

April 4, 2010

EASTER!!

Luke 24:1-12

Christ is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed!

It's been a long week. Last Sunday we walked with Jesus into Jerusalem, following as he rode a donkey along a path lined with people's cloaks, feeling the breeze as palm branches waved. We raised our voices with the crowd as they sang, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"

We were there, shocked, when he overturned the tables in the Temple, throwing out the money-changers and hearing him shout, "My father's house should be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves!"

We felt a shiver of fear when he announced that the temple would be torn down, leaving not even a single stone on top of another. Fear not only for such a sacred place, but for Jesus as he drew the wrath of the authorities down on himself.

By Thursday, we were there in the Upper Room, trying to understand what it meant when Jesus said, "This is my body, broken for you. This is my blood, shed for you." And when he said the one who would betray him was in the room with us, we could only hope that we wouldn't be The One by some horrible circumstance!

When Peter denied knowing Christ, we were relieved that those words came out of Peter's mouth and not ours.

We covered our ears when Pilate had Jesus flogged, not wanting to hear the sound of the whip, but we couldn't block out the noise any more than we could silence the sound of the crowd shouting "Crucify him!" And we couldn't leave the hill where he was hanging on the cross until he died.

All week we have been living, knowing Jesus died. We left him there in the tomb, the stone covering the entrance. The world was finally silent yesterday after all the noise of the previous days.

A long week. A hard week. Did the birds stop singing? Did the sun seem a little bit dim? I know I saw a full moon but somehow it didn't seem as bright as usual.

Jesus was dead, and it seemed like life was a little less worth living.

My friends, it's over. This long week is over!

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

On Easter morning, the women went to the tomb early, early in the morning, taking spices to finish anointing the body.

They found the huge stone rolled away from the entrance, and no body inside the tomb. They were very confused! Before they could spend much time trying to figure out what was going on, two men appeared, wearing dazzling white. All the way through the Bible, people wearing dazzling white are heavenly beings----angels!

Two angels were there to witness to the empty tomb, to the resurrection of Christ!

The angels asked the women an amazing question---“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” As though they were confused about the women’s actions! As though the women were doing something completely illogical, irrational!

The women had seen Jesus die on the cross. They had heard his last words, seen him stop breathing. They had followed as Joseph of Arimethea had taken the body down from the cross and carried it to the tomb.

Any rational person would have believed he was dead. And he was! And everyone knew that dead is dead, no coming back, not then in the days before advanced medical technology---there were no defibrillators or CPR or respirators back then.

And even today, once someone is buried, there is no coming back.

So of course the women were looking for Jesus in the cemetery!  
Where else does a person look for someone they saw being buried?

So the question, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” is not a logical question.

Not a HUMAN question!

It was really more of a rhetorical question. A way of telling the women that Christ was no longer dead, that he was alive again!

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

**CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!**

And the women ran back and told the other disciples (the men!) what they had seen and heard, that Christ was alive, risen from the dead.

The men dismissed it. Women were not considered credible witnesses in that culture, and their story sounded too much like the ravings of hysterical, over-tired, delusional women.

But Peter! Peter, the man of action, was tired of sitting still anyway, so he ran out to the tomb to see for himself. He found the tomb empty, the linen cloths that had been wrapped around the body lying there empty.

He ran home, amazed at all that had happened!

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

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This happened a long time ago, 2000 years ago or so. To some people it might seem like just a nice story, one that we hear every Easter.

But it is so much more than that! If you want to know if it's important, I will tell you, it's the **ONLY** thing that's important!

And here is why it means so much-----

People like to quote John 3:16 a lot. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him will not die but have everlasting life.” And that’s why. Easter is God’s big “I love you” to the world. Such a big “I love you” that God wants us to live forever with him--- everlasting life. This love makes our lives meaningful. The promise of everlasting life gives us hope.

We need to find meaning in our lives. To live without meaning is to live in despair. It’s to be depressed, even suicidal. A pointless, meaningless existence is intolerable. It leads to all kinds of psychological problems, all kinds of desperate, sometimes dangerous actions because we would do just about anything to find meaning in life.



And even if we find something meaningful to do with our lives, there might be times when we just throw up our hands and ask, “What’s it all for? Because this is all going to end. I’m going to die and that will be the end of me and everything I’ve done!” And the fear of death can also be the fear of losing whatever meaning we have found in life.

But dead is not dead. Death is only the beginning of another way of being. Our great source of hope is that no matter how much or how little meaning we have found in this life, our eternal life with Christ will not be meaningless. It won’t be limited. It’s not the end of everything! Instead, when we die, we will find even more meaning, even more purpose than we have ever known on this earth.

But this line of thinking is just taking something from the past and connecting it to something in the future. I want to talk about now, today.

Why is Easter important to us NOW!!

When we say Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

It's not about a long time ago. It's not about someday, sometime in the future. It's in the present tense!

Christ IS risen!! Not "Christ rose sometime a long time ago." Not "Christ will rise again someday" Christ IS risen!

And because Christ is risen in the present, today is different for us.

Today our dancers performed to a song called "You Raise Me Up." It's not talking about God raising up Christ. It's about Christ raising US up, and making us more than we can be on our own.

By his resurrection, he raises us up! By his love and by his spirit, he makes us more than we are!

How has Christ raised YOU up? What has God done for you?

Each one of us has a story to tell. I would love to hear yours. I have told you some of my story, but there is something you might not know.

There is no way I could get up in front of all of you and speak and lead worship unless Christ was helping me. It is not my nature to be a public speaker. But here I am, and I love doing this!

It's part of the ordination process to take a battery of psychological tests. The psychologist who evaluated my results wrote that she suspected that I love the process----the studying and the reading and the writing--- the process of writing a sermon, more than I like actually preaching.

She couldn't have been more wrong! I like the studying and the reading okay, but the writing drives me crazy! I have a terrible time deciding how to start and how to end and especially what to put in the middle. I often scrap the whole thing and start over, and when I don't, I almost always wish I had time to!

But the preaching!! I love it!!

I love it because God has given me a great gift of being a preacher. An even greater gift is to be a pastor! Something I never thought I could be, never thought I WOULD be!

And now I can't imagine being anything else.

What has God done for you? How has Christ raised you up? How has Christ made you more than you ever thought you could be?

Allow Christ to bring that kind of resurrection to your life! Be grateful for all that he has done, all that he is doing, and all that he will do for you!

For all of us, Christ has shown us how to live in the light of God's love, following the way of peace. Christ has shown us how to die, unselfishly, unafraid, not letting violence and death change us, but still being the people that God created us to be, made in God's image, beloved children of God.

And Christ has shown us that we will live with him, eternally in the house of God. There is no greater hope than this.

And so we follow the risen Christ, with purpose and meaning,  
unafraid to be God's people, relying on the strength of the Holy Spirit,  
walking in love and hope, living the way of peace.

Christ is risen, Christ is risen indeed!

**CHRIST IS RISEN! CHRIST IS RISEN INDEED!!**

Amen! Hallelujah!