

Following the Footsteps of Jesus; to the Tomb!

Shepherd's Grace Sunrise Service

March 31, 2013

²Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her (John 20: 1-18)

My name is Malcus! I am the slave assigned to follow the body of Jesus and to watch as it lay in the tomb! My master is Caiaphas, chief priest of the Jews (here I refer to the Jews as those in power and who exercised that power to step beyond the boundaries of Jewish social and religious law) in the year that Jesus is crucified. I was with the Roman police the night Jesus was arrested. I went out with them on Thursday and one of His...one of Jesus' disciples, Peter, drew his sword and cut off my ear! I fell to the ground crying out in pain and at that very moment Jesus came forward and touched me! He touched me, one of those who had come to arrest him, to persecute him and in that instant all my pain disappeared. He restored my ear, stopped my bleeding and brought forth a peace in me that I have never known before!

After He was arrested, I continued to follow Him under orders of my master Caiaphas. I watched as he stood trial in the Sanhedrin and then as he was taken to Pilate. I watched as Pilate tried to wash his hands of the incident and set Him free. I watched as the crowds turned against him, encouraged by the chief priests. I watched as the crowds shouted, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" I watched as Pilate waffled and waivered and finally succumbed to the political pressure of the moment and led Him off to be crucified. Then I watched as he hung on the cross.

I watched as his followers looked on from a distance. I watched as that coward Peter stood far away so as not to be seen. I watched as the women came forward with only the one disciple coming with them, the one whom Jesus loved. I watched as the sky grew dark. I watched as He shouted out from the cross, "Father Forgive them for they know not what they do!" I watched as he breathed his last and as the guards pierced his side to make sure he was dead! I watched as Joseph of Aramathea, a secret disciple and Nicodemus, another who had once visited Jesus at night took Him down and wrapped him in cloth.

Then, under instruction from Caiaphas, I followed these two and the women to a tomb where Jesus was to be laid. I watched as they checked for signs of life in His body. They found none! He was dead! I know He was dead! I watched as they rolled the stone in front of the tomb. I stayed and watched as they left. I watched on Friday night, all day Saturday, and Saturday night; then after midnight on that first day of the week I saw a light from inside the tomb. It was an incredible light, a light bright as the sun! The stone was still rolled in front of the tomb, but the light shone even through the stone. I had never seen anything like it. It was as if light had come into the world and darkness could not overcome it!

A short time later, the large stone just seemed to move away from the covering of the tomb! I could not see where anyone approached the tomb or touched the stone. It just seemed to move and then I saw two figures walk out of that tomb! The two seemed to have a glow, the kind of glow the Hebrew people saw upon Moses after he had talked with God. I tried to get close enough to identify the two but could not. After that, all was quiet until early morning!

Then, early in the morning, while it was still dark I saw Mary Magdalene come toward the tomb. When she reached the tomb she seemed quite disturbed. She did not go in. As slave to Caiaphas, I have often been in the company of people who know and debate the scriptures. Mary's action of shock and surprise at the entrance of the tomb in the darkness of that morning reminded me of another passage I had heard debated before. Perhaps you also know it. "In the beginning, when the world was a formless, shapeless void and darkness covered the face of the earth, the Spirit of God hovered above the face of the deep." (Gen.1: 1-2) I don't know what Mary saw at the entrance to the tomb but perhaps she saw something similar to the beginning of the world. Perhaps she saw a new creation, a new thing God was doing!

At any rate, Mary ran from what she saw and found Peter and that other disciple. I saw them both approaching the tomb as I continued to stand my post. The other disciple made Peter look old and slow as he outran him. The other disciple reached the tomb, stopped and waited. I was so surprised! He waited for that coward Peter! What happened in the hours between Thursday and Sunday to allow Peter, that one who struck me, who denied Jesus, who ran away, who stayed in the distance to once again hold such a position of prestige amongst these disciples? I may never understand!

Please forgive my petty petulance for Peter and continue to listen. Peter went into the tomb. At this point I crept close! I saw what they saw! Peter saw the garments Jesus had been wrapped in lying on the floor. He saw the head covering folded and lying in a separate place. The other disciple entered, saw the same things and they talked. The other disciple reminded Peter of the times Jesus said He must be raised from the dead! Peter shook his head as if to try to comprehend. They both agreed it was too dangerous to say anything! They left and returned to their homes, still not understanding anything of what had taken place.

I quickly hid behind the rocks as they walked my way. They did not notice me. They did not even notice Mary standing outside the tomb weeping! As they left she stepped toward the entrance to the tomb. I was able to position myself behind her so I could also see into the tomb. She looked inside and saw two men wearing clothes whiter than any I had ever seen on this earth! I could hear them ask her who she was looking for. She sobbed loudly and told them she was looking for her Lord who had been moved from the tomb.

Just then, I saw Jesus! He did not look as he had on Thursday, but I could never forget the look of love He had in His eyes! It was Jesus and He came up behind Mary. He gently touched her on the shoulder and asked who she was looking for! She wept and, thinking he was someone who worked there asked where they had laid her Lord! Then He called her by name and at once she saw in His eyes the same love and care I saw there on Thursday! She knew! I knew! We knew not by what we saw but by what we had come to believe. He talked to her, walked with her, and as she left the garden, she was giddy.

As I watched all this I could not help but think back to the passage from Genesis I shared earlier. God, in His desire to create a relationship started with nothing. God started with the cold dead of emptiness and because with God nothing is impossible, created a universe, a world, a people in His image and likeness and called them by name. Adam, from our word adamah which means earth. For from dust God created them. Out of nothing God spoke them into creation. Just so Jesus was dead, lifeless, nothing and God created from him a new thing. From death God spoke and life began anew! This was not the old life filled with fear and death! This was new life!

This one who loved me even though I was there with his prosecutors and took on all the evil the world had to offer put that evil to death and was raised to new life in God! Just as the old Adam, adamah was

sent out of Eden in sin, now this Jesus, the new Adam, the new creation was ushered in to Eden in life! His life was a promise of the first fruit of all creation. How fitting since the day of His resurrection is the celebration of the Jewish festival of first fruits. This Jesus now becomes the first fruit of new life, a life redeemed by the Passover sacrifice and now made possible by God's creative work!

Mary, after talking with Jesus went from the garden just as Adam went only instead of going out in sin and disgrace she went out in joy to share the good news. From the garden of goodness which became the garden of sin and death Adam went out to die. Now Mary goes out from the garden of death and sin to share the good news that the author of life has overcome death and sin once and for all time so that our sins might be forgiven and go forth to live!

I am Malcus! I bear witness to these events not so you will know, but so you will believe through faith that Jesus has been raised from the dead and that in Him, God has begun a new creation; one that invites you and me to receive His forgiveness and grace in order that we might go forth to live as those who will never die! Amen!