4-4-21 Easter

Luke 23:50 – 24:12

This Resurrection Day is a day for us to celebrate. Just three days ago we remembered the death of our Lord and Saviour upon a cross; a somber remembrance. But Jesus didn’t stay dead. Life was given to Him by the Father and a glorified body as well; a body He still has and will for eternity to come. We celebrate because our God is alive, and we celebrate because He was the first-fruits of the resurrection. And, because He was the first-fruits, there will be more, and that is us.

We, as Christians, believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We believe it because the Holy Spirit has given us the faith to believe what the Bible tells us. The Bible tells us that there were many witnesses who saw the risen Christ. There are many witnesses who saw the empty tomb. Luke is careful to point out that the first witnesses didn’t make any mistakes. In 23:55 he says, “*Now the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how His body was laid*.” These are the women who witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus and His death. They followed Joseph to the tomb where He was laid to rest.

Because of these details, the accusation that they went to the wrong tomb on Sunday morning cannot be. They were there when He was placed in the tomb; they even observed how His body was laid. They had looked closely and paid close attention to where He was. They already had plans to come back after the Sabbath to properly prepare His body for burial. In verse 24:10, Luke even provides the names of some of the key women. There are more witnesses to the empty tomb and more witnesses to the resurrected Jesus, than would be required by any court. His return to life is fact.

Early that following Sunday morning, these faithful yet devastated women came to the tomb. Try to imagine what must have been going through their minds when they saw the heavy stone moved away from the entrance. Even more, when the body of their beloved Lord was nowhere to be found. The Bible tells us that they were perplexed. They had a few moments to take everything in and start to try to figure out some explanation. Perhaps they even had time to ask each other questions that they couldn’t know the answer to.

As if this would not have been bewildering enough, they are suddenly faced with two angels. The light coming from them was obviously nothing that would be earthly. The women go from bewilderment to terror in seconds. We know what they do now. They bow with their faces to the ground. This was not worship, this was showing great respect; respect that came from fear.

The angels ask a question, give a statement of fact, and tell them to do something. The question is full of meaning, “*Why do you seek the living One among the dead*?” First off, the question points out how silly it would be to do something like this. If you were looking for someone who is alive, it would be ridiculous to go to a cemetery, start digging up graves, and opening coffins. Now, these women didn’t know that they were looking for someone who was alive; but the point is, they should have.

The angels refer to Jesus as “*the living One*”. What a perfect name for Jesus. Bear in mind that Jesus is 100% God and 100% man. The man Jesus could die, but God cannot. Because Christ is God, He was never created, He was never given life; He has life in Himself. It is a hard concept; but this is God. All creation that lives was given life, we don’t simply possess it on our own. God was never given life; He simply has it.

We also see in John 11:25 where Jesus says, “*I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in Me will live even if he dies*.” Jesus actually is life; believing in Him is the source of eternal life. That eternal life comes through resurrection, which is also through Jesus. Belief in Jesus as Lord and Saviour is the only way to be resurrected into eternal life. Jesus is the only way to have these things.

Finally, Jesus is alive. He is alive now in His resurrection body. Many disciples watched as He ascended into heaven and again there were angels there to tell them what had just happened. Hebrews 10:12 tells us that Jesus, “*having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God*”. There is no question that Jesus is alive and in heaven. Indeed, this is a wonderful and true title for Christ: *the living One*.

Next the angels give a fact: *He is not here, but He has risen*. The women had come to the tomb expecting to find Jesus. When they didn’t see Him lying where Joseph had placed Him, they certainly looked around for a moment. The angels told them that they were looking in the wrong place; He wasn’t there. The reason He wasn’t there was because He had risen. No one had taken Him, something else hadn’t happened to the body; He was risen. He was no longer dead, He was alive, and He had left.

Lastly the angels told them to remember something. “*Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise from the dead*.” Jesus had told His disciples at least three times that He was going to be killed and He told them very plainly that He would be raised after three days. The Bible also explains to us that they didn’t understand what He was saying.

From our vantage point, it seems they should have understood what Jesus told them. But they didn’t have the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide them; they fully expected that Jesus was going to start a rebellion and defeat the Romans; and, from a carnal perspective, raising from the dead doesn’t make any sense. But Jesus was sure to tell them this would happen so that they could remember it later. And once they did have the Holy Spirit, they would not only remember, but they would fully understand all that went with the death and resurrection of Jesus.

After a mental nudge by the angels and perhaps some help from the Holy Spirit, these dedicated disciples of Jesus did remember. Now, all they had seen in these last three days would have fit with what Jesus had said to them. But it would have still been so hard to believe what they were seeing and hearing. It may have fit together, but it didn’t really make sense.

