

There are certain times of the year that are filled with memories for me. Winter, making snow angels with my family or going sledding the first time on a hill by my grandparents. Fall, raking up big piles of leaves that we would jump in before putting them in orange garbage bags with pumpkin faces. Summers, going to the beach, still one of my favorite places to be, watching the crashing of the waves, with that sea-salt smell in the air.

But most of my memories about the season of Spring are centered in the church, and even more specifically, are centered on Easter Sunday. Easter always marked the beginning of spring. Even when it was still chilly out, when Easter would come early, I would have a new spring dress to wear. As I got older, there would be pancake breakfasts and sunrise services that involved the youth group. I played the handbells, and Easter we would break out beautiful pieces of music that would involve fast hands and joyful noise.

As I was reflecting on today's scripture passage from the Gospel of Luke, I had a new thought about these Easter memories, however. If they simply stay as memories, we are missing out. For Easter isn't supposed to just be a memory or memories about the past, its supposed to be a day that propels us forward in our Christian walk.

Each of the Gospels tells the story of Jesus's resurrection a bit differently. In the Gospel of Luke the story begins in such a familiar way - its the first day of the week, the day following the Sabbath, early in the morning. A group of women who had been following Jesus, probably the same group of women who stood by him on the cross, are making their way to the tomb where Jesus body is laid - carrying with them spices to prepare his body for a proper burial.

They knew that there was a large stone that had been placed in front of the tomb, out of fear that someone would come and steal Jesus's body. But, here, there is no talk of what the women will do about the stone. Instead, they approach the tomb and find that the stone that would be blocking them from their task, the desire of their heart, had already been rolled away.

So they entered, only they found that they could not do what they had hoped to do, because Jesus's body was already gone! You can imagine the confusion and questions they must have had. "Where's the body?" "Who took it?" "Now what?" But in the midst of their confusion, angels showed up. Described here are two men, clothed in bright white, that frightened the women to their very core.

And these angels had a question for the women - "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" Because Jesus is not here. He is risen - just like he said that he would be.

The women may have been frightened and confused, but they were also compelled to go and tell. They became some of the first evangelists - bears of the Good News - that Jesus had been raised!

Only the people they told, Jesus's disciples, the ones who would have heard this same teaching from Jesus about how he would be handed over to sinners but rise in three days, they didn't believe the Good News they were being told. Some translations put it as "their words seemed to them like nonsense." But Peter had his only curiosity piqued, even in the midst of disbelief, to at least go and run to the tomb.

He looked on in, and saw that the body of Jesus was gone and he was went away amazed. Confusion. Amazement. Fear. Disbelief. These may be some of the same things that we feel as we peer into the tomb anew today as well. On Easter Sunday, year after year, we proclaim the ancient story of our faith - about how Jesus came and trumped over sin and death.

But all too often, we spend more time trying to address the confusion or disbelief or myriad of other emotions instead of simply sitting in the truth. Instead of marveling at the fact, that on this day, God not only changed history, but also handed responsibility to go and tell this good news into the hands of those who faced all of their own emotions at the empty tomb.

And to us today as we encounter that empty tomb anew.

For a period of time I attended a church who believed it was their job to explain everything in the Bible in detail to folks in hopes that they would become converted. Friends, I have lived enough life to tell us that we cannot convince someone to come and receive the Good News of the empty tomb with arguments and facts and figures. But we can tell the story of how the empty tomb has changed our hearts, and those are some of the most fruitful words that we can ever offer.

When we get caught up in trying to rationalize this day in particular, friends, we can end up with a whole lot of Peters. Folks who may be amazed by what we say, may even go and peer into the empty tomb on their own, but at the end of the day, they simply walk away. But when we tell the story of how Jesus has changed our life, then we are like the women - bearing testimony because we have been changed.

All too often, when we caught up in our own memories about this day, we, too, can end up like Peter - amazed, but never moving past that point. The result is celebrating Easter as a special day, a day we may even be able to put words behind about its significance, but we don't live as if anything has changed.

And friends, when you have had an encounter with the Jesus of Easter, everything changes. Because Jesus has claimed victory over all that has held us captive. And when you realize that, you can't go back to life as it was.

Recently, I was speaking to someone about how much the resurrection of Jesus really does change in our lives. This particular person was struggling with feeling bound up by her own thoughts that they were not good enough to be called to follow and serve Christ. I stopped the conversation at one point and said that I believe in the power of praying Scripture over folks and the prophet Isaiah said that the Messiah would come to restore sight to the blind and set the captive free. So could we pray that the resurrected Jesus set her free from what was holding her captive.

Talk about standing on holy grounds, brothers and sisters. But that is the power of Christ and that is what we celebrate this day. That because of the intersection of the cross and the empty tomb we are set free. That's what I mean when I say that you cannot go back to life as it once was.

So what about you today? How has today not just been a memory for you, but a chance to move forward in the freedom of Christ? How do you claim not just what Christ once did, but what Christ is doing in and through your life? What is the Good News that you have been set free to go and bear witness to? Amen and Amen.