

Matthew 28:1-10

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Run To Daylight
Easter Sunday 7:30 am
March 31, 1991

Text: *"So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples."*

"It rained all night the day I left, the weather it was dry. The sun's so hot I froze to death, Susanna don't you cry." It would be hard to beat the contradictions which face the person singing that old familiar American folk song. But think for a moment. Think over the story which Jesus and his followers lived the previous week. A week of contradictions. The King of kings makes a triumphal and happy entrance into Jerusalem. Once there, as one gospel account has it, this prince of peace turns a normal pleasant market scene into chaos when he drives the money changers out of the temple with a whip. Within a week's time he raises Lazarus from the dead and is betrayed by one of his own. His disciples honor him, misunderstand him, abandon him, and deny him all in that time. Finally he was crucified and when the women came to the tomb to prepare his body they discovered he had been raised.

After such a week of emotional highs and lows, twists and turns, it is a wonder the women even knew their way to the tomb. The negative qualities such an emotional impact would have upon a person's life could be staggering. And it all ended with Jesus' death and then calm. Blank, cold, mind numbing calm. The unwelcome kind of calm which would be like slowly sinking into the endless depths and darkness of the sea. This is the end. There's no way out. From now on life would be lived without living. Each day would become a mechanical process where chores, duties, and tasks were performed for their own sake alone. With the death of Christ on the cross each passing generation would live in darkness and there certainly would never be a light at the end of this endless tunnel.

The cross, of course, was not the end. The women who journeyed to the tomb were met by an angel whose appearance was like lightning and whose clothes were as white as snow. The angel caused an earthquake when he rolled back the stone which covered the tomb. He had for them a message. Quite simply, Jesus was risen from the dead. He offered them a look in the empty grave and told

them to go quickly and tell Jesus' followers what had happened. Go quickly? They ran! Not in fear, but with boundless joy. It was not proper for women or rich men to run in ancient Palestine, but Mary Magdalene and the other Mary could not help themselves. Their actions showed their joy. Their hearts led them on their mission with great speed. The light at the end of this dark tunnel was in sight. Nay, even better, the light leading them out of darkness was still with them and they met him on the way.

Before the resurrection could happen the crucifixion had to take place. Before the light could be seen, the contradictions had to be lived. Such is the same with our personal lives. Before we can solve a problem, some work must be done. Before we can conquer a fear within us, we must tackle that fear. We have, time and time again in our lifetimes, to walk into the valley of the shadow of death before we can come out victorious and resurrected on the other side. It is, without question, absolutely necessary - if we want to change a habit or change our lifestyles or even an emotional condition - to enter into the fear of grappling with our shadows in order to emerge as changed beings.

David M. Griebner wrote a short story called Shadowbound which I will share with you now. For a sermon it is rather lengthy, but today it is altogether important.

"Once upon a time there was a man who lived in the middle of the desert. Yet, that was not quite true. It would be better to say that he was a prisoner of the desert. You see, somehow and sometime in the past our friend had acquired the habit of following his shadow, and only his shadow. It was a relentless and unbending compass which he obeyed completely and followed without question. Every morning when the sun came up he began walking in the direction his shadow pointed. As the sun traced its slow crescent across the sky he followed the subtle bending of his shadow. By the end of the day he had traced a rough oval and was nearly back to where he had started in the morning. While his course varied a little with the seasons of the year and the speed he walked, it wasn't much, and it was never enough to allow him to leave the desert.

This had been going on for as long as he could remember. It was familiar and comfortable, the only way he knew. Yet he also had to admit that it often left him feeling trapped and alone. Sometimes he wondered what it would be like to face the sun instead of always turning his back to it and walking the other way. And he longed to

see if there might not be something more to the world than the desert, but he never seemed to have enough resolve ever to do anything different.

Then one morning, while it was still dark, as he was preparing to set out again, something came and spoke to him. It was a voice. At least it was more like a voice than anything else. It said, "JUST STOP IT." That's all, "JUST STOP IT."

JUST STOP IT? He didn't know how he knew, but he knew without a doubt that what was meant by this was following his shadow. Just stop it. Could it be that simple? What a lovely thought. Yet it was a foreboding thought as well. Certainly there was joy and hope in what the voice suggested, but there was also fear and dread because following his shadow was the only way he knew to get around - such as it was!

