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Glorious Gospel of Easter Day

By Rev. Stephen Paulson
in Care

And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint Him. . . . Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: He is risen: He is not here: Behold the place, where they laid Him—Mark 16:1, 2.

THE Sabbath came and went over the grave of its Lord. Silence reigned in Joseph's garden, broken only by the muffled scuttles who chattered and laughed by the sealed sepulcher. We do not know what the disciples did on the Sabbath day. Probably they spent the day in close retirement in some upper room. Their thoughts were nailed to that Cross on Calvary, and their spirits were under the heavy pull of that tragedy of Good Friday.

We can never understand the utter misery and desolation of those hours between Christ's death and His Resurrection. Our faith rests on the centuries, and when we read of the Crucifixion we have in mind the glory of Easter morning. But to the disciples, all their hopes had been shattered, all their plans frustrated, and all their love buried in Joseph's tomb. A resurrection did not enter into their thoughts at all, and therefore their testimony is the more valuable. True, they had heard Jesus say that He would rise again, but they had interpreted that in a sort of future and symbolic sense.

Before dawn, the women mentioned in our text, perhaps with some others, started for the sepulcher bearing their spices and ointments with which they expected to finish the embalming of the blessed body of their Lord. A resurrection had no place in their thoughts. They came to minister to the dead, not to greet the living. Their one great concern was: Who would help them to roll away the stone which sealed the tomb, and which was too great for their unaided strength? As they drew near they saw that the stone is rolled away, and so little did they think of a resurrection, that the open tomb brought them only perplexity and grief.

The Gospels were not written for the curious, but for the devout. They are most silent therefore, where myth and legend would be most garrulous. Here we are told nothing of the wondrous Resurrection. Did He awake alone? Or was He attended by the hierarchy of heaven? We are told only what concerns mankind, viz., the sufficient manifestation of Jesus to His people of His Resurrection.

We can reconstruct something of the events of that first Easter morning from the Gospel accounts. First the women come and find the tomb empty. Mary Magdalene immediately runs back to the city and tells Peter and John about it. They rush out to the garden of Joseph, John, the younger man, taking the lead. The women have left. Peter enters the tomb and sees the linen clothes which had covered the body of Jesus, and there begins to dawn upon them something of the meaning of the words of Jesus, "On the third day I shall rise again."

Mary comes back and Peter and John have gone, and no one is there to explain what has taken place; so she stands by the sepulcher and pours out her distress in tears.

Now comes the first revelation of the risen Christ. "Mary," He says, in the well-known voice of love and tenderness, and in a moment all her sorrow is turned into joy. It is always so when the risen Christ comes into a life. The living Christ is the world's great joy-bringer. Without Him, our thoughts can only be thoughts of death. With Him we enter into the conception of the larger life, of which this is only the outer court.

Life! Death! They seem to be the very antipodes of thought. We have come to look upon them as mutually exclusive, but Jesus has taught us that out of life death is to arise.

The Resurrection of Jesus is the anchor of our Christian faith. We live in a day when men seek positive grounds of thought and action, and the enduring power of the Resurrection is not a sentiment but a fact. A sentiment has its day. Phases of mere feeling pass rapidly over the generations of men, like clouds over our heads, but the fact of the Risen Christ remains. In the strength of that certainty Paul went forth to his great missionary labors. In the strength of that, Peter went unafraid to his own crucifixion. In the strength of that, the soldiers of Christ in all ages have stood fast in the faith, quit themselves like men, and endured unto the end.

The Easter Gospel is the Gospel of all comfort. "If Christ be not risen then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain," so says St. Paul, and then comes his triumphal shout of certainty: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that sleep!" That is the Gospel of comfort, which the world of sorrow and death needs so much. That is the glad and glorious Gospel of Easter Day. Today we seek, not a dead Christ, but a living one, and then, may it soon be our bliss to see the Risen Savior face to face, as did Mary on that very first Easter morning.

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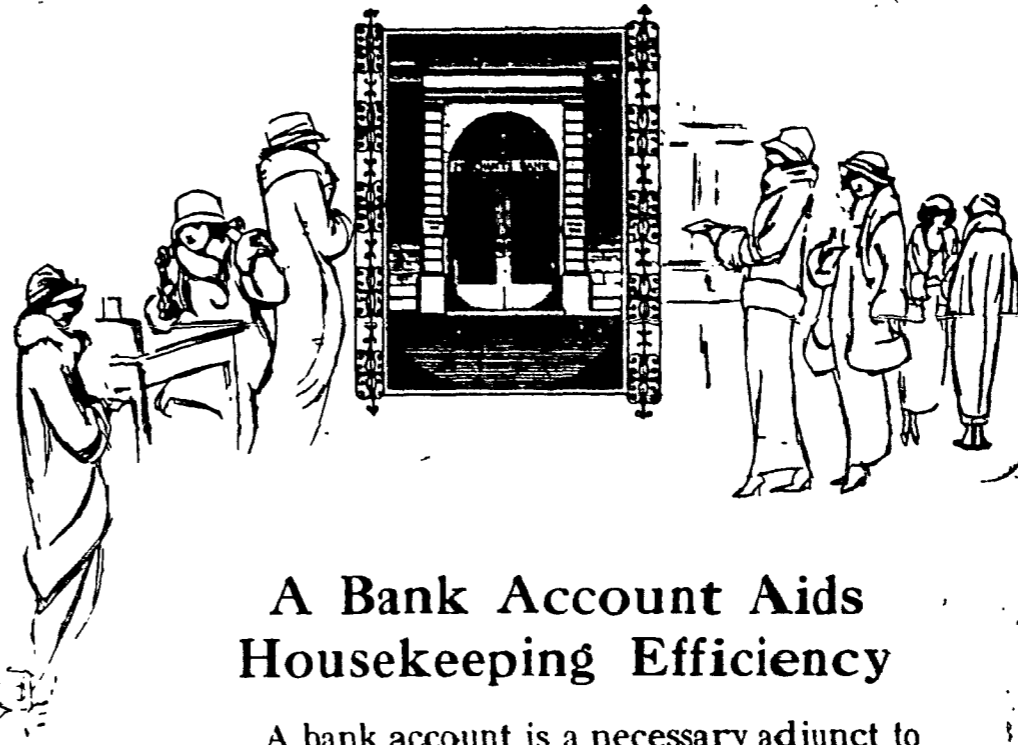
But the season of the year is at hand when even the "clod of earth feels a stir of night—an instinct within it that reaches and towers."

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