

April 16, 2023

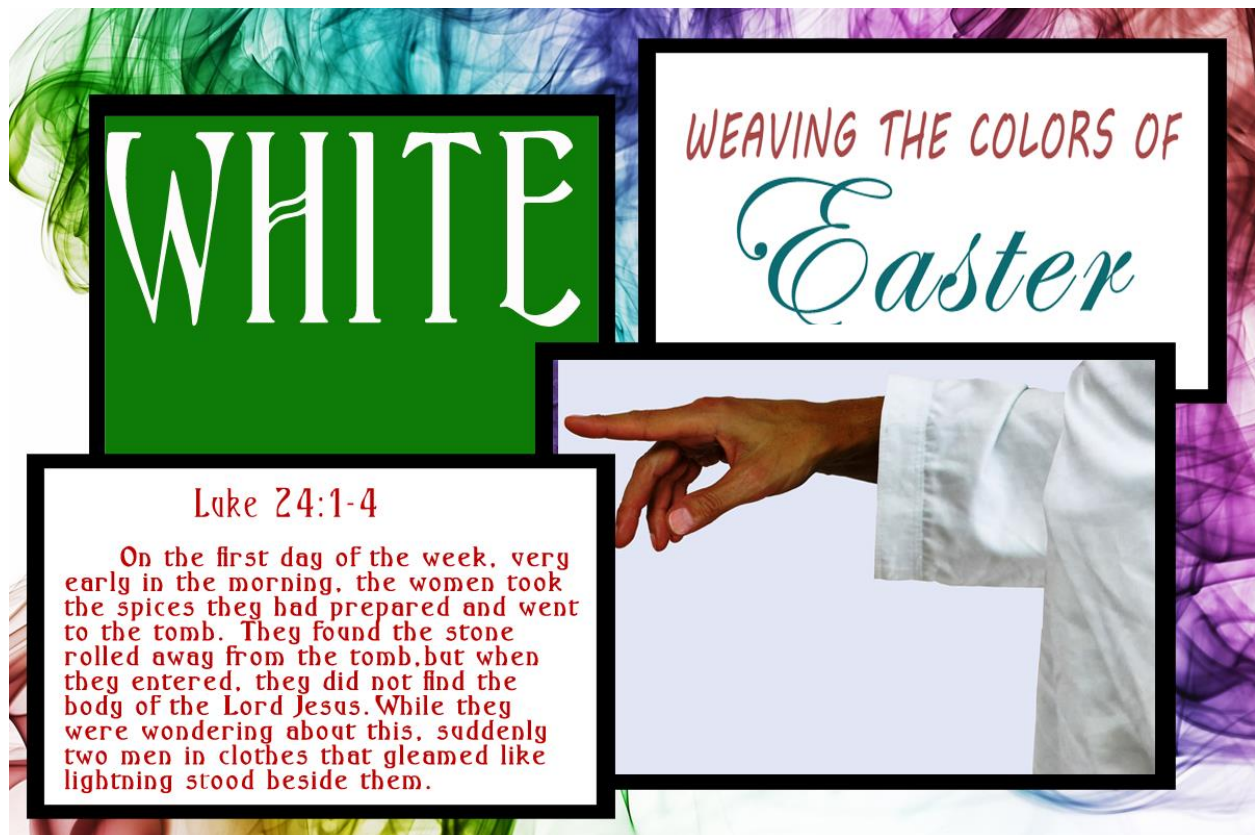
“WHITE”

Luke 24:1-4

- 1 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.
- 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,
- 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.
- 4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.

Special Music: “Kari Jobe” The Garden

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y43Z0WJLDS4>



THE LIGHT OF THE SON

In the blackness
Before the cosmic stop watch was marked
Before the universe was sparked
The birthing pangs of galaxies
Was mute in the nothingness.
Without struggle
God juggled
The stars dancing on His fingertips.
When time was stilled
And senses revealed.

יְהִי אוֹר “ yehi ! “

A voice shouted from the nothingness.
“y’hee or” (yi hi or)
“Let there be light”
And there was light
As the cosmos burst forth into existence,
The light of a billion of stars
Drove back the darkness
As only light can do.
God scattered those stars among
The nothingness
Making a new somethingness
From the essence of His light

That brilliance of Creation
Is the stuff of Christ Eternal

As He steps from the tomb.
His robes brilliant
As a million suns
Blotting out the blackness of death
With the passage of God's breath
Removing the darkness of sin
Removing the pain within
He is risen,
Not with a fanfare
But with inexhaustible brightness
Balancing Creation towards rightness
The power of light in resurrection
Born of God's introjection
Of love through the light of His Son.

