

HE LIVES!

It seems that everyone loves to celebrate. We sometimes invent reasons to have a celebration. Kingsport's Fun Fest is one of those invented reasons. There are other occasions and events that have historical significance which we commemorate with celebrations such as Independence Day (July 4th) or Thanksgiving Day. Some cultures celebrate the change of the seasons or harvest and planting time. The event that we refer to as Easter is a seasonal celebration that came from pagan religious traditions that commemorated springtime. In the early history of the church, there was an effort to relate events on the Christian calendar with events from the pagan cultures which the church was trying to evangelize. Consequently, we have the winter solstice celebration of the Druids combined with the celebration of the birth of Jesus and the Easter celebration of Babylon associated with the resurrection of Jesus. The artifacts of the pagan celebrations (the so-called Christmas tree and the yule log at Christmas and the brightly colored eggs at this season) often tend to overshadow and get more attention than the truly significant reasons for such celebrations.

We celebrate the resurrection of Jesus each year and mark it was one of the, if not the most, important events in God dealing with man. We sing the song, "He Lives!" and it captures the celebrative nature of the commemoration. However, as this event was unfolding, the followers of Jesus did not think that they had a lot to celebrate. In fact, this was a time of great bereavement. They had just witnessed the betrayal, the beatings and berating of Jesus. They had seen the mock trial, watched Jesus carry a cross to a hill outside the city, and had watched Him die. To them, it was not a time to celebrate. It was a time of grief and there was work to be done.

MARK 15:42-47 It was late afternoon and sundown was approaching which would signal the start of the Sabbath day. The Jewish day started at what we would call 6 P.M. This was not just any Sabbath, but it was the Sabbath associated with the Passover. The Jewish leader did not want anything so ugly as three crucified bodies hanging on crosses marring the appearance of the city, so they asked the Romans to hurry the death process along. The Romans cooperated and set about to break the legs of the those being crucified. When they came to Jesus, He had already died and they did not break His legs. (This fulfilled the O.T. scriptures that said "not a bone (of the Messiah's body) was broken.")

Joseph of Arimathaea was an important member of the Jewish community leadership. He was a member of the Sanhedrin and apparently was a wealthy man. He had noted what was happening in the events surrounding the life of Jesus and he had seen what his colleagues had done in condemning an innocent man to death. He had stayed in the background until the crisis had developed to such a point that his help was really needed. It is not likely that anyone of lesser importance (politically) could have secured the permission of Pilate to take down the body of Jesus at that particular time. We are told in John's Gospel that Nicodemus also helped by bringing the embalming spices.

Joseph of Arimathaea had a new tomb (sepulcher) that he made available for Jesus to be placed. This sepulcher was a hewn cavity in a rock and a stone was placed over the entrance after a body was placed in it.

Here we see two people Joseph and Nicodemus who were believers in Jesus that were not in the limelight and yet they were available for God to use them at the right time. Many people are like that today. They believe but are not often seen by others and yet their ministry become important at particular times.

The preparation of Jesus' body for burial was hurried because of the approach of the Sabbath

day, and some of the women that were followers of Jesus took note of where the body was interred so they could return to finish the job after the Sabbath was over.

MARK 16:1-5 This was a time of intense mourning for the small band of follower of Jesus. They had no idea of what might happen next. They might all wind up on Roman crosses and their hopes of a new kingdom with Jesus as the king were as dead as they presumed Jesus to be.

The three women who were going to finish the embalming process left for the cemetery around sun rise of the first day of the week. As they approached the garden where the sepulcher was located, they remembered that a huge stone was placed over the entrance and they wondered how they might get in. Evidently, they did not know that the Jews had posted guards there to keep the disciples of Jesus from attempting to steal the body. Had they know that, they might have counted on the guards to help.

When they arrived they could see that the stone was already rolled away and when they looked in they didn't see the body of Jesus but a young man dressed in a long white garment sitting inside the sepulcher. The other gospel writers identify this person as an angel. Needless to say the women were frightened and probably very confused by what they saw.

MARK 16:6 The angel knew why the women were there and he had the privilege of proclaiming the most significant news in the history of mankind. "He is risen!" It is not often that God sends an angel to make an announce to people; however, we have to believe that such messages are most significant.

MARK 16:7-8 The angel was a messenger sent from God and he delivered his message with instructions to pass it on to others. The message was simple and yet it was significant. It told the followers of Jesus where to go to meet Him. Peter was singled out in the message probably because he needed some special encouragement to be assured that Jesus still valued him even though Peter had denied Jesus three times. The message is also significant in that we see that where ever Jesus sends us He goes before us. The disciples were given the hope of seeing Jesus if they obeyed what they were told to do. I think that as we obey the commandments of Christ, then we will be able to see Jesus in our lives and more importantly, others also will be able to see Him in us.

We would do well to follow the actions of the women as they left the tomb. *They went out quickly.* We need to have a sense of urgency about carrying out the work of the Kingdom of God. One thing is different though, they were frightened and did not tell anyone. We can be free from fear and we should tell everyone that Jesus lives today and that we know it without a doubt, not because we were there 2000 years ago, but because He lives in hearts and reigns as Lord of all.