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The Compulsory Rising

Text: John 20:1-10

I am not a cemetery person, but I understand the importance of a gravesite visit for some. Sometimes we can miss a person so, that the most helpful act, for us, is to go to the last place we *had* them. Even though we know their spirits have gone to stand before God, we find that plot of ground where we laid their remains, to be a hallowed plot. John does not tell us why Mary Magdalene went to the tomb (v.1). Luke tells us that several unnamed women went to the tomb with the spices they had prepared, perhaps planning to anoint the body of Jesus (Luke 24:1). Mark names the women and writes that “Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome brought spices, that they might come and anoint Him” (Mark 16:1). Matthew says that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb (Matthew 28:1). While verse 1 names only Mary, verse 2 has her speaking in the plural (“*we* do not know where they have laid Him”).

It was early morning, still dark outside. John likes to point out light and darkness. He reminds us, in the prologue of this gospel, that the light shines in darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it (1:5). John tells us that Jesus described himself as the light of the world (8:12). John tells us that after Judas was identified as the betrayer of Jesus, Judas went out “and it was night” (13:30).

Our text says that upon discovering the empty tomb, Mary was compelled to go tell *somebody*! She ran to Peter and “the other disciple, whom Jesus loved” (whom tradition identifies as John [John 19:26]). Mary reports a missing body and the two men, Peter and John, run to the tomb. The narrator tells us that John was faster than Peter, arriving at the tomb first (v. 4). John defers to Peter’s position and waits for Peter, so that Peter enters he tomb first (v. 8).

Evidence of resurrection led to belief (v. 8). John describes, in some detail, the scene inside the tomb. It doesn't suggest violence, as would be the case if an animal had gotten in and dragged the body out. There was no disheveled setting, as might be the case if grave robbers had gotten in there. John Stott, in his book, *Basic Christianity,* says that what they saw in the tomb was “like a discarded chrysalis from which the butterfly has emerged”.

The narrator tells us that up to this point these disciples did not know the Scripture that He (Christ) **must** rise again (v. 9). Surely, they had *heard* the prophecy that Jesus would rise. They did not *know* the Scripture. A better rendering of the thought in verse 9 is *they did not understand the Scripture.* What they did not understand was that the resurrection of Jesus was not *im*pulsive, not *re*pulsive but *com*pulsive. **This rising *had to* happen**. When Jesus rose from the dead it was not an afterthought. This was the plan of God and an event of which Jesus spoke. Let us be clear here. These disciples are not completely ignorant of the plan of God, to which their Lord often referred them. These disciples know *something.* They don't know *everything.*

In John 2:22, the narrator connects with resurrection with the Scripture. This act of Jesus conquering the power of the grave is the most significant act in Jesus’ life. It is what sets Jesus apart from every pretender to the throne of God. There were in that day, itinerant teachers who performed miraculous signs (Asclepius, for one; Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:9-11). There were people who presented teachings as did Jesus (Pharisees; Sadducees). However, no other person died and rose again from the dead, proclaiming that he had all power!

When Jesus rose from the dead, the disparate pieces of a relatively new theology began to come together for these followers of Jesus. As we continue to follow Jesus, and study Him and his teachings, we simply *comprehend* more. Jesus had made it clear that this rising from the tomb would happen (Matthew 16:21; 17:22; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22; John 2:18-22). This was no surprise. This was a compulsory rising.

**Illus.**

Eugene Peterson in his As Kingfishers Catch Fire:

*There is a widespread practice in our post-biblical church culture to take the story and then essentially eliminate it by depersonalizing it into propositions or “truths” or morals or ideas. The story is eviscerated of relationships and persons. Jesus, the center of the Christian faith, is thus depersonalized into an abstract truth, and men and women are depersonalized into “problems” to be fixed.*

This emptying out of the tomb is a witnessed, historical event not to be reduced to a set of sanitized tales and fables. This event is not a

“depersonalized... problem to be fixed”.

**Closing**

There are three Greek words used for “see” in this text.

Verse 5: *blepo*- to perceive by sight

Verse 6- theoreo- to see with attention

Verse 8- eidon - to pay attention to; to understand

When John *saw* in verse 8, that seeing led to believing.

As these who were closest to Jesus could “look” but not “see”, so the same could happen to us.

The evangelist D. L. Moody told of a 15-year-old girl who was suddenly hit with an illness that left her paralyzed on one side and almost blind. As she lay in bed one day, she heard the family doctor say to her parents, “She has seen her best days, poor child.” But she was a believer and she quickly responded, “No, doctor, my best days are yet to come, when I shall see the King in His beauty.” (In James Boice, The Gospel of John [Zondervan], p. 1,400.)

Because I have given my life to the risen Jesus, I have the same testimony as did that 15-year-old girl. My best days are yet to come, when I shall see the King in all His beauty. Do you have that testimony?" I trust so.

Amen