

“More Hope Than We Can Handle”

John 20:1-18

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Easter

Recently, I was reading an article by Craig Barnes in which he wrote, “Easter is about more hope than we can handle.” He’s right. Easter is about hope but it is different from secular or even pre-Easter hope. It truly is bigger than we can embrace or understand.

In 1925, novelist and film writer Laurence Stallings was asked to attend a football game between the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Illinois and write the story for a local publication. The field was muddy and everybody was slipping and sliding. The only player that mastered the conditions that day was a halfback, Red Grange. He was a three-time All-American half-back for Illinois that was given the nickname, The Galloping Ghost, because he was so elusive and fast. On this day, he broke loose for three touchdowns and set up another.

All the writers in the press box were furiously pounding away on their typewriters describing Grange’s outstanding play. Stallings was not, however. Instead, he was pacing up and down the press box, hands clasped to his head saying, “I can’t write! I can’t write! It’s too big!”

I feel a little like that this morning. The hope that was revealed on Easter has no rivals. It’s in a class by itself.

What’s different about Easter hope? There is no situation that it cannot embrace and change. Not one.

Easter hope was born out of chaos and despair. Sorrow and confusion reigned. Tears flowed as freely as unanswered questions. It was a time of utter hopelessness and despair.

On Good Friday, the disciples buried their trusted leader, best friend and the dreams that he dared them to believe. To say that it was the saddest and most bewildering time of their lives would be an understatement. No light was piercing the darkness. Spiritually, it was midnight and morning would never come.

When is the last time you felt that way? What caused it? Did you bury a loved one, lose your job, get a bad medical report, find drugs in your teenager’s possession or file for divorce? What attacked your dreams with a lethal blow?

Initially, were you convinced that this problem was so large and complex that it could not be resolved? Did you sink lower into the pit of despair than ever?

Welcome to Mary’s world and the women that accompanied her to the tomb that morning. They were not making that trek because they hoped things would be different when they arrived. They were going to finish the burial process that had not been completed on Friday due to the rush to bury Jesus before sundown.

Can you imagine how painful this must have been for them? Some of you can. You have walked down that lonely path.

If you are on this journey now, listen to what Craig Barnes wrote about the significance of where you are. “No one is ready to encounter Easter until he or she has

spent time in dark places where hope cannot be seen. Never forget that the discovery of the risen Christ occurred in darkness and it still does.”

“On the first day of the week, **while it was still dark**, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance” John 20:1.

Hope is born out of hopelessness. From the darkest night comes the most beautiful morning if we open our lives to the transforming power of God’s Spirit.

What else makes Easter hope unique? The change it creates is radical.

When Mary and her friends went to the tomb in the pre-dawn hours, all they were hoping was to be able to complete the burial process. Upon seeing the empty tomb, Mary’s focus changed to finding and returning Jesus’ body to its proper place.

These strike me as pre-Easter hopes for a return to normalcy, life as it was supposed to be, life as Mary knew and could manage. This is not what Easter hope is about, though. It is so much more.

Easter hope is not about returning someplace, but charting a new course. It is not about getting something back, but creating something new. It is not about restoring normalcy but discovering a new way of living. It is about believing God when He says, “Behold, I make all things new!” and letting Him perform that miracle in your life.

Far too many times, when we are grieving, we long for God to give us back what we had, even if it is dead and lifeless. That’s what Mary wanted with her limited pre-Easter hope. God did not grant this wish, though. He had something better in mind. He gave her new dreams and the energy to pursue them through the risen Lord.

He will do the same for us if we let Him. He will give us a new attitude, a new desire, a new passion, a new purpose and a new direction. He will provide new ways of thinking, living, arranging priorities and relating to others. He will bring new people into our lives or make us a new person in our current relationships.

Easter hope is about all things new and better. It really is more hope than we can handle. Maybe that’s why we don’t embrace it. We struggle to believe that life can come from death and new can replace old. Often we blend our voices with Solomon’s and cry, “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun” Ecclesiastes 1:9.

On this Easter morning I want you to know there is something new under the sun and it can be yours if you will let the risen Lord help you discover it. Offer him what you have, dead and lifeless as it may appear. Along with it, invite him to be a part of your life and struggle. Let him help you carry your burden while he leads you down a new road filled with all things new and better. If you will, you will receive more hope than you can handle, but that’s ok. He will help you carry this, too.