

FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH  
COCKEYSVILLE MD

Easter Sunday, April 24, 2011  
John 20 : 1 – 18

**One thing you can say about God,  
God sure is consistent.**

**God is nothing if not consistent.**

**First, he decides to have his only begotten son enter the human race in a filthy old stable with a feed box for a crib ... what a laugh!**

**Then, Jesus runs around the Galilean countryside and seems to like nothing more than to consort with tax collectors and thieves and prostitutes and immigrants, with outcasts and with sinners ... ridiculous!**

**He gets himself killed, nailed naked to a rough cross, executed in the most gruesome way known to humankind ... downright scandalous!**

**And finally, in the moment of his greatest glory, at the moment of resurrection and new life, he chooses a woman to be the first witness of this resurrection!**

**A woman !!!**

**God is nothing if not consistent, and at every turn, he surprises us with the unexpected.**

**You see, women in that day and age were not considered full human beings.**

**They were property of their fathers, and then their husbands, and just like slaves, they didn't have any rights of their own.**

**They couldn't even testify in court.**

**They were considered to be unreliable, and their testimony in a court of law was only admissible if it was backed up by the testimony of another.**

**So why you would choose a woman to be the first witness to the resurrection ... God only knows.**

**But here is Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus' closest friends and followers, alone, going to the tomb, by herself, no other witnesses around.**

**It's still dark out, and the Gospel according to John does not tell us why Mary Magdalene would be going to Jesus' grave in the middle of the night anyway.**

**Perhaps she has come to anoint Jesus' body with oils and perfumes as was the Jewish custom, and now that the Sabbath is over, she can come and do this sacred duty without violating the Jewish law of not working on the Sabbath.**

**I don't know how she figured she'd get into the tomb. She didn't bring anyone along to help her roll away the heavy bolder that was used to close off the tomb. But of course, she never gets to worry much about that because when she gets there, the stone is already rolled away ... and the body is missing.**

**I don't know about you, but if I had been in that situation, I think I might have run off right then and there being scared out of my wits ... and that is just what Mary Magdalene does!!**

**She runs off to Peter and to the others, to tell them that Jesus' body has disappeared, has been stolen.**

**No doubt, Peter and his circle of friends think so, too.**

**After all, Jesus was executed as a traitorous rebel who had started a dangerous political movement that challenged the temple authorities and perhaps even the Roman occupiers ... perhaps his opponents had decided to quietly get rid of the body so that his grave doesn't turn into a shrine for the thousands of followers Jesus has attracted during his lifetime.**

**In any case, confusion reigns because the body isn't where they have laid it three days earlier, and Mary Magdalene, after Peter and the others have gone, just lets her frustration and pain and grief run over: she stands outside the tomb, weeping unconsolably,**

**That's when things get interesting:  
As she bends down and looks into the tomb,  
she sees two angels where Jesus' body had been, and when she turns around,  
she sees Jesus himself,  
standing right there,  
in front of her,  
tall as life!**

**Of course, in her confusion and grief, Mary does not recognize him.**

**She thinks he is the gardener, you know, the cemetery groundskeeper,  
and that maybe he's had something to do with the disappearance of the body.**

**But then Jesus speaks.  
He calls her name.**

**Mary.**

**Gently. Softly.**

**And it is then that the scales fall off Mary's eyes and she sees clearly and understands that she is speaking to her risen Lord ... and thus becomes the first eye witness to the greatest event in all of history!**

**Yes, God is nothing if not consistent,  
and at every turn, he surprises us with the unexpected.**

**And let's face it: a dead person coming back to life ... that's really unexpected, isn't it?**

**I mean, being raised from the dead is just so outside our human experience.**

**Imagine for a minute, if you would, what it would be like to be in Mary Magdalene's shoes:**

**You've gone to the cemetery to visit the last resting place of a loved one, and of course you don't expect the grave to be open and the body to be gone.**

**Dead people don't just get up and walk around ...**

**Dead people ... they stay dead.**

**Death is final, irrevocable, irreversible ...**

**The idea that a dead person could come back to life ... well, it's just unthinkable, totally impossible,**

**But with God, all things are possible!**

**With God, all things are possible,  
and so this Jesus,  
this teacher and rabbi who during his lifetime has always  
done the unexpected,  
has always pushed the envelope,  
has always defied the conventional,  
this Jesus has one more surprise for us today:**

**The body is gone!  
Jesus is alive!**

**Because with God, all things are possible,  
and for us, the implications are enormous.**

**You see,  
if Jesus has been raised from the dead,  
then we, his followers, will be raised from the dead.**

**If Jesus has overcome death,  
then we, you and I, can overcome death.**

**If Jesus has won the final victory over sin and Satan,  
then you and I will win ultimately win the victory!**

**(Can someone say Amen to that?)**

**Oh yes, with God, all things are possible,  
with God, all things are possible,  
and the implications, for us, are enormous.**

**You see, in Jesus' resurrection,  
God has said a loud and final NO to sin and death  
God has said a loud and final NO to suffering and separation**

**God has said a loud and final NO to all that stands in the way between God and humanity.**

**And the implications are enormous because God has said a loud and life-changing, death-shattering, earthquake-producing YES to life.**

**With God, all things are possible,  
even dead people who don't stay dead.**

**With God, all things are possible,  
Come on, say it with me:**

**With God, all things are possible,  
and the implications for us are enormous.**

**You see, with the resurrection of Jesus,  
God has rolled away the huge rock that blocks our lives  
God has rolled away the large stone that keeps us from  
seeing and from sharing God,  
God has rolled away the bolder that stands between us and  
God.**

**That huge rock we call sin  
That huge rock that weighs on us and keeps us down  
That huge rock that crushes our soul and only brings  
hopelessness and despair.**

**God has rolled away the stone  
because with God all things are possible,**

**Turn to your neighbor and tell him/her:  
With God, all things are possible.**

**You know the expression, don't you,**

**That's a huge weight off my mind?**

**When you worry about something, when some situation really weighs you down, and then, unexpectedly perhaps, the situation gets resolved, and you say:  
that's a huge weight off my mind.**

**Well, friends, I am here today to tell you that in rolling away that rock in front of that tomb all these many Easters ago, God has taken a huge weight off your SOUL.**

**God has taken a huge weight off your soul because in Jesus' resurrection, God has said a loud and final YES to YOU,**

**and the implications for you are enormous not just for your life that is to come, but for your life in the here and now.**

**You see,  
with God, all things are possible,  
(are you listening to me?)  
and whatever that rock is in your life that weighs you down,  
whatever sin is eating at you,  
whatever addiction has gotten hold of you,  
whatever broken relationship or illness has you captive,  
whatever the burden is that you are carrying,**

**let God lift that burden  
let God roll that stone away  
let God do the impossible in your life,**

**God has defeated death once and for all,  
death no longer has the final say.**

**God will wipe every tear away and lift the heavy burden that  
crushes your soul**

**Because with God,  
all things are possible**

**One more time, all together now:  
With God, all things are possible!**

**The body is gone!  
Jesus lives!**

**Alleluia and Amen.**