So look again this Easter morn into the tomb of Christ. Behold, it is empty! So also shall your grave be empty. Of Christ the angel declared, “He is risen! He is not here.” So also shall it be said of you. You shall rise from death even as you rise from sleep. Do you fear sleep? Then neither should you fear death! You are girded with the armor of God; death holds no terror for you. Look at your grave in the light of Easter. See your cemetery as a cozy bed-chamber, made holy by Christ. “Do not be alarmed.” Your soul shall be carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom at the banquet table of heaven. Then, on the last day, your body will join your soul again and forever. You, body & soul, will be with the Lord always in the heavenly mansion He has prepared for you in the new creation. Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed. So you shall rise; you shall rise, indeed. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes . . .