3-31-24

Luke 23:55-56; 24:1-12

As we always do about this time of year, we are considering the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The wages of sin is death and Jesus died on account of our sin; but death could not hold Him. Because of His obedience to the Father, God brought Him back to life. He came back in the same body but it has been glorified; made perfect to live with the Father forever. In doing this, death has been defeated and no longer has a permanent hold upon the followers of Christ.

Yes, we consider these same things each year, but it is necessary that we remember them. Perhaps it seems like an old well-known story; well, let us pray that the Holy Spirit will breathe new excitement into us for this account. We serve a God who is very much alive; don’t let yourself become jaded to that fact.

Jesus had brought people back to life; Old Testament prophets had brough people back to life; the apostles brought people back to life: but no one had undergone resurrection. These others died once more, but God raised Jesus from the dead and He will never die again. This is the wonderous promise held out to us as Christians: that one day we will be resurrected, have our bodies remade into glorious new ones, and live forever with Christ. We will never experience death again.

As we look at our verses for today, we must be very careful. This is an account of the women coming to the tomb of Jesus and finding it empty. All four Gospel books record this happening. While everything the women did and experienced is important, we must keep our focus on the One who is most important in this account, and of course, that is Jesus. We must do our best to see how everything relates to Him and also see how it applies to our lives.

We began with verse 55 where the women are mentioned as being ones who followed Jesus even from Galilee. What we learn from all four Gospel accounts is that the women were very good witnesses to have because they had followed Jesus in His ministry, they witnessed His crucifixion, and they were the first to find the empty tomb and encounter the risen Jesus. Luke tells us that he composed his Gospel after interviewing many witnesses. Surely these women were among them; how much of Luke’s account of what happened to Jesus do we owe to them?

Having said that, the fact that the women were listed in the Gospels as the first witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection helps to confirm that the Gospels were not a fabrication. At that time, a woman was considered an unreliable witness; their testimony would not be accepted in court. If the Gospels were a fabrication, they would have had men finding the empty tomb.

Now these women had followed Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to the tomb where Jesus was laid, even seeing how His body was laid; so they knew exactly where He was. They would not have gone to the wrong place on Sunday morning. It was also important to note all these people who were absolutely certain that Jesus was dead. Our Saviour died for us; He was God who could not die, but He became an actual man so that He could die to save us.

Because of the lateness of the day before the Sabbath, once Jesus was buried, the women returned and gathered all that was needed to properly prepare Jesus’ body for burial. Here is another demonstration of their loyalty to their Rabbi; they were going to see to it that He was properly buried even if it was delayed. But they were also obedient to the Law; the Law that Jesus had kept perfectly.

I mentioned loyalty, and with that goes gratitude. Are we as loyal and thankful as these women were? These all left their homes to follow Jesus and they used their own means to help support Him and the disciples. They put their reputations on the line. Can you imagine what was said about them traveling around with a group of men? Are we willing to use our means to support ministry; will we put our reputations on the line for Jesus? We are actually called to do these things. Jesus must be first in our lives.

Jesus delivered Mary Magdalene from seven demons, and she was gratefully devoted to Him from then on; and well she should be. But Jesus has delivered us from hell. He has won for us eternal life. He has made the way for us to be resurrected from the dead with bodies that are perfect and will last forever. He has made peace between God the Father and us when no one else could. How much more should we be gratefully devoted to Him.

Well, they got quite the surprise when they reached the tomb. The stone was rolled away. The tomb was empty. They were perplexed about this. They were confused and dismayed; they were at a complete loss as to what was going on and why Jesus’ body wasn’t there. The wording of verse 3 is more precise than that they simply couldn’t find the body and maybe needed to look around some more. It means that they couldn’t find the body because it wasn’t there. A corpse didn’t exist.

Another thing in this verse is the term “*the Lord Jesus*”. We are quite used to this term; we use it all the time. We read it in the book of Acts and in the epistles. But don’t miss this point: This is the only time it is used in all the Gospel accounts. The Gospels call Him Jesus and they call Him Lord, but this is the only time Lord Jesus is put together. The significance is that here in His resurrection He is exulted. Before He was the crucified Jesus, now He is exulted by God Himself as Lord.

As they stand there bewildered in the empty tomb, the poor girls are suddenly confronted by two men in dazzling clothing. That word “dazzling” can be described as the appearance of lightning. They would have appeared in a tremendous flash as they stepped through from heaven into the cave. The women are rightfully terrified and drop with their faces to the ground. It is interesting that the angels don’t start with the customary “fear not”.

No, they go straight into a question, “*Why do you seek the living One among the dead?*” What a question. If they had not been so terrified, I imagine they might have gotten angry at such a ridiculous question. They had witnessed Jesus’ death on the cross; they saw Him taken here and laid to rest. They were coming here now to fulfill an act of duty and loyalty and love. “*Why do you seek the living One among the dead?*”

There is a small but important translation issue in this verse. Most translations say “*Why do you seek the living among the dead?*” While that is technically correct, the Greek wording is more specific. It is not simply “*the living*”, it is “*the living One*”; they are referring directly to Jesus as being the one who lives.

