

'Never to Be Lost Again'

John 20.1-18

Prayer – Dear Lord and Father, you are the God of hope for a world that lives without hope . . . You are the God of promise for a world that cannot keep its own promises. On this Morning of mornings, you bring new hope and new promise in the resurrection of your Son Jesus. As you opened the eyes of the Mary and the disciples on the first Easter, send your Spirit upon us to open our eyes to the salvation you have prepared for your people. Where there is sin, grant us forgiveness; where there is hopelessness, give us hope; and where there is death, raise us to life. We pray in the name of your Risen Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. // //

Salutation – Brothers and sisters, grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. // //

Sermon – It should have been a textbook operation, but from the beginning, everything went wrong on April 4th, 1943. Two waves of B-24 Liberators from the 376th Bombardment Group were set to depart Soluch, Libya to bomb the harbor in Naples, Italy. // // The mission was simple enough: *Take-off in mid-afternoon, drop bombs on enemy shipping at 7:30,*

and return to base at midnight. The air group had successfully run this mission several times before; but nothing is ever as simple as it seems. The planes took off in a blinding sandstorm . . . Nine of the *B-24's* returned to base because of visibility . . . Two dropped their bombs in the Mediterranean before turning around . . . And two more could not find the target and bombed a secondary site. *////*

The ***Lady Be Good*** was the last plane to take off from Libya and, because of the storm, never found the main bomber group. The pilot and his officers decided to complete the mission on their own. Newly arrived from flight training in the States, this was their first mission together. After dropping their bombs, the ***Lady Be Good*** turned to make its return trip to the airfield in Libya. At 12:12 am, the pilot, Lt. Hatton, radioed to say that the ***Lady Be Good's automatic direction finder*** was not working and asked for a radio beacon to locate the base. *////*

At some point after the radio call, the ***Lady Be Good*** overflew its base because the aircrew failed to see the flares fired to attract their attention. Unbeknown to them, they continued into the interior of North Africa for the next two hours. The crewmembers thought they were still over the Mediterranean Sea. At 2 am, the crew parachuted to the ground as

the **Lady Be Good** continued on for 16 miles before it made a belly landing with no one on board. The plane was deep in the *Calanshio Sand Sea* of the Libyan Desert. A search and rescue mission from Soluch Air Base failed to locate the plane. The flight crew was listed as ‘*missing in action.*’ ////

Fast forward to November 9th, 1958, a British oil exploration team found a plane in the desert that was largely intact. By means of the pilot’s log, they identified the plane as the missing **Lady Be Good**. They also reported that all the parachutes were missing . . . Within a year, the United States Army investigated the wreckage and, reconstructing their flight path, searched for the missing crew. In time, the bodies of 7 of the 9 crew members were found 50-60 miles away from the wreckage. When they died of thirst and exposure, they were making their way north to what they thought was the coast of Africa. What they did not know was that they were 400 miles from the coast and walking deeper into the heart of the Great Libyan desert. A sketchy diary speaks of thirst and desperation during the last days of their lives . . . Several crewmembers have never been found. ////

When I first heard this story as a child, it fascinated me . . . *How could something like this happen?* . . . I wondered. //// *How could the crew not*

know where they were? //// Why didn't anyone look for them? . . . //// . . .
These were the questions of one who was very young. Now, it's easy to understand what happened. They were an inexperienced crew, the visibility conditions over Naples and their airfield were horrendous . . . And to make matters worse, they thought they knew where they were, *even though they were hopelessly lost. ////*

It seems to me that we are as lost as the aircrew of the **Lady Be Good**. *How do we become lost? ////* We don't mean to get lost, but we just get off track . . . Our **internal direction finders** fail us as we navigate our lives. The danger is great because we think we know where we are going and we don't even realize we are lost. It is almost comic the way we think that we are secure and that others are lost. *But reality is harsh . . . The realization that we are truly lost finally comes . . . It always does. It comes* as we near the end our lives . . . **It comes** as we look at the broken relationships with family and friends . . . **It comes** when tragedy strikes . . . **And it comes** when we have no one else to turn to. ////

We are sinners who, for whatever reason, choose to live apart from God and become lost. But deep down, we sense that something is not right in our lives . . . We sense that we have somehow lost our way. To make

matters worse, death scars our innermost being as loved ones and friends are taken from us. Humans that we are, we live with a constant sense of our mortality . . . fearing that we might die alone, abandoned by God. We worry about the well being of our families as they move away from us because of school or jobs. We struggle with brokenness in our relationships with spouse, family, and friends . . . brokenness that separates us one from another. ////

And there's always the unpredictability of life. Strange things happen when you least expect them . . . Things like the chance sandstorms that the **Lady Be Good** encountered on her last flight . . . Tragedy often seems to strike when one is not ready for it. **But that's the way life is.** And I think that's what happened to Peter, the disciples, and Mary Magdalene after the events of Palm Sunday. ////

JESUS WAS DEAD. The world said that all human beings must die, and Jesus was no exception to the rule. So Mary Magdalene came to fulfill one last labor of love for her Master; she came to anoint his body for burial. But on the first day of the week, St. John tells us that something changed in the way the world does business. The old reality was gone forever. **THE TOMB OF JESUS WAS EMPTY.** His body was nowhere to be found. ////

Poor Mary . . . Poor blessed Mary . . . Everything she had come to believe . . . Everything she had come to expect, was changed. God had intervened in a totally unexpected way. **JESUS WAS ALIVE . . . DEATH COULD NOT HOLD HIM. GOD HAD CHANGED THE RULES: DEATH WAS NOT THE END OF LIFE. ////**

But this possibility never entered Mary's mind. As far as she was concerned, the body of Jesus was missing. When she told Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple, they ran to the tomb and found it as she said. Both saw that the tomb was empty . . . Both saw the grave linens used to wrap the body. But only the Beloved Disciple understood that Jesus would no longer need them . . . He saw life where there was death . . . He saw the new reality of the resurrection. The empty tomb cried out its message of life, but Peter and Mary simply did not understand. Like all of us, they knew that cemeteries were for dead people and that the dead stayed dead. ////

When Peter and the Beloved Disciple had departed the tomb, Mary stood by its entrance weeping. With the disappearance of his body, Mary could only assume that her Master had suffered the final indignity of a desecrated grave. The Evangelist John tells us that even the presence of

angels could not change what she thought to be true. Grief had so clouded her mind that Mary mistook the risen Jesus for the gardener. It was not until Jesus called her by name that she knew him. Mary saw Jesus with her own eyes. And seeing Jesus, she had seen the future . . . *her future* . . . and the future of all who would believe in him. Death was not the end of the story because it could not hide Jesus from the life-giving power of Almighty God. In joy, Mary ran to the disciples and shouted to them **‘I have seen the Lord!’** And with these words, the world changed forever. ////

To say that **‘Jesus is dead’** was no longer sufficient. Yes, *Jesus was dead; but now, he lives.* What happened on Calvary is part of our here and now. Jesus carries the good news of his victory across the ages to people who are hemmed in by sin and death. Jesus died for us and Jesus was resurrected for us. That’s the good news of Easter. ////

Why is the death and resurrection of Jesus so important for us? ////

First, Easter reveals to us who God really is. We already know who we are — warts and all. We are painfully aware of all that is wrong in our lives . . . We know that we are sinners . . . And we know that we live only to die. But because we are human . . . because our vision is clouded by sin, we cannot

see God for who he really is. But in raising Jesus from the dead, God reveals, once and for all, who he is. **He is the One who gives life . . . the One who forgives . . . the One who dies for us . . . the One who loves us more than life itself.** In short, he is the One who is for us when everything else is against us. ////

The raising of Jesus from the dead is more than an individual event proving that he is the Messiah. Instead, the resurrection of Jesus is God's final statement to the world that he is **'for us.'** God, through Jesus the Son, has not only made himself known by living among us; but he has also made himself known to us on the cross, saying, **'THIS IS WHO I AM . . . I AM THE ONE WHO DIES SO THAT YOU MIGHT LIVE.'** ////

Second, in raising Jesus from the dead, God guarantees our present and our future. We know that life is lived one day at a time. But so often, we fear the tomorrows that lie before us. However, the good news of Easter is that life in the resurrection begins now; not sometime in the future. Jesus is present with us now; in life, in death, and in life again. ////

Therefore, we can say that Jesus represents us before God. **A Resurrection faith is to trust** that he will represent us before God . . . **A**

Resurrection faith is to know that he speaks for us when we are silenced by death . . . **A Resurrection faith is to believe** that Jesus reminds God that each one of us is unique, indispensable, and absolutely irreplaceable. The resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee that we will never be forgotten and unclaimed. ////

We began this morning talking about the lost crew of the **‘Lady Be Good.’** They were lost to their loved ones . . . their nation . . . And until, 1960, they were lost to history. It’s important to remember that they were not alone in that lonely desert . . . The Resurrected Jesus was with them . . . even at the end. And on this Easter Morning, it is even more important to remember that they were not lost God. To each of us this morning, the Resurrected Jesus says, **‘I HAVE FOUND YOU . . . AND I HAVE CLAIMED YOU IN BAPTISM. YOU ARE MINE FOREVER . . . NEVER TO BE LOST AGAIN.** Amen.

