

April 4, 2010
The Festival of the Resurrection

“Christ Is Risen! He Is Risen Indeed!”

LUKE 24:1-11

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” ⁸ Then they remembered his words. ⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

The article was entitled *Easter in Kenya*. It told how Christians living in the African country of Kenya have an interesting custom on Easter morning. On Good Friday they fix up an old building to look like the tomb of Jesus. Easter morning, as the first rays of light are coming into the village, the early risers run to the tomb, look inside and proclaim to each other “He is not here! He is not here!” Then they run back to their homes greeting people who are also going to the tomb, “He is not there!” Others look for themselves into the tomb and proclaim to each other, “He is not here!” and then tell others, “He is not there!” Then they gather for worship and joyfully proclaim to each other, “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed.”

Christ is risen! That’s a fact. It is a reality that we celebrate every day of our lives. It is a fact that also has tremendous impact on our lives. Let’s look more closely at these facts as they are presented to us in Luke 24 and then see the impact on our lives.

What a fact!

It was early in the morning, very early in the morning, the first day of the week, Sunday morning, when the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They prepared the spices because they wanted to finish wrapping the body of Jesus with linen clothes. As they are walking to the tomb they are thinking of the body of Jesus, the body that had suffered so terribly, the body that was lifeless on the cross, the body that was gently taken down, the body that was carefully washed of its blood, and the body that was lovingly wrapped with 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes, and the body they had seen lying at rest in Joseph’s tomb, a fresh tomb, never used before. The facts of a dead body loom up so large in their minds that the reality of Jesus resurrection does

not shine forth with the rising sun. And they worry about rolling away the stone.

As they draw closer to the tomb in the faint light of dawn, they can see the stone rolled away from the tomb. Fear grips them. They assume that someone had stolen the body of Jesus. Mary Magdalene does not even take the time to check it out. She runs to tell the disciples they have taken away the body of Jesus. She cries her eyes out in despair. Where would we be this morning if we did not know fact of Jesus' resurrection?

Some of the women did not run away immediately. They stood there wondering about this. How do you put a puzzle together? You look for the pieces that are the same, the corner pieces and edge pieces. They could not put the pieces together because the main piece, the resurrection is missing from their lives. All they can see is death and its consequences and that fills their lives with fear.

The Lord is so good at bringing us back to reality. "Suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them." It's angel time. Time to get rid of the doubts and fears and bring home the truth of the resurrection in a way that will never be forgotten, that still thrills us today. The women bow to the ground in fear and then they hear the angel say to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was with you in Galilee, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'"

Why do you seek the living among the dead? If I want to get flowers for my garden, where do I go? Do I go out on Black Road to the place where they compost green waste, where dead material rots and decays? Imagine going to the people working there and saying, "I want to buy some flowers." No, you go to a nursery where flowers are raised and sold? Look into the baskets you are carrying. Why did you bring spices and linen clothes to wrap a dead body? You should have brought the fresh cinnamon rolls you just baked, and the freshly ground and freshly brewed coffee, and the luscious red Santa Maria strawberries, and some hardboiled eggs to have a resurrection celebration with your risen Lord.

When it comes to the reality of Jesus' resurrection we never grow tired of someone telling us Jesus is alive. Martin Luther was once down in the dumps. The Reformer had his low moments, just as you and I do. His wife Katie was tired of him moping around and looking so sad. She met him at breakfast with black mourning clothes. With a fearful look on this face he asked her, "Dear, Katie who has died?" She said, "No one has died. I thought I would wear these clothes because you are living as if Jesus is still dead and in the grave." Is it any wonder that the Luther often cheered himself up with one Latin word, "Vivit!" "He lives."