The only thing they knew to do was go back to the eleven apostles along with the many other disciples of Jesus and tell them all they had seen and been told. Try once more to imagine the disciples, all gathered together in fear and dismay. The One they had put their trust and belief in had been hung on a cross and died. Not only that, but now they could easily become targets of the Sadducees and Romans because of their association with Jesus. Next comes the group of women who had gone to tend to Jesus’ body saying they though Jesus might be alive.

Once more, true to form, the apostles and disciples act from carnal reasoning. *But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them.* It is very important for us to understand this: To the carnal mind, this is nonsense. In Acts 17, we read of Paul speaking to the people of Athens. They listened with attention as Paul preached about Jesus until he mentioned Jesus raising from the dead. When he stated this, many of them began to sneer. Do not be surprised when this happens to us for our belief in the resurrection of the Christ.

This brings us to something important in our Christian faith: the resurrection of Christ and of the dead in Christ. There are many issues in Christianity that we might call secondary. This does not mean they aren’t important; it means that they aren’t a salvation issue or they are not explicitly explained in the Bible.

In recent weeks, we’ve been talking about the Rapture in these sermons. We know that no-one except God the Father knows when it will happen. But there are lots of indications in the Bible for when it might take place in relation to the final tribulation. However, the verses relating to the Rapture are such that some people think the Rapture will take place before the tribulation, some say it will take place in the middle of the tribulation, and some say at the end.

This is a secondary issue. Our salvation does not depend on which way we think the Rapture will work out. The Bible is not exactly clear on how the Rapture and the tribulation are linked together. Christians who hold different opinions on this topic ought to be free to discuss their differences and remain in fellowship. Any Christian church needs to have room for each of these views among the members of the body of Christ.

Another example is the method of baptism. Baptism is extremely important in the Christian life. It is a command of Jesus Himself. We are told in Matthew 28:19, “*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*”. We demonstrate our love for Jesus Christ by following His commands. We ought to submit to baptism and baptize new converts.

However, the Bible doesn’t give step by step instructions for how to baptize. So, some will baptize by full submersion, some by sprinkling; some groups baptize infants while others will only baptize those who are old enough to profess their faith in Christ. This is an area we can have differences on. This church baptizes by full submersion. But we can have fellowship with a church that sprinkles. We can have differences in method because the Bible doesn’t spell the method out.

Now, the bodily resurrection of Jesus is a different story. There is no room for different opinions here. Anyone who does not proclaim the bodily resurrection of Jesus holds a heretical belief. They need to have their error explained to them and if they will not turn, Christian fellowship must be broken. One place this is made very clear is in 1 Corinthians 15. I invite you to read this chapter sometime and think about how important the resurrection was.

In verses 3 and 4 Paul writes, “*For I handed down to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures*”. The resurrection is primary Christian belief. Those who do not hold to this belief are not Christian. Paul goes on to make a very drastic statement in verses 13 and 14. *But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, your faith also is in vain*. Our very salvation depends on Jesus having been raised. And if He was raised, we who believe in Him will also be raised.

The resurrection has always been ignored by the carnal mind. Unfortunately, in the last century, it has crept into what should be Christian teaching and main-line churches. The resurrection will be described as a myth or even as some sort of spiritual but not physical event. The physical resurrection of Christ is denied in many pulpits. If you hear that denial, you need to leave that church. The reason for the denial is the people are working with a carnal mind.

With belief in Jesus as Lord and Saviour we are gifted with a spiritual mind. As Paul said, “*I have the mind of Christ.*” While we live this life, our spiritual mind doesn’t always work properly. We are still influenced by sin. With this spiritual mind we can believe in the resurrection of Jesus and in the future resurrection of all believers.

What a marvelous thing Jesus has done for us. He has, by dying and rising, defeated death. Although death is still mysterious and somewhat frightening for us, we need not fear as those who do not have Christ. The sure hope we cling to is that death has simply become a doorway into eternal life with Jesus. Death has lost its sting.

How beautiful is Resurrection Day. Our Saviour is glorified in the shameful death He suffered on our account. And He is glorified again by His glorious rising from the grave; bringing with Him all who have been ransomed from eternal destruction.

Prayer

Almighty God, You have demonstrated Your great power by defeating death and sin. We worship the One who is able to do this. We place all our trust for everlasting life in the One who rose from the dead. We proclaim that He lives forevermore and by Him we also have life.

Thank You Holy Spirit for giving us the faith we need that we might chose Christ as Saviour. You give us the faith and the understanding to believe all these great acts of God possible. With spiritual minds, we happily accept that You are able to do these things and stand in awe of You.

Blessed Lord, help us that we may always come closer to our resurrected Saviour; that we may share His mind; that we may cling to Him no matter what.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen