

“More Than We Deserve or Expect” -- Matthew 28:1-10

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ 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.”

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Easter is not what was expected. Easter is also not what was deserved. Columnist and Speaker Lori Borgman writes, We are a people concerned with getting what we deserve. We deserve child care, health care, good schools, good jobs, easy commutes and a comfortable retirement. We deserve smoke-free air, a strong stock market, happiness in our marriages and children who always remember our birthdays. Lobbying groups and professional organizations around the country exist solely for the purpose of seeing that we get what we deserve. Well, that and to line their pockets in the process. When you listen closely, you hear the many things we deserve sprinkled throughout conversations: We deserve our money’s worth. We deserve to be treated respectfully. We deserve good customer service. With all that work at getting what we deserve, it’s no small wonder we also feel we deserve a vacation...We deserve the right to eat and not grow fat, the right to speak, the right to be heard and the right to have all of our questions promptly answered.

<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/easter-celebrating-what-we-dont-deserve-1389657.html>

Borgman is right on. We deserve something all right. Wrath. We should have been hung on that cross with the richly deserved penalty for sin, self-centeredness, arrogance, pride, greed, gluttony, hard hearts, mean spiritedness and all the rest. But, the thing is, we didn’t get it. Christ did. He took what I deserved, every lash, every hit, every piercing. He took what I had coming. He paid the price I deserved to pay, was crucified, dead and buried, and on the third day rose again.

Easter is also not what is expected. What was expected of the Messiah? “A miracle maker: the disciples had it. Able to calm the winds and the waves, feed thousands with a boy’s lunch, and ever raised Lazarus from the dead; Jesus did that. Spoke in parables and drew huge crowds: Jesus was famous. He was in many ways exactly what was expected of a Messiah. So, what went wrong? Why didn’t Jesus defend Himself? So many times, the Pharisees tried to trap Him with questions and failed. So many times they plotted to kill Jesus, tried to stone him, or throw Him off a cliff; each time Jesus escaped. What happened? Why did they treat Jesus so? Why would they beat Him so cruelly and why above all would they nail Him to the cross? Our Messiah wasn’t supposed to die. It wasn’t supposed be like this!”

The women went to the tomb to bring more burial spices as if the 75 pounds given by Nicodemus wasn’t enough. But the women didn’t want it to end. Mary, Jesus Mother, had pondered so much in her heart; but now her son was dead and in the tomb. She had cried so much and so hard since Friday that she had no more tears. Her heart was as broken as the rest. Like any of us who mourn Mary might have thought, “I wasn’t ready! I want Him back!” Maybe by bringing more spices these women could prolong their denial and somehow overcome that terrible emptiness that they had been feeling since Jesus’ death. The women were in mourning—It just wasn’t supposed to be this way.

And where were the disciples? Hiding in fear, without Jesus where do they go? What do we do now? It wasn't supposed to end like this. Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God; Jesus was supposed to save Israel? The disciples and these women were hurting just like we do when we have lost someone we love. We know that death will come to all of us, but it is always an unwelcome guest. It always feels so final; too soon; unfair and cruel. This is what death leaves for the living.

When the women arrived at the tomb Good Friday was flooding their hearts. But when they got to tomb everything changed. Jesus once again gave them what wasn't expected; the tomb was empty.

With guards laying around like dead men, the rock, which was big and heavy, had been rolled away, angels appeared to the women and announced the good news. "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He IS NOT HERE; HE HAS RISEN, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay." When these women looked in all they could smell were the burial spices and not even the slightest hint of death. The tomb still looked unused expect for the strips of linen that lay intact as though once wrapped around a deflated balloon; as well as the burial cloth that was around Jesus' head—folded up by itself, separate from the linen. No signs of a struggle or a theft. It was like...like someone woke up and made their bed. Not what they expected. Look for yourself, He is not here; He is risen, JUST AS HE SAID. Now go and tell the disciples—go to Galilee, there *you will see Him*.

What if we could see the ones we love, who died; the ones whose death made our hearts hurt. What if we could see them face to face again; talk with them again; hold them again; what if the words of the angel were spoken to you—He is not here, He is risen. Well this is exactly what happens with Easter—the unexpected becomes a reality. 1 Corinthians 15:17-22 lays it out for us. "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But *Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, *so in Christ all will be made alive*." All who die in faith will live again; in the words of the angel-- JUST AS HE SAID.

That's what happens to us on this day. Easter Changes things. The once sad and mournful women run with a mixture of fear and joy. The joy overcomes the fear. Jesus and His Word keep saying to us: "Do not be afraid. I have redeemed you. Because I live you too will live. Go and tell My brothers." Jesus is my Brother. With Him I pray: "Our Father, Who art in heaven." The Resurrection completes the Gospel. The resurrection gives the Gospel power to change things.

Jesus' resurrection is our resurrection. Even though it was unexpected on the first Easter is what Jesus tells believers to expect now. "Whoever believes in me will live even though He dies." Eternal life is not what we deserve but what we receive. The resurrection does not leave us unchanged but promises we will live again. That's good news. That's something to talk about and celebrate. I pray we do exactly that this week and thereafter. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Pastor Matthew Woods
John 3:30