

Easter Festival; April 21, 2019

Luke 24:1-8

May 19, 1780 would become known as New England's "Dark Day." The American Colonies still found themselves at war with England, murder was rampant and rebellion was in the air. It felt like that the people of America were doomed. In spite of all that was happening with the war, the days leading up to May 19th felt good for the people of New England. It had been a particular long and hard winter. Spring had finally brought warmer temperatures. The sun came up as usual, but by later in the morning, the skies over New England became dark.

It was about 9am that people began to realize that this darkness was much different than they had ever seen before. A heap of reddish clouds came in from the west. By 10am, the sky then went from that reddish color to black. Crickets began chirping and cows returned to their stalls. An eerie night had fallen in the middle of the day. All over New England, every farmer, schoolboy, fisherman, young woman, blacksmith, clergyman and laborer looked upward for the missing sun and wondered about the loss of light.

Schools were closed. Candles were lit. Fear began to grip the hearts of people. People began to flock to the churches. Many were convinced that Christ's Second Coming was almost at hand. The pews became packed with people. Preachers stood in pulpits and spoke about the sins of the people and how they were bringing judgment on themselves. Men prayed and women wept. Those that were not real religious began to flock to the taverns. They thought, that if this was the end, they might as well enjoy a good last drink. Was this the end or would the sun once again shine?

"On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb." When the women got up and headed out that first Easter morning, it was still in the cold and dark hours of night. Perhaps, they felt like the people of New England on that "Dark Day." I'm sure the ladies didn't really want to go to that tomb that morning; I'm sure that they didn't want to anoint the corpse of their Teacher. They didn't want to go that place, that tomb, because it was a place of defeat, a place of fear, a place of disappointment. It was a hopeless site of shattered dreams and broken promises. When Jesus died on Good Friday, there was a part of them that died on that cross as well.

They had thought Jesus was the Messiah—the Savior whom God had promised would come and take care of the problem of sin once for all. He shined like a light in this dark world of sin. It seemed like he would be the one to get rid of the darkness of sin and death forever. But then, they crucified him. They stood by the cross. They listened to his last words. And then, he stopped breathing and died. Their hopes died with him. What a dark and cold night it had been for the followers of Jesus!

Have you ever felt like the people of New England on that "dark day" in 1780? Have you ever felt like the women who went to the tomb on that first Easter morning? I can only imagine how scared the people of New England felt that day. I can only imagine how much of a sleepless of a night the women had on Saturday night. Things always look worse in the darkness, don't they? Why? The human heart in times of trouble forgets the promises of Jesus and mopes around in the darkness. It is said that the night is the darkest just before the light of the dawn of a new day. I think we can understand how they felt on that first Easter Sunday morning, because we feel the same at times in life. It feels like the darkness is deepening instead of getting closer to the dawn.

Yet, they should not have felt that way in the darkness. The people of New England didn't understand what was happening on May 19th. No one knew what was happening and why. The signs had been there in the days before. In the days leading up to it, residents in many parts of New England had noticed that the sky was cloudy and murky at dawn, the sun had a pinkish hue to it at midday. The air seemed thick and full of the smell of soot. They didn't understand the signs.

The women and the disciples should not have felt the way they did early on Easter morning. Jesus' resurrection should not have been a surprise. He had told them what was going to happen a number of times following the darkness of his death. They just didn't understand what was happening and why. Do we always understand what is happening and why? We may forget the promises of God, but God doesn't forget us.

The people of New England did not understand the darkness of May 19th. They went to bed that night not knowing what the next dawn would bring. On May 20th, the sun rose in the East as it always had. The darkness was gone, the night was over. The end was not here. It would take scientists more than 200 years to figure out what happened that “dark day.” The thick dark clouds that day had come from the smoke of distant forest fires. That day the air was unusually still. The air was damp. Instead of the smoke being blown away, the damp air acted like a cap holding the particles in the air. All the right things had to happen that day for this very unusual phenomena to happen. Today, we can look at satellite photographs, consult computer models of wind patterns, and gather information from all over the area in minutes. But in 1780, none of that was there. Communication was poor at best. The following day the wind changed, and the rain washed the particles out of the air. A new day had dawned.

The women who went to the tomb that early morning would not have to wait two hundred years to find out what happened to Jesus that day. The stone was rolled away. The tomb was empty. Angels announced to them the Resurrection of Jesus. **“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!”** A new day had dawned. The devil was defeated and Jesus won.

A new day has dawned for us as well. Our sins should separate us from our God. Our guilt should condemn us before Him. As hard as we might try, we cannot by ourselves take away the sin in our hearts. None of it could fix the problem of sin. God said a price needed to be paid for sin. The wages of sin is death. But God loved us too much to let us be condemned. He came to this earth. He carried all of our sins to the cross. He paid the price for sin. There is nothing more for you to do. It is done. It is complete. Your sins are washed away.

It was a long dark day for the people of New England in 1780. But a new day would dawn. It was a long dark night for the women who went to the tomb. But a new day would dawn. Jesus is not dead. He is arisen. Our long dark night is over. Our sins have been washed away by the blood of Jesus. A new day has dawned. Jesus shines through all the darkness. He is risen. He is risen indeed. Amen.