About this time the sun came up, and with it the powerful tug of his growing shadow. He tried to resist it but could not. Yet all that day, even as he obediently followed his shadow, the memory of the Voice and the experience of the morning stayed with him. It stayed with him through the night, too. And while he made no significant changes over the next few days, it was enough just to have some hope.

Then one morning, just a moment before dawn, he suddenly turned his back to the dark, western horizon and faced the glow in the east. It was done almost before he realized what he was doing. The freedom to do it happened in a moment. And he recognized in his new freedom the presence again of the Voice, which lovingly offered him what he could not offer himself.

The rising sun in front of him was brighter and more wonderful than he had imagined anything could ever be. As the sun cut across the sky that first day it was all he could do just to stand there and face the light, turning slowly now to keep his shadow in back of him! There was no question about going anywhere. Yet, as the day passed, his shadow became less and less intimidating and his new freedom more and more familiar, even if it was just to stand still.

Finally, one morning, the Voice came again. As with the other times, he could not fully describe what happened, only that the Voice brought him another gift. The gift this time was a sense of direction.

Slowly, he put one foot in front of the other, fixed his gaze on some distant mountains, and set out. He wasn't sure where he was going, but at least he wasn't still going around in circles. And he certainly didn't feel alone anymore."

When Mary Magdalene and the other Mary ran into the risen Christ on the road back to tell the disciples what had happened, they ran to the daylight of knowing and truth. Not the kind of daylight that comes when the sun rises in the east and shines all day, but a more theological or cosmic kind of daylight. From that moment on the world would never be the same. Surely, the authorities of that time tried to hide the truth, but they soon found it to be irrepressible. From the first Easter the world will forever live in the promise and hope of positive change. Why is it, then, we, as a species, follow the shadow of our technology to lead us out of confusion? Where have we gone wrong when we think we can find the peace that passes all understanding if we could just get enough recreation time? What possible motivation causes us to chase material wealth and instant gratification? It cannot be happiness, because we can never have enough to keep us happy.

Friends, I don't think people in general trust the resurrection. The trouble is, we keep padding ourselves against the harshness of life through artificial means and are afraid to plunge through the darkness to the light that's out there. We are afraid to face the Good Friday in order that we might experience the Easter. In Charles Dicken's A Christmas Carol remember that Scrooge had to struggle with the three spirits before he could experience the truth of Christmas. In the morning, when the experience was completed and Scrooge was a changed man, he was heard to say, *"I am as light as a feather."* We, too, can be as light as a feather by listening to the story of the resurrection and becoming a part of the story. We can only do this by having the courage to face the pain of change and arriving on the other side as new beings.

Running to daylight means we are running to hope. A hope which lifts us through the burdens of this life and a hope which displays the conquering of death. The energy that keeps us going is not that of our own; it belongs to God. When changed we become a part of God's new creation and cannot help but to keep moving toward the light which sets us free. Isaiah boldly proclaims, *"Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."*

I will leave it to the poet A. L. Frink who wrote the well known poem "The Rose Beyond the Wall" to draw a clear and lovely picture

of how the resurrection changes us into new beings, even beyond our deaths.

*Near shady wall a rose once grew,
Budded and blossomed in God's free light,
Watered and fed by morning dew,
Shedding its sweetness day and night.*

*As it grew and blossomed fair and tall,
Slowly rising to loftier height,
It came to a crevice in the wall
Through which there shown a beam of light.*

*Onward it crept with added strength
With never a thought of fear or pride.
It followed the light through the crevice's length
And unfolded itself on the other side.*

*The light, the dew, the broadening view
Were found the same as they were before,
And it lost itself in beauties new,
Breathing its fragrance more and more.*

*Shall claim of death cause us to grieve
And make our courage faint and fall?
Nay! let us faith and hope receive
The rose still grows beyond the wall,*

*Scattering fragrance far and wide
Just as it did in days of yore,
Just as it did on the other side,
Just as it will forevermore.*

This Easter, we can begin to enter into the hope of the resurrection. Not just that our lives may be changed after our death; though that is most meaningful. But let us begin to be changed now - to die of our old selves and become like new today and everyday. The daylight of God's Kingdom is available to us all right now. Let us run to it not because we have to, but because we cannot help to. Amen.