

April 4, 2021
Resurrection Sunday
Pastor Matthew Ude
INI - SDG

While It Was Still Dark

John 20:1 Now on the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw *that* the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

In the first verse of the twentieth chapter of the gospel of John, John tells us that Mary went to the tomb, “while it was still dark.” This reference is one that those who would like to discredit God’s word refer to often. They claim that it is at odds with the other gospel accounts which say “began to dawn”, “early in the morning,” and “very early in the morning.”

Now this is a foolish claim since there is no reason to suggest that the terms “while it was still dark,” and “began to dawn” are at odds with each other. Undoubtedly it was still dark when they set out, but the sun was rising as they walked.

Nevertheless, there is something different about John’s account. John unlike any of the other gospel writers does not just mention the darkness but really draws our attention to it, without any reference at all to the rising sun. Also, John seems to purposely leave out the reference to the angels.

The gospel of John is also the one who records for us way back in **John 13:30** “Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.”

From that time, beginning with Judas leaving, it was night. And on the first easter morning, it was still dark, regardless of whether the sun was risen, or the angels in the tomb. It was still dark because as John tells us “as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.” John 20:9

From the beginning of John chapter 20, there is darkness, there is emptiness (empty tomb), there is worry, there is confusion, there is fear, there is weeping. There is no joy and there is no light until Mary’s eyes are open and she see that it is Jesus. Even when John mentions the angels, he passes over them quickly. Mary barely even notices them.

John is not just telling us the time of day he is telling us the way he felt. The darkness and gloom persisting well after the sun had risen because they still did not know that Jesus had risen. Regardless of whether the sun was up in the sky or not, it was dark in their souls until they saw Jesus. And then and only then there is light.

When the sun has set you can see the stars, and the stars are beautiful. But no matter how brightly the stars shine, the night is dark. When the sun is up it is light, and the stars do not matter.

There are things in this world that are good and evil, joyful and sad. Or at least good and bad in the way we see it. But when the light of Christ's resurrection shines upon then the rest of this means nothing at all.

That spring morning as the women walked to the tomb may have been beautiful. Spring breezes, birds chirping, a rising sun on the horizon. The angels they saw were undoubtedly filled with beauty and light. But none of that matter as long as they thought that Jesus was still dead. It was still dark.

Conversely when Jesus was risen there is nothing dark remaining.

The sharp contrast between light and dark which is so prominent at night, is completely gone during the day. The sun is simply too bright to allow any part of the sky to remain dark. So too is Jesus' resurrection, the glory and joy of his resurrection is more than enough to dispel any gloom or any darkness from the problems of this life.

One year ago, I stood in this pulpit and preached, and there was not a single soul here, and yet I told you then and tell you again, it does not matter because Jesus lives. And because he lives so will we.

Yes, I greatly prefer that you are all here, and that we get to go out and do an egg hunt and have easter brunch. I much prefer that, but when you were not here, it did not ruin the joy of easter morning, the knowledge that Jesus is risen from the dead and lives and reigns.

There is a story about Martin Luther that I have told you before and you have probably heard many times but it is well worth repeating. When Martin Luther was in despair and very gloomy, he came down to find his wife Katy dressed head to toe in black.

"Who died?" Luther asked.

"From the way you have been acting I assumed that Jesus was still in the grave." was Katy's reply.

There is no reason for sadness if Jesus lives. And yet we are still humans, subject to the storms and problems of this world. The chemicals in our body respond to our environment and our emotions go up and down. We have times of joy and times of deep despair. Yet above the clouds and storms the sun still shines.

What darkness is there in your life? What doubt, what despair, what sadness? I am sure that we all have times in our life when we have thought that my life is ruined, my life is worthless. We have probably had times when we wished that we could go back to the beginning and redo our life maybe from day one, maybe just from the day we entered high school. Perhaps some of us have even gone further than that and thought about simply ending our life. We messed it all up. We cannot fix it. There is no reason to keep trying.

But now Jesus is risen from the dead and that morning sun can fix anything, and our lives do matter to Jesus who paid for them with his very body and blood.

Jesus is risen from the dead.

When Jesus was still dead it was dark, but now Jesus is risen from the dead and there is only light.