

Psalm 93 Colossians 3:1-4 St. John 20:1-10

Searching in all the wrong places...

Have you ever stashed something away in a safe place and then, later, when looking for it, not been able to find it? You know you put it in that place, but now it is no longer there. You may even (if you are like me) blame someone else for moving it. And so the hunt continues, but you keep going back to that one place you are certain you put it. It is as if your mind will not allow you to look somewhere different. However, you will never find what you are looking for unless you continue the search elsewhere...or unless you have a kind, patient and loving spouse (like I do) who will either find it for you or point you in the right direction.

In many ways, this is a picture of what happened on that first Easter Sunday. Hopefully by now, you have either heard or read for yourself all the four Gospel accounts of the Passion and know more or less the sequence of events and the main characters in this drama. Our Savior died on a Friday...consequently, the burial preparations were rather hasty as the Sabbath began at sunset...they didn't have much time between taking His Body down from the cross, wrapping it in the shroud with all the spices, and then laying it in the tomb. So, when the Sabbath ended at day break on the first day of the week, the day we call Sunday or the Lord's Day, the women scurried down to the tomb to complete what they had begun late on Friday.

Now, all this would be fine if these were ordinary women and the Body that of an ordinary Man. Going to the tomb to attend to a corpse would be the natural and normal place for a 1st Century mourner to go if you were expecting to find a corpse, right? But how many times didn't our Lord Jesus tell His followers that He would be betrayed to the

Romans, crucified on the cross, die and be buried, but then rise again on the third day? Do yourselves a favor and go home today and read through the four Gospels and count the number of times He told them He would be resurrected. Well, what else were you going to do?

But they went to the tomb anyway, bringing the spices they had prepared to anoint the dead Body with. Now, you all know the story...when they got to the place they saw the huge round, wheel-like stone had been rolled away from the mouth of the tomb and the Body was missing...and instead of remembering the words of their Lord and coming to the conclusion that He was, indeed, risen from the dead as He had said He would be, they panicked. Because they were expecting a dead body, they concluded that someone must have stolen it. And here I want you to notice how their minds simply would not allow them to come to any other conclusion because they simply could not bring themselves to look for Him in a different place.

In St. Matthew's Gospel we read that the women were told by the angels that Jesus was not there because He was risen just as He had said. They were then instructed to go and report this to the disciples. St. Mark wrote something similar to this. And St. Luke recorded that the angels rebuked them asking the women why they were seeking the living among the dead, adding a direct quotation from Jesus regarding His resurrection to drive their point home. But while the women did report what they saw, they apparently still didn't quite get it. St. John said that St. Mary Magdalene simply could not wrap her mind around this extremely foreign concept...she was still searching for Jesus in all the wrong places. "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb," she wailed, "and we do not know where they have laid Him." Or, to return to our imagery in the introduction,

she had seen Him put away in a safe place and consequently she was still looking for Him where she thought she had left Him. She just couldn't bring herself to look elsewhere. Given the facts it seems amazing to us. She had the Lord's word...she had the angel's words...she had the illogical situation of robbers stealing a worthless body and leaving behind the costly spices and linen cloths...but still she stayed at the tomb weeping. And, as we see in the verses following our Gospel lesson for this Easter morning, all she really had to do was redirect her gaze from the tomb, turn around and refocus her eyes on a different spot in the Garden in order to find what she had been searching for all the while.

Oh, the 1st Century followers of Jesus were silly, weren't they? I mean, they had Jesus' words and all...they had the evidence right there in front of them...why didn't they get it? But then again, don't we have the same word? Don't we have that same evidence? And we don't always get it either do we? So, maybe they weren't so silly, after all. You see, we all need a reminder from time to time to redirect our focus...to stop searching in all the wrong places...and to turn around and to look to Jesus to find what we are looking for. That's what St. Paul was reminding the believers at Colossae to do in the third chapter of his letter to them. "If then," he wrote, "you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." You see, when the going gets tough, as it often does in this life, we all tend to go scurrying around looking for help or consolation in all the wrong places. We try to settle our differences in the pagan law courts, or by giving someone the proverbial cold shoulder, or by cutting them out of your circle of friends through blatant gossip and

slander, rather than working things out ourselves or choosing to suffer wrong and to forgive. We attempt to drown our sorrows in the bottle or in the triple-sized portions on our plates, rather than letting the peace of God rule in our hearts. We look for fulfillment in illicit relationships or in unhealthy work habits, rather than striving to be conformed to the image of Jesus. We seek our self-worth in our physical appearance, rather than in God's love for us. We search for security in money or possessions, rather than in spiritual and therefore eternal treasures.

All of these places will lead us back to the same empty hole because we are seeking to live our lives as believers in the places of the dead...our minds are set on earthly things and not heavenly things...and as long as we stubbornly refuse to redirect our focus and to start looking for answers to our problems in His Word, we will never find the peace of mind or the state of happy blessedness we are striving for. And we will stand at all those wrong places weeping with our minds still stuck in the same rut as before until we turn around and face Jesus head on.

This morning, dearest beloved brethren, as you come to partake of the symbols of His resurrected life shared with you, my prayer is that you too, like St. Mary Magdalene, will hear our Lord speak your name as clearly as she heard Him speak hers that first Easter morning. And I pray that as you turn to look on Him Who calls you by name, that your eyes may be opened to comprehend that which you have been searching for all your life, and that in Him, as the elect of God, you will be enabled to stop looking in the wrong places and start finding what you need by resetting and redirecting your focus by setting your mind on things above and by letting His Word dwell in you richly.