

MORNING ALWAYS COMES

Matthew 28:1-10, I Corinthians 15:3-4

Often I am awake and studying after most of the people whom I know are asleep. Much of my constructive thinking and composition have to be done late at night. Some of the saddest and some of the happiest times of life have come in the dark of the night, but one thing I have learned is that morning always comes. What an arresting statement! It is made from the perspective of the Christian faith.

There was a time when the statement, "morning always comes," could not be made with any degree of certainty. Do you remember? "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"

On Calvary's cross, in fulfillment of an eternal purpose and plan, "Christ died for our sins." Christ voluntarily took our sins upon Himself. Through Christ's death on the cross the purposes of divine love became intelligible, the great problem of human redemption was solved, we have obtained the remission of our sins, we have been brought to God, and we have been made the righteousness of God in Him. We are impressed deeply by the marvel of Christ's death, then by the meaning of it, and finally by the manner of it.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified our Lord. For three hours He was exposed to the fierce rays of the sun. At noon there came over the land a three-hour period of supernatural darkness. At three o'clock in the afternoon Christ cried, "It is finished," and died.

It is almost impossible for us to imagine the tragic despair that hung like a shroud over the disciples between the time Christ Jesus gasped His last breath on the cross and the time when the fingers of sunlight lifted the curtain of darkness on the third day.

For approximately three years the disciples had accompanied Him over Palestine. They had given up their vocations to cast their lot with Him. They had seen His love reaching out to the unwanted and the outcast. They had heard His teachings about God. They had marveled at His courage as He faced opposition. The disciples had pinned their highest hopes on Him.

Then, in swift events that made one dizzy with disbelief, the Lord Jesus was betrayed, arrested, tried, convicted, and crucified. From the cross He cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" From the heart of the disciples echoed the same pathetic question. They felt forsaken and bereft of power and purpose. Their Lord and Master had died. In fear of their lives, they fled and locked their doors. To their way of thinking, there was no need for them to meet again.

Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Christ, acted quickly by going to Pilate and obtaining permission to remove the body of our Lord from the cross and prepare it for burial. Joseph had not made a confession of his faith in Christ because he was afraid of the Jews. His love had been subjected to his fear, but now, in this hour of crisis his love became triumphant over his fear. No doubt Joseph regretted the fact that he had not shown his love for Christ while He was yet alive. It is one of the most common tragedies of life that we keep our praises of people until they are dead. It would be so much better if we would express our gratitude to them and our praises of them when they are still alive instead of waiting and placing some flowers on their graves after they are gone.

After Pilate had ascertained from the centurion in charge that Christ was dead, he granted the request of Joseph that he be permitted to lay the body of Christ in the

tomb which he had prepared for himself, and he gave orders to the centurion to deliver the body to him. Joseph and Nicodemus prepared the body of the Lord Jesus for burial. Joseph provided the fine linen in which His body was wrapped and Nicodemus supplied the spices. Together they tenderly and lovingly laid their Lord in a new sepulcher which was hewn out of a rock in the garden and had been prepared for Joseph's own entombment. With loving reverence they placed His body therein, and then rolled a huge stone in front of the door.

The next day the chief priests and Pharisees reminded Pilate that Christ had said, "After three days I will rise again" (Matthew 27:63). Pilate authorized them to seal the entrance to the tomb, which seal no one could break except upon the penalty of death, and to station a strong guard of soldiers on duty there to prevent the tomb from being robbed. But how ridiculous for men to attempt to thwart the purpose and power of God! The stone, the seal, and the guard could not keep the Lord of life a prisoner to death.

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James observed where they had placed the body of Christ, and then returned to their homes and rested on the Sabbath. At sunrise on Sunday morning they and Salome started to the tomb to anoint the body of Christ as a token of their love for and devotion to Him. Usually the bodies of loved ones were anointed at the time of death, but these friends had not been given the opportunity of thus honoring their Master. Nicodemus had placed spices on Christ, but that was an expression of his love for Him and not their love.

These broken-hearted women never dreamed that Christ would come out of that tomb. But, when faith and hope are dead, love remains alive. You can kill faith and hope, but you cannot kill love. Without a particle of faith in or hope of His resurrection in their hearts, they still loved Him Whom they believed was still behind that stone in the borrowed tomb.

As they made their way to the tomb, they were wondering, worrying, and talking about who might roll away the stone from the entrance. Upon their arrival they were amazed to find that their concern had been entirely unnecessary because the stone had been rolled away, and the body of Christ was not there. So often dreaded difficulties are never encountered.