During the rise of communism in Russia a man by the name of Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin enjoyed exalting atheism and putting down the Christian faith. He was instrumental in the Bolshevik Revolution and was the editor of the communist paper, Pravda, which means truth. There is a story told about a journey he took from Moscow to Kiev in 1930 to address a huge assembly on the subject of atheism. He aimed his heaviest artillery at Christianity, which Lenin labeled "the opiate of the people." After a very long

lecture intended to wear the people down he asked, "Does anyone have anything to say?" Deafening silence filled the auditorium. One man approached the platform and mounted the lectern standing near the communist leader. He surveyed the crowd first to the left then to the right. Then he shouted as loudly as he could the ancient Easter greeting so well known well in the Russian Orthodox Church: "ChristOs VoskrEs (CHRIST IS RISEN!)" In mass the crowd responded with loud shout like the sound of thunder: "Volstinu VoskrEs" "HE IS RISEN INDEED!"

You see, dear Christian when you know the amazing fact of Christ's resurrection, it has an amazing impact on your life. With the heart we believe and with the mouth confession is made.

What an amazing impact

And how did the women respond to the words of the angel that reminded them of what Jesus had said? We are told that they remembered the words of the Lord. The very specific words of Jesus about his resurrection created new faith and new hope that Jesus was alive. Chinese fortune cookies are not very specific. You will meet someone interesting. Tomorrow will be a better day. When it came to rising from dead, Jesus was very specific. There was definite time and a definite place where he told these women and the disciples lie would rise again. The angel's message gets through to them. They remembered what Jesus told and they run to the disciples to tell them what they had seen, including what they had seen in the tomb, the forensic evidence of the resurrection in the grave clothes Jesus had left behind.

And now notice the impact the news about the resurrection has on Peter and the other disciples. At first they did not believe the words the women had spoken, but later that night Jesus would appear to them and they would be overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Peter ran to the tomb. He bent over and saw the strips of linen lying by themselves. The gospel of John tells us that the clothes were lying there and the head piece was neatly folded by itself. These grave clothes sure had their impact on Peter for it says he went away, "wondering what had happened."

What happens when you start wondering about the resurrection and examining the evidence? I can tell you what happened to Thomas. He looked at the nail marks in Jesus hands and saw the spear wound in his side and joyfully proclaimed, "My Lord and my God." The fact of Jesus resurrection impacts us with the realization that Jesus is Lord and God from all eternity. When he tells you, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, no one can snatch them from my hand." Because of the fact of the resurrection your life is impacted by the arms of the Shepherd that hold you close, the very arms of God himself who created the universe in which we live.

Let the fact of the resurrection sink deeply into your life this morning and you will go home from this worship service knowing without a doubt that the work Jesus did to rescue you is solid and secure. When the thief died on the cross he prayed to Jesus, "Jesus, remember me when you come in to your kingdom." This thief could not ask Jesus to remember him on the basis of the good life he tried to live. He had nothing to offer

his God in himself, but he had everything in Jesus, just as we have nothing to offer our God but everything in Jesus. Because Jesus rose from the dead the work he did to save us and the death he died to forgive is genuine and real. I am holding in my hand a receipt. The receipt tells me that I paid a bill. The resurrection says that nothing can tear up that receipt and that I will have that receipt with me when I stand before God in the final judgment. Your Individual Retirement Account may take a huge hit, but your Individual Redemption Account is rock solid and secure.

Let the fact of Jesus resurrection sink into your life and you will enjoy the impact of knowing that someday when you die Jesus will raise you to life again just as he raised his body to life again. There is a reason why we adorn our worship with lilies, Easter lilies. They are given in memory of people we love and we know that these people will be raised to life again on the last day. The fact of the resurrection impacts how we view those last days on this earth of people who die in the Lord. My final words to my father as I walked out the door at 5:00 AM in the morning were, "Dad, you know how much you loved the Redwoods in California. I know Jesus has even more beautiful places waiting for us and we are going to go for a long walk together under those beautiful trees." My dad had the presence of min to say, "Oh, we won't walk, we will glide along." A son forever cherishes the memories of a conversation with his dad, framed by the very genuine and real hope of the resurrection on the last day. Christ is risen! What a fact. Christ is risen indeed! What an impact. He is not here. He is not there. He has risen. Amen.