Many years ago, I spent a summer working for the Lyric Theatre in Oklahoma City as the First Electrician. It was a hard summer but one I will never forget. We did five musicals back-to-back, "1776," "Bye, Bye, Birdie," "Finian's Rainbow," "Anything Goes" and "Oklahoma." While one musical was happening we were building the next one in the shop. We performed each musical for two weeks to sold out audiences. On turn-around weekends, we would do a Sunday afternoon performance. We were dark on Monday, dress rehearsal on Tuesday. Final dress on Wednesday and we were back to running the show every day. During the changeover weekend, the set was struck from the last show after the matinee. Then the next show was assembled while electric crew was allowed to catch a couple of hours of shuteye. We would find as comfortable a place as we could in the theatre, usually on the floor somewhere. Then after a couple of hours restless sleep amidst the noise, we were back to work as the set crew caught a nap. It was grueling and I loved every minute of it.

One of my responsibilities was running the carbon arc follow spot which is a follow spot that works very much like an arc welder, but with two carbon rods. When the carbon rod touch, there is no doubt as to the power of light to dispel darkness. Its only purpose was to create a focused beam of light that could follow the actors on stage from a long distance. The follow spot operator had to be precise and on cue.

I was used to running follow spots, but not carbon arc follow spots. In some ways, it was a whole new ball game for me. The very last show of the season was Oklahoma. And the very first cue was mine. For some insane

reason, the director had chosen to use a live horse for the opening song, “Oh, What a Beautiful Morning.” There was so much that could go wrong. Curly would ride onto the stage in the dark. The horse has to hit its mark. Curly had to hit his mark. And I had to hit my mark, keeping my fingers crossed that we wouldn’t mess it up. If I was early, late, or off mark and hit the horse in the face with basically sunlight, it would have spooked the horse and he would have took off running across the stage, wrecking havoc wherever he went. My only goal was to only tag Curly’s head and gradually open the iris on the spot light until it included the horse.

Light can be an awesome, powerful thing. Too much of it can blind us. Too little of it can leave us guessing as to what is around us. People are generally not as nervous when they can see what is happening around them. I wouldn’t call it a fear of the dark so much as a reticence to navigate the darkness. We are uncomfortable when we encounter the unknown.

There are some Saturday nights that I find myself working late here at the church. I have the bulletins and the prayers list printed out and I need to get to narthex so that they are ready for Harlan on Sunday morning. But there are no light switches near my office that will help me to navigate to the back of the church. So, I just leave the bulletins and prayers lists on my desk until Sunday morning. I just don’t trust myself to navigate the sanctuary in the dark. I also know that it’s my own stubborn pride that makes me think I might be able to do it. God certainly doesn’t expect me to and I’m sure it doesn’t really matter to you..

1 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.

Mark 16 tells us who these women are:

1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.

We know that the burial of Jesus was rushed. Joseph of Arimathea had gone to Pilate and asked for the body and had bought some linen to wrap the body of Jesus in. He then had Jesus laid in a tomb meant for himself. They rolled the stone in place and the Roman guards had sealed it. Because He has died as the Sabbath was falling, Jesus had not received a proper burial with ointments, salves, powders and everything held dear to the Jews with regards to the passing of a loved one. They couldn't do anything to rectify the problem on the Sabbath. Their first opportunity was on Sunday morning. As the ladies approached the tomb, They had to have a lot of questions running through their heads.

Will the soldiers let us see him?

Will they let us take care of his body?

Who will roll the stone back for us so we can get in?

Will the soldiers arrest us?

They had brought everything they needed with them, and they were resolved to try. They must have felt like they had failed him, and they were doing everything

in their power to make it all right. They each loved Jesus. Nothing was going to deter them. They were willing to walk into a very dangerous situation to do what was expected of them and pay the proper respect for their dead Rabbi. There was no expectation for what they were about to encounter.

When they enter the area of the tomb, verse 2 tells us:

2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

There were probably all kinds of thoughts running through their heads, but not one of them was on the mark. Thoughts like:

Who could have rolled that stone away?

Where are the guards?

Is Jesus' body still there?

Did we scare somebody who was about to do something terrible?

Is someone trying to trick us?

Of course they struggled with what they saw before them, because, even though Jesus had told them repeatedly that He would rise from the dead on the 3rd day, none of that really sunk in. They didn't believe that Jesus could have been killed. And yet it happened. I'm sure that their grief left them somewhat foggy as well. And this must have all been even more frightening than what they had imagined. It looked very much like a trap, possibly catch some of Jesus' followers in case they steal the body.

