

Looking for Jesus
Matthew 28 1-10
Easter Sunday: April 20, 2014

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. 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. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Jesus Christ is risen!

In today's Gospel reading, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary set out, first thing in the morning, to find something. They didn't set out to find someone. They set out to find something. If they had been looking for Jesus, they would have been looking for someone. But that wasn't the case. The something they were looking for was a dead body. Thank God they were wrong, because Jesus Christ is risen.

At the crack of dawn, these two well-intentioned ladies were on their way to see to it the body of Jesus was properly interred. We can only guess at the grief they must have felt. The one they loved, the one they believed to be the promised Messiah, was dead. They had watched him die. Their hope for the future escaped with his dying breath. Now they were making their way to his tomb to attend to the last details of their friend and their dream.

Of course, both the angel and the empty tomb made the most incredible announcement, "*He is not here; he is risen*" (Mt 28:6). Those devoted women went looking for something and found someone. They went looking for a dead body and found a risen Savior. And, just as we can only guess at their grief when they thought their friend was dead, we can only guess at their joy finding upon their Lord and Savior alive.

Now, with the advantage of 20/20 hindsight, we know Jesus said he was going to rise from the dead and he did. Therefore, we might give a condescending nod to these ladies who went looking for something, when they should have been looking for someone. But before we become too full of ourselves, we need to ask if we have ever gone looking for something to enhance our lives, solve our problems, give us contentment, when we should have been looking for someone to do all that, and more.

Anyone, who might say, "I have never done that," isn't being honest. We are all sinful.

We have all, at one time or another, tried to solve our own problems, make our own way through life, or resist temptations without help. We have all gone looking for something instead of someone. We have bought bigger houses, bigger cars, bigger boats. We have changed friends, changed jobs, sometimes even changed spouses. We have buried ourselves in hobbies or work. But these things and more were all unsuccessful, because something will never replace the someone of Jesus.

Of course, we know Jesus. When we come to our senses, we turn from all the somethings and we return to Jesus. We confess our pride and self-centeredness and he forgives us. Jesus gives us a fresh start and we step back on the road of life trying to keep our eyes on our someone and not the somethings.

What a joy it is to know the Easter story. How comforting it is to know the answer to everything is Jesus. Our help, our joy, our hope, and our forgiveness are all in Jesus. The risen Savior is the only someone we will ever need.

But we Christians are not the only people in the world. In fact, at least two-thirds of the world don't know Jesus. When life closes in on them, the only answers left to them are the somethings of this world. That means there are approximately four billion people looking for answers in all the wrong places. The question for this Easter 2014 is: What can we Christians do about that?

First, we need to find the people who are looking for answers in the somethings. (These might be believers or unbelievers. Anyone can go looking for something instead of someone.) So, how do you recognize these poor souls? Some are people who use fear, anger, or hatred to deal with life problems. Some are people who turn to alcohol or drugs to quiet painful memories. Some are people who will do anything and everything to be liked and accepted by other people. The list could go on and on, but it always comes back to someone looking for an answer other than the answer of Jesus.

The second thing we can do is help these people get pointed in the right direction. If this person is a believer, we need to lovingly remind him or her of the Easter story. We can help them move their focus from worldly things to the victory won by the risen Savior.

If we are dealing with an unbeliever, we need to gently introduce that person to the Lord, who conquered the world. When Jesus died and rose, he did those things for everyone. The answer of Jesus is available to everyone – believer or unbeliever – no matter what the past – no matter what the present. The answer of Jesus is the universal answer.

The third thing, and we must do this, is to be sure we have laid full claim to the Easter story in our lives. That means we put our complete trust in the victory Jesus won for us. And that means we are not looking for answers in the somethings of this life. An unbeliever, who sees a Christian trusting in the somethings of this world, will never be inspired to believe in Jesus as the answer.

When problems, troubles, and trials strike, to be sure we are always turning to our someone of Jesus and not the somethings of the world, we need to be aware of two things: **where not to look for Jesus and where to look for Jesus**. Let's look at a few of those.

Don't look for Jesus in a history book. Many Christians seem to be confused on this point. The Bible is not a history book. The Bible is the revelation of God's loving plan for our salvation. Furthermore, Jesus is not an historical figure. Historical figures are people who lived in the past and are now dead. Jesus is not dead. Jesus Christ is risen.

Don't look for Jesus in ideas and musings of your own making. Many Christians seem to be confused on this point, too. The Bible is the inspired infallible Word of God. If the Bible says things that make you uncomfortable, and you put a new spin on Scripture to make it what you want, you will never find the real Jesus. The Jesus of Easter is the Jesus of all of Scripture – nothing added and nothing taken away.

Don't look for Jesus in only the most religious places. Can you find Jesus in church – yes. Is church the only place where you will find Jesus – no. If you read your Bible, you will find most of the people found Jesus somewhere other than the Temple or a synagogue. People found Jesus on a hillside teaching – on a dusty road – in the town square – even hanging on a cross.

So where can we look to find Jesus? To answer that, we turn to our Gospel reading.

In verse seven, the angel told the women: *Go quickly and tell his disciples: He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you*. He is going ahead of you. A good place to look for Jesus is ahead of you. When you look at tomorrow, next week, next year, don't be afraid. Jesus is going ahead of you. You can always look for Jesus in the future because he is already there.

Now, let's complete the angel's announcement from verse seven: *He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him*. Jesus was going to meet the disciples in Galilee. Galilee was home for many of the disciples. When the disciples went to Galilee, they returned to their everyday lives. So, Jesus was going to meet the disciples in their everyday lives.

You see, Jesus isn't just in your future. Jesus isn't just in church. Jesus is in your everyday life. Jesus will be with you at home, at work, at school. Jesus will be with you in your car, on your boat, at the golf course, and at the bowling alley. You can always find Jesus right at your side. Jesus promised” *Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age* (Mt 28:20). That's a promise from the God, who has never broken a promise.

Every moment of every day the world is full of people looking for answers. People with problems, griefs, addictions, and heartaches. Believers are looking for answers. Unbelievers are looking for answers. The whole world is crying out for answers.

Many of these people will look for answers in the somethings of this world, and they will be disappointed every time. Only the risen Savior has the answer the world is searching for. Only the love of Jesus Christ can calm the troubled soul, heal the wounded heart, and give hope to the hopeless.

We have the answer the world is looking for. We have felt *the love of God that is Christ Jesus, our Lord* (Rom 8:39). This Easter, share the story of the someone who loved us so much he would rather die than live without us. Tell your neighbor, your relative, your friend, your co-worker the answer to all of life's situations. That answer is – Jesus Christ is risen!