

**“He Has Risen”**

*The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen” (Matthew 28:5-6).*

One of the most sobering experiences in life is the trip a family takes to the funeral home to view the body of a loved one. When someone dies, a funeral director immediately provides care for the body and begins to prepare it for the viewing. As the mortician does his work, it's normal for two or three days to pass between the death and the visitation. Finally, when everything is ready, the family comes to the funeral home to see their loved one before the viewing is opened to the public.

There is no other experience in life that is like this one and, as you make your way to the funeral home, your mind swirls with a mixture of anticipation and dread. You brace yourself, understanding that you are about to confront death face to face, but not quite knowing how you will react to the intimate reality of what the casket holds. Many of you have gone through this process and, as you know, its emotional impact is profound.

Now imagine for a moment how the women felt as they made their way to the tomb on that first Easter. Just a few days earlier, they had looked forward to celebrating the Passover and all of the festivities that accompanied it. They were probably still reeling with excitement from the unexpected reception Jesus had received as He entered Jerusalem to the cheering crowds who had lined His path with their cloaks. Then, they woke on Friday morning to learn that their teacher had been arrested and, by noon, they found themselves outside of the city, at the foot of a cross in shocked disbelief, as Jesus hung, suspended above the earth, taking his last labored breaths. As the sun began to set on Good Friday, the dazed women hurried home, carefully cognizant of the Sabbath even as they were swallowed up in grief.

They spent the next day obeying God's Law by keeping the Sabbath, and yet their minds were on Jesus. They knew that His corpse had been rushed off of the cross and placed in a nearby tomb and yet they had no idea if His battered body had been properly cared for and prepared for burial. So, when the Sabbath ended, even before the light had started to color the new day, the women began their walk to the grave. Their emotions must have been similar to our funeral home journey as they prepared to encounter the lifeless body of their loved one. With heavy hearts they knew where they were going and in reluctant anticipation they knew what they were going to see...but what they found at tomb was not what they expected.

The massive stone designed to secure and seal the tomb had been rolled away and, instead of the Roman guard posted by Pilate, an angel greeted the women with words that changed the world, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.”

How strange these words must have sounded to the women. They had come to see a body. They had come to prepare a corpse for final burial and instead they found an open, empty tomb. And, before their minds could catch up to their eyes and ears the angel gave them more words of instruction, “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’” (Matthew 28:7). Matthew is careful to tell us that as the women hurried away from the tomb to tell the disciples what the angel had said they were at the same time filled with joy and gripped with fear...and who could blame them!

These words of life were overwhelming...and how could they *possibly* be true? They had seen Jesus perform many miracles; He healed the sick, He brought sight to the blind, He fed the multitudes, calmed storms, cast out demons; He had even called Lazarus out of the grave. But Jesus had *died* and these women were there! They watched as He took His last breath, they winced as the Roman soldier pierced His side and they wept as He was

lowered from the cross. How could this be? What could the angel have actually meant? Could Jesus really have risen from the dead?

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ remains the single, most important teaching of the Bible. It supplies the very foundation of our theology and it is also the battlefield where God's promise of life is pitted against the deception and lies of the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh. Contemporary society treats the Resurrection of Jesus as quaint and archaic mythology and even people who call themselves Christians talk about the Resurrection of Jesus as if it were only a metaphor – a framework for helping us to overcome all that is negative in life. The world simply doesn't accept the Resurrection of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul faced this same issue as he wrote to the Christians in Corinth. "Brothers" he writes, "I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, (and) that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:2-4). Paul minces no words. The Resurrection is the center of our faith and, my friends, without the Resurrection there is nothing to believe in. Think of the scene on that first Easter. In desperate sadness, the women came to the tomb to prepare a corpse for burial. In paralyzing despair, the disciples hid in Jerusalem, afraid that their bodies would be the next ones to be nailed to a cross. Disillusioned and embarrassed, the many followers of Jesus who thought that He was the Messiah were now scattered. In each case, there was no hope. And then Sunday came. "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said."

Without these words of Resurrection, there *is* no meaning for our lives. Without Easter, we simply do the best we can and then we end up in ground. Without Easter, we are, "to be pitied more than all men" (I Corinthians 15:13-14, 19). "But" Paul writes, "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (I Corinthians 15:20-22). The Resurrection of Jesus validates what we read in the Bible. The Resurrection of Jesus means that His sacrifice on the cross for our sins was accepted! The Resurrection of Jesus means that this life is not the end, that we too will rise and that in Christ we have a future with God in heaven.

Jesus Christ is risen! These words change things forever. The doctor may not be able to provide healing and the wisdom of this world's most brilliant minds may not be able to preserve our bodies, but Scripture is clear that by the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ we are indeed saved. He lives and because He lives the pains of this pitiful world will be brought to an end. He lives and because He lives our sins are forgiven. He lives and because He lives, the power of the grave is broken, our goodbyes are never final and the trip to the funeral home is but a stop along the journey.

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia. Amen.

Pastor Thomas A. Eggold