



When you read the Easter story, your heart is forced to go through so many emotions. We travel from the exhilaration of Jesus' triumphal ride into Jerusalem to the disbelief of Judas' betrayal in the garden. Then there is the heart wrenching picture of Jesus being beaten crucified and his death which breaks our heart and leaves us devastated at the tomb. But that is all eclipsed by the unbelievable joy of the resurrection. As the choir takes us on this journey, we will see an empty cross, an empty tomb, and empty grave clothes. Each of these are a symbol of something which Jesus wins on our behalf through his Easter Journey, and each is a promise He gives to you and me this morning.

I. The Empty Cross - The Promise of forgiven sins
Mark 15:37 - 40; 16:1 - 3

Let's begin at the empty cross. Because the cross was empty, we have the promise of forgiven sins. Think of what we have just read. It is early morning, the sun has not risen yet. As the women are on the way to the tomb I wonder if they had to pass near the place of the crucifixion. If they did, I wonder if they would have seen silhouetted against the sunrise, the gruesome reminder of the horror of Friday. Because yesterday was the Sabbath, I doubt that the crosses had been taken down, so the middle cross on which Jesus had hung would have still stood there. If they took a closer look they would have seen near the top of the cross was the bloodstains from where the crown of thorns had caused the blood to flow each time Jesus had leaned his head back against the cross. The stains on the cross member would have still been there from where his hands and wrists had been nailed to the cross. The main beam still would have had the stains from where his raw whip lacerated back had rested for those long six hours. The cross would have still bore the signs of where Jesus had died.

There was no question that he was dead. The Romans knew it, the soldiers knew it, the Jews knew it and those who had been at the cross knew it. We also know that with a word Jesus could have called 10,000 angels and come down on that cross at any time. That means that he had to, with each breath, decide to stay on the cross. Why? The bible says in Romans 5:8: 'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us'. What held him on the cross? It was his love for you and I, and his determination to make sure that those things which we have done which would cause us to be separated from God, things we would be bound to which we would never be able to leave behind, and would cause us to have to spend eternity out of God's presence, those would be paid for, taken care of and forgiven. On the cross He transferred our actions, our wrongs and our sin to his very body and soul so that we could be forgiven and given a brand new start, a new heart, and a new eternal future. On that day across every name He wrote in His own blood **Forgiven - Forgiven - Forgiven.**

The empty cross is a reminder that we can be forgiven if we accept what Jesus did on the cross on our behalf. Dale Evans (Roy Rogers' wife) once said, "I spent most of my life searching for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Then I finally found it at the foot of the cross."

II. The Empty Tomb - The promise of eternal life Luke 24:1-7

Philip was an eight year old. In his Sunday school class several weeks before Easter, Phillip's teacher introduced a special project. He gave every member a plastic "egg", the kind Easter candy comes in (panty hose used to come in them). He explained that each child was to go outside, find a symbol for new life and put it into the egg.

Enthusiastically, the class responded. Back in the classroom the eggs were opened one at a time with each child explaining the meaning of his symbol. In the first egg was a pretty flower and in the next a beautiful butterfly. The children "oohed" and "awed". In another was a rock, which prompted loud laughter. Finally the last egg was opened and there was nothing. 'That's stupid,' said one child. Another grumbled, 'Someone didn't do it right!' That is when the teacher felt a tug on his shirt. It was Phillip, who said, 'That's mine, and I did do right! It's empty cause the tomb was empty.'" There was an unusual, thoughtful silence and the kids began to nod in agreement

That summer, Philip picked up an infection which most children would easily have shaken off, but Philip's weak body couldn't and a few weeks later, he died. At his funeral, nine eight year olds with their teacher, brought their symbol of remembrance and placed it near his coffin. Their unusual gift of love to Phillip wasn't flowers it was empty eggs - now a symbol to them of new life and hope.

The fact of the empty tomb is that Jesus rose from the dead. The promise of the empty tomb is that we too will be raised to eternal life. For those who know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, the bible says death has lost its sting. And while death can cause so much hurt and loss in our lives when we lose a loved one, the reality is that for the believer (because of the empty tomb) something has changed. We know that death is no longer the end. Instead the bible teaches that it is the beginning of the most exciting adventure of our entire life.

I came across this analogy the other day. A father and son were traveling down a country road one afternoon in the spring time when suddenly a bee flew in the window. Being deathly allergic to bee stings, the boy began to panic as the bee buzzed all around inside the car. Seeing the horror on his child's face, the father reached out and caught the bee in his hand. Soon, he opened his hand and the bee began to buzz around once again. Again, the boy began to panic. The father reached over to his son, and opened his hand showing him the stinger still in his palm. 'Relax, son,' the father said, 'I took the sting, the bee can't hurt you anymore.'

The empty tomb is God's way of saying to us 'Relax, my child, I took the sting, death can't hurt you anymore, actually it will just open up the fantastic potential of an eternity I have prepared for you.'

III. The Empty Clothes - The promise of a personal relationship with Jesus John 20:1 – 8

On February 27, 1991, at the height of Desert Storm, Ruth Dillow received a very sad message from the Pentagon. It stated that her son, Clayton Carpenter, Private 1st Class, had stepped on a mine in Kuwait and was dead. Ruth Dillow later wrote, 'I can't begin to describe my grief & shock. It was almost more than I could bear. For three days I wept. For three days I expressed anger and loss. For three days people tried to comfort me to no avail because the loss was too great.' But three days after she received that message, the telephone rang again. The voice on the other end said, "Mom, it's me. I'm alive." Ruth Dillow said she couldn't believe it at first, but then she recognized his voice and knew he really was alive. The message was all a mistake! She said, 'I laughed, I cried, I felt like turning cartwheels because my son whom I had thought was dead, was really alive. I'm sure none of you can even begin to understand how I felt.'

Perhaps not, but I believe that some of the people who walked the pages of the New Testament would have understood how she felt because they experienced similar emotions themselves. One day they watched their best friend and teacher being nailed to a cross. They witnessed His pain as He cried out, "I thirst!" and heard him say "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" and they saw him die. But then at the tomb the ladies were told that Jesus was alive and that they needed to tell the disciples. That is when Peter and John ran back to the tomb. Impetuous Peter went in first and sure enough the tomb was empty, but it was when John stepped into the tomb that he had the great 'ahha'. Not only was the tomb empty but the grave clothes were also empty, and folded right where Jesus' body had been laid. It struck him that if someone was going to steal the body of Jesus they wouldn't have removed the burial clothes, folded them neatly and left them where he had been lying. Truly Jesus was alive and as they found out, his goal was to meet them, talk to them and be with them. That is why we find him walking with them, sitting with them, eating with them and simply meeting with them in groups of 2 to 500. And here is the amazing thing - just like with the disciples, His resurrection makes it possible for you and I to have a daily, personal on-going relationship with the resurrected Jesus.

Three Simple pictures which help us see three important promises:

- I. The empty cross is the promise that our sins are forgiven.
- II. The empty tomb is the promise that we will have eternal life and that death is not the end.
- III. The empty clothes is the promise that we can have a personal relationship with Jesus.

<p>For information about Brentview Baptist Church and its ministries, please contact the church office at: 3512 Charleswood Dr NW, Calgary, AB T2L 2C3 Phone: 403-284-4691 Fax: 403-284-0132 email: mail@brentviewbaptist.com Website: www.brentviewbaptist.com</p>
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