

Do you ever get the feeling that something is missing? Maybe when you sit down to eat today, you get the feeling that something is missing for the meal and don't discover it until after your Easter dinner is over. Or you are packing for a vacation or business trip and think you left something important behind. When you get to the business location you discover you left some important papers behind. Or your vacation is at the beach and discover you forgot to pack your swimming suit. I can't tell you how many times I've left our house without my cellphone or gone into the house and forget my phone in the car. Have you ever left one of your kids behind someplace? Mary and Joseph left Jesus behind in Jerusalem when he was 12 years old.

Today is Easter Sunday. Did someone forget to tell the weather reporter we are supposed to have warm, sunny weather on Easter? There will be lots of Easter Egg Hunts and Easter Baskets given out. Restaurants will be busy serving Easter Brunch. Do ladies still wear Easter Bonnets or have Easter Parades? These can all be good things, but is there something missing?

How many people will celebrate Easter today without the Cross, the Tomb and the Stone? We can celebrate the arrival of spring. We can get Easter Lilies for our homes. We can watch kids get a sugar high after eating their Easter candy. But something is missing if we don't celebrate the resurrection. People can forget about Jesus and leave Him in the tomb, but Jesus won't stay there. Easter is not Easter without Jesus' resurrection. Without the cross, there is no tomb. Without the tomb, there is no stone. Without the stone, there is no empty tomb. Without the empty tomb, there is no resurrection. Without the resurrection, there is no hope. But we have hope because Jesus is alive. Our Savior lives!

This morning we are going to take a look at three important objects, the Cross, the Tomb, and the Stone. We begin with the Cross. The cross is the most recognized symbol of the Christian faith. Not only do we have crosses in and on our churches, the cross appears in many places. It appears on earrings, necklaces, and tattoos. You may see a cross hanging on a wall in your house or walk through a cemetery and see a variety of crosses on tombstones. Jesus' cross is the theme behind Christian Hymns and Praise Songs.

Prior to Jesus' death, the cross was the most brutal means of execution the Romans could come up with. Jesus' death on the cross was a total cultural shift. The meaning of the cross runs deeper. The cross is Jesus' declaration of unconditional love, ultimate sacrifice, victory over sin, death and the devil. The cross is the hinge point of history that cannot be ignored. Jesus died on the cross for us. He took our place on the cross. He paid the price for our sins on the cross. Jesus' cross offers the world forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration, and hope. The importance of the cross for the Christian faith cannot be overstated.

Jesus body was taken down for the cross and placed in the tomb. Without the tomb, the cross fades into nothing more than a heroic story in which the prophet is killed and evil wins. We put dead bodies in tombs or graves. Jesus died on the cross. He didn't just pass out or have a near death experience. No body took His place on the cross as some groups claim. Jesus died and was buried. If Jesus wasn't dead, the cross is a sham, and the resurrection didn't happen.

Jesus body was in the tomb for three days. That doesn't make sense to us because we look at things exclusively instead of inclusively. Our Western culture excludes the first day when we think about something happening in the future. Ancient Jewish and Eastern cultures include the first day. In Eastern culture Jesus rose on the third day, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Jesus' body was dead, lifeless when it was placed in the tomb. Jesus was changed when He came out of the tomb. He was not limited by the same things we are. He just appeared to the Disciples in the Upper Room. His appearance was so transformed that the two disciples walking to Emmaus did not recognize Him.

A stone was placed in front of the tomb. It was sealed and Roman soldiers were sent to guard it. But neither the stone, nor the seal, nor the Roman soldiers could keep Jesus inside the tomb. The stone was rolled away, and the tomb was empty. After the stone was rolled away, the empty tomb was revealed. Jesus' body was not there. He had risen, victorious over sin and death. The stone reminds us of God's power.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us what happened. **“Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint. Then the angel spoke to the women. “Don't be afraid!” he said. “I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen.”** (vss. 3-6)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything. The resurrection has the power to change us, too. The cross, the tomb, and the stone tell a history of the world not found in most history books and not celebrated by too many people today.

The big question is to what extent do the cross, the tomb, the stone change our lives? What difference does it make for us that Jesus died on the cross, was buried and rose back to life on the third day? Jesus is the hinge point in our personal histories. Because Jesus lives, we have the hope and the promise of eternal life in Him. Because Jesus is alive, He is with us every day of our lives, helping us face all the challenges that come our way. Because Jesus lives, our sins are forgiven. We have a new life in Him.

What difference does Jesus make for you? That is one of the most important questions you will ever need to answer. It is certainly something for you to think about today. Maybe it would be a great topic to discuss around your Easter table. Christ is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed!