At the Tomb

*Matthew 28:1, “Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week . . .”*

It’s still dark on this the first day of the week. The Sabbath rest is over. And now it’s time for labor to begin again. It’s time for everyone to go back to their jobs and life as normal. But this morning we follow two women to their peculiar work. Theirs is a labor of love. They make their way to a tomb to pay their respects. This tomb has been freshly dug and it houses the body of their friend and their teacher, Jesus.

When they arrive at the tomb, the women bow their heads. They fall into a deep and melancholy vigil. But then, something happens that shakes them from their reflections. The earth trembles under their feet. It shudders and quakes. They fall to the ground, startled and afraid. But nothing can prepare them for what comes next. The boulder, barring the entrance to Jesus’ tomb rolls to the side, and there, sitting on top of it is an angel of God.

They’re terrified out of their minds, but the angel says, “Don’t be afraid. You seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen, just as he said! Go, tell His disciples!” The women have gone from being petrified to being ecstatic! They can’t believe their ears! God’s messenger has brought even better news than they possibly could have dreamed. Just imagine how exciting that first Easter must have been! Imagine how thrilling it was to hear the news for the first time that Jesus had come back from the dead! This is the first day the world learned of the resurrection!

First days are awesome, aren’t they? They’re chock full of excitement and possibility. They’re loaded with all kinds of opportunities. There’s the first day at school when you’re thrilled to meet your new teacher and make new friends. There’s the first day at a new job and you’re ready to wow the boss and finally live up to your potential. There’s the first day of owning your first home, a home that’s *all yours*! There’s that first day you bring home your new car, that cute puppy, that sweet kitten. Or how about the first day of marriage! First days can be a real blast!

But then there’s the second day, then the third, the fourth, soon a year, then a decade and more. School turns out to be pretty much like last year, only the classes are harder. At work the boss still holds you back and red tape keeps killing project momentum. Your new home needs painting in addition to the plumbing issues you’ve got to get fixed soon. Someone backed into your new car in the Kroger parking lot, your cute puppy treats your shoes like a fire hydrant, and that sweet kitten is convinced that the best claw sharpener in the whole house is your leather couch. And after time, that newly-wed love has cooled into little more than toleration of your spouse, and sometimes not even that.

The excitement dulls. The happiness fades. The brightness of the first day loses its luster. And soon, ecstatic joy settles down into dim greyness. The extraordinary becomes ordinary. The thing you took so much joy in doing on the first day becomes just one more task added to your already lengthy list of responsibilities.

We’re like that, you and I. We’re so fickle in our excitement. We lose our joy in new things so quickly. I see it in my sons all the time. They’ll get a new toy, and for about two days, that will be the only thing they want to play with. But on the third day it finds its place in the basket on the floor, alongside all the other toys of yesterday’s excitement.

We’re no better than children really. But we don’t just lose interest in things. Often we lose interest in our whole lives! Day after day of the same routine, and soon we see our lives as dull, colorless, bland. We think of each day as a chore and adopt TGIF as our motto, counting down the hours to when we get to kick back and do nothing.

Even our joy over something so grand as *Easter* dies away. It’s fun on the day, but mostly we’re excited for the triumphant songs and the majestic trumpet. When only the ears of the chocolate bunny remain and the only Jelly Beans left in the bag are the black ones, well then Easter fades into the background. We toss it into one of the many cluttered baskets in our minds, alongside all the other events that have long since lost their luster. We go back to life as normal and can’t wait for Jesus to take us out of this boring, dreary world so that we can go to heaven.

When I plan my schedule, I usually think of Monday as the first day of the week. I’ve done that since I was a kid, probably because that’s when the weekend was over and school started again. But that’s completely wrongheaded. The first day of the week is Sunday. We go to Church on Sunday. We begin the week on Sunday. Why? because that’s the day Jesus rose from the dead!

Centuries before Jesus was even born, Isaiah predicted this moment in history. God foretold a day on which He would renew and restore His world, tarnished and dulled by sin. Through Isaiah, God said, “Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” Do *you* not perceive it?! Do you really understand what happened when Jesus rose from the dead?

What would you say is the most important invention in history? What would you say is the one discovery that advanced humanity more than any other? Some say the wheel, others argue fire, electricity, or the electric lightbulb. Still others make the case for the compass, the combustion engine, or the computer chip. Well there’s certainly no doubt whatsoever that these inventions did change the world. They radically transformed the way we live. The world has not been the same since their creation.

Just think about how profoundly even Google has changed our planet. What do you do if you want to find a local pizza joint? What do you do if you can’t remember the name of that actor or if you can’t quite recall the particulars of Immanuel Kant’s “Categorical Imperative”? What do you do if you want to figure out the best route to your out of state family? You Google it! And when we don’t have internet access, we feel lost! We can think of no other way to get the information we need.

But nothing in history has so profoundly changed the world as that dark morning some 2,000 years ago, when two women heard for the very first time that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. Easter isn’t just a holiday. It’s not just a really jolly good thing that an innocent man came back to life. Easter means so much more! Jesus didn’t just prove that He was God’s Son by rising. Neither did His resurrection simply prove that God accepted His sacrifice on your behalf. When Jesus walked out of that tomb, He changed the world forever!

Paul writes, “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” When the two women went to the tomb that early morning, it wasn’t just the first day of the week. It was the First Day of something brand new! It was the First Day of a New Creation!

Before Adam and Eve sinned, God would walk with them in the Garden of Eden. One writer said that “[W]hat [the women] were looking at was the First Day of the new creation, with a new heaven and a new earth; and in the semblance of the gardener God walked again in the garden, in the cool not of the evening but the dawn.”

The day before Easter was the last day of former things. It was the last day ruled by sin and death. Before Jesus’ resurrection, the world was grey and pointless and futile. In a world where death has the final say, what is the point? What is the purpose? Why do anything at all? Why not adopt TGIF as our mantra? Why not hit the snooze on Monday morning and hide under the covers on Sunday. But when Jesus rose from the dead, He began something new. He inaugurated the New Creation! He inaugurated in this present world what God will bring to completion when Christ returns.

The point is this, unlike other “first days” we eventually tire of, Easter is something else entirely! The resurrection of Jesus puts your life in a whole new light, *all* of your life! Even, perhaps even especially, the things you think are boring and mundane and dreary.

There’s nothing exciting about changing diapers. Unless you understand that this too is part of the New Creation. Raising your children patiently to be God-fearing, faithful young Christians isn’t a humdrum job . . . it’s part of the New Creation! Being loving toward your wife and practicing your manners around her isn’t dull. Being respectful to your husband isn’t part of a grey existence. It’s part of the new world. Your 9-5, Monday through Friday, less-than-exhilarating job through which you provide for your family, even *that* is part of the New Creation. How so?

Paul tells us that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” You are in Christ. In Baptism, God joined you to the death of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. But He also joined you to the resurrection of Jesus. The old you drowned in those waters, and behold, the new has come! He raised you from that watery grave as a *new* creature. So even now, even today, you are part of the New Creation. The vocations God has given you aren’t drab! They are beautiful! They are exciting because God has transformed those mundane, run-of-the-mill tasks into Easter things. He has drawn them up into the Resurrection of His Son.

Losing our excitement after the first day seems to be human nature. But Easter is different. Easter is the only First Day that can thrill forever. It’s the First Day of the end of Death’s dominion. It’s the First Day of the reign of Christ. It’s the First Day of the Resurrection of the dead. This is the First Day of the New Creation . . . and *you* are part of it! Alleluia! Christ is risen! Amen.