Upon entering the tomb to perform their ritual, possessed with mingled fear and astonishment, the women saw the white-robed messenger of the Lord sitting within the sepulcher. He appeared to be in perfect contentment as though he was celebrating the triumph of Christ. He assured the women that they were no longer to be looking backward to One Who had died, but that they were to be looking forward to One Who was alive.

The words of God's messenger constituted the first sermon about the resurrection of Christ. The message was very short and simple: "He is risen; he is not here; behold the place where they laid him." "He is risen" is the most momentous and meaningful announcement ever made. His resurrection brought the removal of doubts, the relief of distress, and triumph over defeat.

One meaning of this incident is that "morning always comes." Christianity is incurably optimistic. It affirms the Resurrection in spite of the Crucifixion. Christianity does not leave you on a lonely hillside called Golgotha, but on a Mount of Transfiguration, with all your yesterdays, today, and tomorrows changed in the light of the unbelievably good news that "Christ is risen." Rejoice over this glorious fact.

A Mohammedan once remarked to a Christian missionary: "We Moslems have one thing you Christians do not have: we have a tomb to which we may go and weep." "Exactly so," replied the Christian, "We, too, have a tomb, but it is empty." That empty tomb makes

the difference between Christianity and all other religions. Christianity has a living Founder and Saviour, while all other religions of much age have dead founders and no Saviour. Christ claimed to have power to lay down His life and to take it up again, and the empty tomb justifies His claim.

This leads me to remind you that "morning always comes" to the dark world in which we live. It is a clinché to say that we live in a time of crisis. Every time in history has been one of crisis. Surely, this is a time of crisis. We are faced with those to the right and left of center who are bent on destroying one another. There are the hippies who want to drop-out, tune-in, and turn-on. There are the rioters who vent their hostility in the streets. There are the respectable people who are pretending to be happy in their paradise of pills, pools, and poodles. The "haves" and the "have-nots" draw farther apart, and set the stage for revolution on a world-wide scale. Guns are leveled in Vietnam and on the Israeli-Jordanian border. With nervous fingers men sit close to buttons that could start a nuclear holocaust. This is a dark and dangerous world, not entirely unlike a power key with a short fuse burning down.

In the midst of our agonizing cultural crisis, my knowledge of history and my faith in Christ enable me to proclaim that "morning always comes." Now, this is not a Pollyanna promise that "everything is going to turn out all right." It does not mean that we won't have to suffer defeat. This is God's morning that is coming, and not ours. The morning is not on our terms, but on God's terms.

We have lost the optimism of our forefathers in the natural progress of history. Two world wars, a Korean war, and a war in Vietnam, along with the rise of totalitarianism, have certainly sounded the death knell to the humanistic view of things. Today, people laugh when they hear Swinburne's hymn of praise: "Glory be to man, for man is the master of things."

The Resurrection faith proclaims the vindication of God's purposes in Jesus Christ. He is the victor over sin and death. The demonic powers may hold sway, but eventually, God will have the last word. This faith truly affirmed and believed will change the way we relate to historical crisis. It will give us new reason for involvement and new strength for the hard task ahead.

Still again, I would remind you that "morning always comes" to you as an individual engaged in life's struggles. Why are you alive? What is the purpose in your living? Why do you choose life over death?

As a pastor, I know something of the problems of people—the deep, gnawing problems that undermine faith. I know the hurt you feel when you are rejected by someone you have loved deeply. I know the disappointment that creeps into your life when the recognition or promotion at work goes to someone else. I know the grief you feel at the loss of a close friend or relative. I know your struggles with understanding what the Christian faith has to say to modern man. But the darkness that surrounds our personal lives is not any darker than the blackness that the early disciples experienced in the death of their Lord and Master, and the good news of the gospel is that the same power that was available to the early Christians is available to us.

Christian living will not be easy; it will be hard. It will not be filled with sunshine; it will be covered with darkness. Long ago, Christ said: "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). That is what Christianity offers us—not a troublefree life, but resources of faith capable of meeting every conceivable need. As Arthur Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, said: "The

life of a Christian ought to be like the ocean, with the surface constantly battered about by storms, but, miles and miles below, deep peace, unmoved tranquility."

God will be with His children in their dying as well as in their living. He is the faithful One Who gives us life, and the One in Whom we have life. Those who have experienced His grace in this life know that "morning always comes."