Following this mild rebuke, the angels do not wait for an answer; indeed, they would not have been able to answer. First they inform the women of what they already know, “*He is not here*.” But then, the angels do tell them what happened, “*He has risen*.” How difficult that must have been for them. It surely took time for that to sink in. It probably wasn’t until they encountered the resurrected Jesus that they comprehended. But for we who already know the story, what wonderful good news. What amazing news it is. Our Lord is alive from the dead.

Earlier we mentioned the idea of “remember”. How important it is to remember; especially the word of God. That is a theme that comes up time and again in the Pentateuch; speak of God’s Law often so it is remembered; tell of God’s awesome deeds so that they are remembered from generation to generation. So now the angels help the women remember what Jesus had told them: *the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again*. In fact, Jesus had told them this four times.

There is a lesson here regarding how our minds work if we have a strongly held preconceived notion. If we hear something that doesn’t fit with what we already think, we tend to twist it so it does fit or we simply forget about it. This is what happened to the disciples. They had a preconceived notion that the Messiah would come in great power to reestablish Israel as an independent nation. They believed He would be a great warrior King. While they were right, they missed that He had to come as a sacrifice first. So when Jesus told them that He would suffer and die yet rise again, it didn’t make sense so they didn’t think about it.

Make sure that when you read the Bible, you are truly absorbing what it says. Don’t let a preconceived notion blind you to what is true. A common example is the fact that God is love. That is a true statement. Unfortunately, many in the world today have a warped idea of what love is. They conceive of it being mushy and sentimental and permissive. If the Bible is read through that lens, it will be very distorted. We will miss things like justice and wrath and even the necessary Christian doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement. In other words, Christ suffered the punishment for our sins.

Once they were reminded, they remembered that Jesus had said these things. There is really no detail about their thoughts or conversation as they headed back to where the disciples were staying. But we can see the beginning, the budding, of faith in the resurrection of Jesus; in true faith of Jesus as Messiah. This wouldn’t fully come until Pentecost when they received the Holy Spirit; but it was starting.

The empty tomb was not enough by itself. The women stood there bewildered. Even when Peter ran to the tomb, we learn that he simply went home marveling at what had happened. Next, however, the women received the witness of the angels. The angels made the declaration that Jesus had risen from the dead; they witnessed to His being alive. A testimony is important, we are often called to give a testimony. Not necessarily about something in our own lives, but a testimony, a presentation of the Gospel. Still, care must be taken regarding the angels. They must be tested; demons can appear as angels of light.

But these angels brought to mind the words of Jesus and the words of Jesus are always trustworthy and true. And Jesus had told them that He would rise from the dead. Now they would be able to begin to believe. They could start to think that it might be true that Jesus was alive, even though they saw Him dead and buried.

We know from all the Gospel accounts that it would finally take a face-to-face encounter with the risen Lord Jesus for them to finally believe. That’s what it would take for them to have the faith that Jesus was indeed the Messiah spoken of throughout the Old Testament. Still, the fullness of their faith would not take place until Pentecost. True faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is a shame that the others didn’t believe them. How bad they must have felt when they were rejected by those they had spent so much time with previously; those they had been friends with and selflessly took care of and tended too. That must have hurt. But they didn’t turn from what they knew; Jesus.

And so it is with us. We will tell others about Jesus and they will not believe us. They might be friends and family; people we have done selfless things for and care about. But still, we must cling to what we know is fact by faith; that Jesus Christ is Lord and He is alive. He was once dead but now He is alive. And He is alive forevermore.

The resurrection is one of the foundation stones of Christianity. It is a doctrine that leaves no wiggle room. To deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is to deny Christianity. A disbelief in the resurrection is another religion.

We have not seen Jesus yet we believe. We can believe because we have the word of God; the Bible. And the word of God is true. But we are also given faith as a gift. On our own, we can’t believe; but the Holy Spirit makes it so we can. Once we are given the Gospel and the faith, then we accept it or we turn it down. Either way, God is glorified.

I hope and pray that each one here has taken advantage of that gift of faith you have been given. Taken advantage by telling Jesus that you understand that you are too foul to stand before God; that you repent of your sins because they are an offence to the living God. Taken advantage by thanking Jesus for living on this earth as a man, having a ministry to show He is the fulfillment of all prophecy, suffering and dying to atone for our sins, spending three days in the tomb, and then rising in a glorious resurrection. Finally, returning to heaven seated beside God the Father where He will remain until His powerful return as King. And after thanking Him, deeply accepting the gift of salvation He offers you.

On this Resurrection Sunday, I pray that you will have a good celebration with family and friends; but that the celebration is focused on the miracle of the rising of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus.

Prayer

Risen Jesus, You are unique in all ideas about gods and saviors. In all of the religions devised by man or devils, in none has the so-called god died for his people and then come back to life. All of these other religions are wretched lies. You are the true God who has come down among us and suffered in our place. You were only dead for a short time and then You are alive again forever!

Lord Jesus; Prophet, Priest, and King, You are also the fulfillment of prophecy and the fulfillment of the Law. You are our living Saviour. Today we proclaim along with the angels that You are no longer in the tomb; You have risen back to life.

How blessed we are to serve a living Saviour; one who continues to intercede for us; on our behalf to the Father. We no longer look for You on the cross, we no longer look for You in the tomb. We look for You in our hearts. And we look for You in the faces of those we are called to love and serve.

We proclaim You alive in Your most holy name

Amen