In my mind I see these women watching carefully and sneaking across the clearing to the mouth of the tomb, trying not to arouse any suspicion and doing everything to go unnoticed. They had no way to defend themselves. But it was extremely obvious that something strange had happened here. I don't read anything in this passage where these ladies had any hope of a resurrected Jesus. Just grief, responsibility, and courage.

And if they thought the area outside of the tomb was strange with the stone rolled back and the missing guards, listen to this:

1 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

At the time, it must have seemed the worst possible thing that could have happened. The logical conclusion that most people would make would be that someone had driven off the guards, rolled the stone back, and stolen the body of Jesus. That's what the Jewish leaders thought would happen which is why they had asked the Romans to seal the tomb and have soldiers stand guard. They didn't want anyone pretending that Jesus had risen. But that is the very scenario that the women faced as they arrived at the tomb and entered it. The cloth that He had been buried in was there, but His body had vanished.

But Jesus knew that a rolled back stone, the absence of guards, and a missing body wasn't going to convince anyone, even though He told everyone that it was going to happen. He knew that we are comfortable in our disbelief. That once we set our mind that something is absolutely impossible, it takes more than doing the impossible to prove it to us that it happened, as if Jesus needs to prove anything to us. Why would we expect that? Proof that He wasn't dead?

Proof that He was alive, and then He died, and then He rose again according to prophecy and His own words? Thinking this way tends to align us more with Thomas than with Mary Magdalene.

I have heard people say that it was all allegorical. It's just a story that means something else. We're supposed to learn a lesson from it. That Jesus represents something (like He represents God's presence among us), the stone represents something else (Like a barrier that we put between us and God), the tomb represents something else (like the darkness that accompanies death), the guards represent something like man's attempt to keep us from knowing God. I'm not saying that those kinds of allegories can't be made and can possibly help us understand what God was accomplishing in this moment. But, what I am saying is, Jesus was really dead. The stone was really sealed over the tomb. The guards that had been stationed there were really there. And then, something happened. Something caused the guards to flee. The stone was rolled back. And Jesus is no longer found in the tomb.

Why is that so hard for us to accept? That the son of God whom we claim to know as our savior, was raised from the dead, just as He said he would be? He kept His promise to us. Because we are prone to look for the more common or obvious answer, one that doesn't involve the word "miracle." So many people want to swallow the Roman and Jewish leaders' stories because it makes more sense than accepting the "miracle" for what it is. So many people want to stop the gospel at the death of Jesus because the rest seems so unbelievable. Because accepting the resurrection of Jesus Christ takes a faith and a belief that

many people simply can't muster. So many of us believe in the teachings and wisdom of Jesus but are afraid to make that jump to appreciating the deity of Christ as well.

Human beings cannot understand what happened during this three day period without input from the Holy Spirit. One can only get that faith from the one God sent to us to claim us as His children. When we take a "God has to prove Himself to me in order for me to believe," the odds are that we will never find the faith, hope, love, and peace that we are seeking.

1 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.

It seems like every time an angel shows up in the Bible, the first words out of their mouths is, "Do not be afraid." They don't do that here, but it certainly would have been appropriate. The women were already confused and frightened, and suddenly two angles appear before them in carbon arc follow spot clothes, as brilliant as lightning. And the ladies hit the deck in awe. I'm sure that this created more questions than answers. This had to be almost other worldly. The dazzling white of God, pure in form, radiating so bright that they had to shut their eyes. White without blemish. White without shadow. The white that stars are made of, that Creation itself spat out at the beginning of the universe.

And they have the answers to questions that the women didn't even realize that they should be asking:

5 “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:

7 ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’”

8 Then they remembered his words.

The minute the ladies are reminded of the words of Jesus, they remember. And immediately, it all makes sense. Sometimes we have to look beyond our own questions and explanations and be reminded of promises as we watch them unfold. Seeking our own solutions often turns sideways on us because it plugs up our ears, as if we could drown out the voice of the Creator of the universe.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

Why are we looking for the living among the dead? Why are we looking for our own answers to questions only God has the answer to? Why are we struggling to understand the nature of Jesus when He is doing everything to help us understand His teachings? Why do we look for faults, cracks, and mud when Christ came to us to help make things all things clear.

Love the Lord with all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Love your enemy.

If you love me, feed my sheep.

**Why do you look for the living among the dead? He's not here. He is risen,
just like He said.**

**This week, I want us all to open our eyes to the truth that Christ brought to
us. To the wonder of God's Creation around us. To the miracle of the
Resurrection. To the message of love that He constantly brings to our attention.**

This week, let us strive to be the Christians that Christ wants us to be.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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