

The Women, the Witnesses

- ✦ First to learn of Jesus' resurrection
- ✦ Nonsense to the disciples
- ✦ Vindicated by Christ

In the Name of Jesus our crucified and risen Lord and Savior, dear *People of the Passion*:

In the weeks of Lent leading up to this joyous celebration we've heard about many *People of the Passion*¹. But **the Witnesses** before us this morning have mostly been in the background. When Jesus' disciples forsook Him and fled, do you remember how they watched from a distance? Several of **The Women** had followed Jesus from Galilee, using their own money to support His ministry, paying the expenses of Jesus and His disciples. Some of their names we know: Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Clopas, Salome, Joanna the wife of Cuza. The two Mary's had watched Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus place Jesus' body in Joseph's tomb, then roll the stone in place. All day Saturday they kept thinking about one last thing to do for Jesus. **The Women** were on their way early Easter morning.

✦ First to learn of Jesus' resurrection

Burials were very different in ancient Jewish culture. There were no undertakers or mortuaries to handle the body and prepare it for viewing as is our custom in America today. Family members would wash the body and wrap it in spices. They would place it on a stone bench inside a hand-hewn cave and come back about a year later when nothing was left but the bones. These would be placed in a bone pile of the whole family. It's one way to explain how the ancient kings were "gathered to their people."

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary had watched in sadness as Joseph and Nicodemus hurried to bury Jesus before the Sabbath began at 6:00 PM on Friday evening. There was no time to wash the body and prepare it properly. Considering the terrible beatings and crucifixion, they prepared more spices to show their love to their Lord. They thought He was dead and gone. Would their grief ever go?

One problem. Rolling the large flat stone down into place took a few strong men. But how could women possibly move it? Imagine their shock to see the stone rolled away. Hearts pounding inside they saw something far worse. Bad enough for Jesus to die like a wretched criminal and be buried in haste. But to not find His body? Luke's word to describe their feelings is when your heart just wants to die.

To see two men "*in clothes that gleamed like lighting,*" wouldn't that almost stop your heart? But the angels were smiling as the women turned their terrified faces to the ground. "*Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'*" Then they remembered his words. (Luke 24:5-8).

Everything was going according to God's plan which Jesus had told them! One of the angels spoke again: "*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.*" " (Matthew 28:6f NIV84) And who met them on the way? "*Greetings!*" Jesus said. They clasped His feet and worshiped as He reassured them: "*Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.*" (Matthew 28:10 NIV84)

¹ Adapted from the 2011 Lenten Series: *People of the Passion*. Available from NPH: 1-800-662-6022.

✦ Nonsense to the disciples

Now **The Women** knew why the tomb empty. He is risen! They had orders from the angel and from Jesus Himself to tell the disciples. Imagine bursting in on those tired, disappointed men who had listened to Jesus and watched His miracles and even did miracles in Jesus' Name. **The Women, the Witnesses** had the perfect news to refresh their sad hearts. They could barely hold it in as they told the Good News of Easter. But these were practical, hardworking fishermen. They only heard "*nonsense*"!

If only it were just men today. We have so many educated men and women, sure of their own intelligence, but they never take the time to investigate the resurrection. They pass it off as religious **Nonsense**, yet they themselves have no answers to why we are here and where we are going. They deny God's warnings of eternal hell and punishment for sin, imagining their own god who would never condemn anyone. It's like having a perfectly curable disease where the medicine works every time, but you don't like the color, or the bottle, or the person who told you about it.

If you examine this book from beginning to end in the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, or in the Latin, German and English translations, people of all races and cultures can see how carefully God wrote this book. He shows us our sin and our need for a Savior – only because He wants to show us His love in Christ. Why did Jesus have to die? Because God said He would satisfy God's justice. Why by crucifixion? God foretold that in detail too. (Psalm 22) Why no bones broken? That was the law of the Jewish Passover lamb, 1500 years back to Moses and the Exodus. In spite of the plans of the Jewish leaders, Jesus had to die during the Feast as "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*" (John 1:29) If anyone has doubts or thinks this is **Nonsense**, why not take the time to investigate the prophecies? You will be amazed by the planning, execution and resurrection. **The disciples and The Women** did not believe Jesus would rise. He had to convince them that He is risen indeed!

✦ Vindicated by Christ

But don't take my word for it. The women were **Vindicated by Christ** many times over. According to Mark's account (16:9), Mary Magdalene was the first to see Jesus alive at the tomb.

Pick up a free video today. *The Road to Emmaus* is being translated into many languages. Two disciples on their way to their little town thought Jesus was dead. A stranger came up and asked what was wrong. He explained how all their Old Testament Jewish Scriptures said it had to happen this way. When He broke bread, they recognized Jesus. New life surged through their tired feet all the way back to town.

They burst in on the Eleven disciples who said, "*It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.*" (Luke 24:34 NIV84) No sooner had they told how they recognized Jesus, and there He was! Standing right among them! "*Peace be with you,*" He said, and ate with them. In the next few weeks before He ascended into heaven Jesus appeared to the disciples on many occasions and places. 500 people saw Him at once. **The Women, the Witnesses** were **Vindicated by Christ** along with all the rest.

This is even better. Take your bulletin where the third sermon part says, **Vindicated by Christ**, and write before the line: "I am." Then sign your name. That's what Easter means for you, for me, for all. *I am Vindicated by Christ.* You are **Vindicated by Christ** – because "*God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*" (2 Corinthians 5:19–21) No **Nonsense** here! We are **Vindicated by Christ**: "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" That's how people can see what God is like when they see His love in you – His faithfulness, kindness, forgiveness, grace and peace.

This Easter shine like the boy looking at a picture of Christ crucified. The man next to him just nodded when the boy told how Jesus died. He walked away, but the boy chased after him. "Mister! Mister! I have to tell you. He's not dead anymore. He rose again!" He is risen indeed! Amen.

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