

April 20, 2014
The Festival of the Resurrection

“Jesus Has Risen Just as He Said”

MATTHEW 28:1-10

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. ⁵ The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.” ⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

It was the day after the Sabbath, very early on Sunday morning, when Mary and Mary Magdalene made their way to the tomb of Jesus. They had some important unfinished business that needed to be done. They wanted to finish wrapping the dead body of Jesus with more linen and spices. Little did they know that Jesus had risen from the dead just as he said he would.

Your life is full of unfinished tasks. There are bills to be paid, rooms to clean, a yard that needs weeding, friends and family to encourage, prayers that have been forgotten and a Bible that needs to be read more often. Because Jesus rose from the dead as he said, the most important tasks of your life have been finished. Your sin has been completely paid for you and a resurrection from the dead is already yours.

Do you know that the ancient Egyptians believed that their pets could help them through the long journey in the afterlife? Just recently they uncovered a tomb full of mummified cats. I know you love your cats and your dogs, but they cannot help you after you die. Maybe you know someone who believes their soul will leave their body after death and then find other bodies to enter until it reaches a level of Nirvana. There is a name for this. It is called reincarnation. It goes on and on and on and on.

Today we celebrate Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. We run to the empty tomb and discover that everything necessary to defeat sin and death has already been accomplished. Listen to these words of the angel and make them your words. “He has risen, just as he said.”

Life without the reality of the resurrection

What is life like without the reality of the resurrection? Take a look at Mary and Mary

Magdalene. "After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb." They were not going to pay a visit to Jesus who had clearly told them he would rise again and the third day. Their baskets do not contain choice foods to eat breakfast with their Lord, luscious red Santa Maria strawberries, fresh cinnamon buns, and freshly brewed coffee. They went to the tomb with baskets full of spices and linen clothes to finish wrapping the dead, cold lifeless body of Jesus.

It is hard for us to grasp how much they must have suffered as they stood beneath the cross of Jesus and watched him die. They watched as he was lowered from the cross by the loving hands of friend. The ugly reality of death kept them from remembering Jesus' promise he would rise again. If you have ever watched someone you love die, you never forget those moments. They stay with you the rest of your life. Death is so real. It has an ugly sting to it. Death will someday come to all of us. It is the huge elephant in the room no one wants to talk about.

What about life and its many challenges? There are those rough days when we become so preoccupied with our problems or even our many undeserved blessings that we lose sight of the reality of the resurrection. Martin Luther said his favorite Latin word was the word "Vivit" which means "he lives." Even he struggled to live to wake up each morning and joyfully say, "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." One day his dear wife Katie noticed that he was going through a rough patch when he seemed to have lost the joy in his life. She woke up early one morning and dressed in the black clothes of mourning. When her beloved husband came to breakfast and gasped, "Katie, who died?" "No one," she said, "But since you act like Jesus is still dead, I thought I would wear these dark clothes of mourning."

Life with the reality of the resurrection

Oh how life changes when Jesus brings the reality of his resurrection into our lives. "There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men." Big events need bold announcements. The earth shakes. An angel comes down to roll away the stone. This was not done to let Jesus out of the tomb, but to reveal to the whole world that the tomb was empty just as Jesus said it would be. The angel shines as bright as lightning and sits on that stone triumphantly, gloriously and defiantly, proclaiming to all our enemies, "Jesus is victorious!" Roman soldiers almost die of fright.

Now the women come to the tomb. The angel does not seem to be present at first, for the gospel of Luke tells us they entered into the tomb and saw that it was empty. They are totally bewildered and do not know what to make of the grave clothes that have been left behind. They need God's angel to tell them what happened just as we need God's Word to tell us what happened to Jesus after he died. The angel says to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; he is risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.'

The Lord knew these women were looking for the dead body of Jesus that had been crucified. He knows when we grieve for people who have died. He knows the fears we

have when death comes or when life overwhelms us.

"Come and see the place where he lay." We look inside and we see with our eyes of faith the unique position of the linen clothes wrapped around Jesus and the neatly folded headpiece. It says in the gospel of John that Peter and John saw the clothes left behind in the tomb and they believed. How do you know the little boy has eaten a juicy strawberry? You see the evidence all over his face. Look in the tomb. See the evidence. The grave clothes are left behind in a unique way to communicate Jesus has risen just as he said.

The angel tells the women to go quickly and tell the disciples that Jesus will meet up with them again in Galilee, the same place where Jesus had first called them to be his disciples. The women run from the tomb afraid yet filled with joy. We think of the shepherds on the fields of Bethlehem running to tell the good news of Jesus' birth. We think of the words of Isaiah 52:7 that tell us "How beautiful on the mountain are the feet of those who bring good news." What an honor and privilege it was for them and for us to bring the good news, "Christ has risen! He is risen indeed!"

Now they get to see Jesus face to face. "Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings,' he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go Galilee; there they will see me.'" Jesus says to them "Greetings!" The Greek word for this "chairete" is similar to our greeting "Have a good day." When it comes from Jesus it means much more than just have a good day, or even have a great day, it means "Have the best day of our life because I am risen from the dead." He says, "Go and tell my brothers I will see them again in Galilee." Jesus calls them his brothers, even though they were unfaithful to him. Later that night he even showed them the nail prints in his hands as the supreme evidence their sin had been forgiven.

Jesus is not ashamed to take us back. He is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters even though we have been unfaithful to him. He gives us eyes of faith to see the nail prints in his hands that he kept as the forensic evidence the huge debt of sin has been paid in full.

Here in the risen Christ you find your true identity in life as Jesus' brother. You cannot find this identity in yourself and in your ability to impress other people or even God himself. I recently told someone that I have never gone on Facebook. Instead of dismissing me as someone totally out of touch with reality, he made a comment that surprised me: "Maybe someone still needs to be pure." Then he explained how often his interaction with Facebook pulls him down rather than lifts him up. Could that be true? Are people seeking their value and worth through social media? Is your identity in what you want people to think of you? I may try to impress other people with pictures and words that I send out, or even by how I try to treat people with respect and kindness. If I think I am going to impress God and make him love me by the life I live, then I am hopelessly lost. I can't even begin to come near getting close to God because I am guilty of breaking the first commandment and so are you. As we mentioned in the sermon last Sunday, idolatry is much more than worshipping idols of wood or stone, or loving money more than you should. It includes letting the things that are going on in my life that seem so important to me become more important than God. I can never find my true identity and true worth in myself and my achievements and accomplishments, but I do have a risen Savior who provides me with real forgiveness and even calls me his brother. Colossians 3 says your

life, or your identity is now hidden with Christ in God."

The woman took hold of the feet of Jesus. Jesus was not some ghost that they tried to hold onto. His body was real. They could actually grab onto his feet and hold on to him. He told his disciples that night, "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see me have." What joy will be ours someday when we are raised to life again and we see Jesus face to face. What joy will be ours when we see our loved ones who died in Jesus raised to life again. Philippians 3 assures us that Jesus will "transform our lowly bodies that they will be like his glorious body."

The women went to the tomb early in the morning hoping to finish the work of wrapping the dead body of Jesus. That night they went to sleep resting in the reality that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead just as he said. Psalm 118 says "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone and it is marvelous in our eyes." The magnificent arch of our salvation has been completed. The heavenly Father has put the keystone into place by raising Jesus from the dead. He has put his stamp of approval on everything Jesus did. It is all real. It won't go away. It will be with you 24/7. It is a completed arch of victory that will never fail you. Jesus has risen just as he said. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.