

"Where is Jesus?"

John 20:1-18

April 8, 2007

That early Sunday morning so long ago was filled with mystery and marvel. I am so much not a morning person that it is hard to imagine leaving before day break to walk to a tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. It had to have been a task so filled with sorrow and pain that there probably wasn't a good time. But they came early - along dark pathways to a garden where a tomb had been hewn into solid rock. I am sure there were no windows so that even if the dawn was upon them, when they looked into the tomb or when they entered - it would have been quite dark. I can hardly imagine the emotions that they would have felt as their eyes adjusted to the dim light and they realized that the body of Jesus was not lying where it had been placed on that terrible Friday evening. Where was Jesus?

It is no wonder that Mary would have been over whelmed to the point that she would have asked anyone who came along about the mystery. "They have taken the body of Jesus and we do not know where they have laid Him ." Where is Jesus? I am sure that it was just as normal then as now to believe that it was impossible for Him to be standing right there beside her!

I know that you know the story of the two rambunctious young boys who always seemed to be getting into trouble. If there was ever anything that was not quite as it should have been - the first thought was that those two had to have been involved. Finally their parents brought them to their pastor to see if he could have a talk with them in hopes that they would straighten up a bit. The pastor decided to sit down with the boys individually and planned to take a deeply theological approach and impress upon them that Jesus is always watching. Face to face - eye to eye, that pastor looked deeply into the eyes of the first young boy, leaned forward and asked in a very serious tone, "where is Jesus"? The boy said nothing so the pastor asked again - "Where is Jesus? At that point the young boy bolted out of the

pastor's office and rushed to his brother and said; "Jesus is missing and they think we did it."

If the tomb is empty and the boys did not do it - Where is Jesus? It was certainly an appropriate question for Mary standing outside an empty tomb on that Sunday morning so long ago. But I believe that it is an equally appropriate question today. In an Easter message from our ELCA Presiding Bishop, Mark Hanson, we are confronted with this same question. The Bishop wrote: *"On the first Easter, the women entered an empty tomb to find Jesus, but were disappointed and perplexed. Today, when we look for peace and there is no peace, we, too, may wonder where Jesus is. When violence and wars escalate, we may wonder where Jesus is. When hunger and poverty continue to have a stronghold in neighborhoods here and around the world, we may wonder where Jesus is. .*

If the tomb is empty and the boys did not do it - Where is Jesus? Where is Jesus on this Easter morning 2007? Perhaps one of the hardest things to imagine is that He might be standing right next to us.

It is hard to imagine. I look around in our culture and I wonder where Jesus could possibly be. So many times and places I suspect that I do not expect to see Him. But there are other times when I do expect to see some evidence of Jesus. I was a bit surprised just the other day to walk by a display of 'Easter baskets'. They were bright and cheery. There was a 'Barbie' Easter basket - that was nice. And there were some feathering Sponge Bob Square Pants and my favorites were the ones with a 'Fear Factor creepy critters' theme. Who would not love finding such creative Easter baskets - but - where was Jesus? I found myself a bit disappointed that nowhere in all of the wonderful Easter Baskets there was nothing even remotely religious - where is Jesus this Easter?

We live in an amazing time in history. It is a time when we are being told that increasing numbers of people in our world claim to have a belief in God. But it is also a world where there seems to be less evidence of His presence. Wars rage, conflict between

individuals is so often evident, our culture continues to fight battles between those who don't want any mention of Jesus and those who do, even the ways we express our faith leads to division among us so that it seems as though fewer and fewer people want to be a part of any organized expression of faith. Even seemingly religious programming on TV serves to call our faith into question. Many watched the program entitled 'The Lost Tomb of Jesus' where an ossuary which was said to once contain the bones of a person who died in Jerusalem around 2000 years ago is suggested to have belonged to "Jesus, son of Joseph". We are left to assume that Jesus could not have been raised from the dead as we have long preached. So - - - where is Jesus? Has He vanished from our world? Have His remains been lying in a 'bone box' in Jerusalem for centuries? Or is He risen from the dead - a living savior who continues to walk with us?

They came to the dark tomb - those faithful believers who had walked with Jesus through His earthly ministry. Those eye witnesses came to the tomb and found it empty - there was no doubt about that fact. They went in - carefully looked around, perhaps even poking at the clothes in which His body had been wrapped. Where was Jesus? He was right there beside them - He stood and spoke to Mary, one of His most devout followers, and she did not even recognize Him. There He was, ready to give hope - ready to turn sorrow into joy - ready to show them the power of God, even over death. But even Mary was slow to recognize Him - slow to receive the gifts of God.

Where is Jesus for you this Easter - for you in your daily life? Do you leave Him in the tomb of Joseph of Aramathia? Do we just leave Him on the cross? Where is Jesus in your life? Did you bury Him somewhere in your past and forget where you have laid him? Sometime the hardest thing to realize is that He is risen from the dead and standing right beside you. Jesus did not stay in the darkness of the tomb - nor does He want us to walk in that darkness. Risen and reaching out to us with that life giving touch Jesus wants us to break out of the cocoons of darkness that wrap around us so that we too might soar to new life.

Invite all kids to come forward and get butterflies to distribute

AMEN