

Luke 24:1-12 (NRSV)

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹²But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Alleluia! It is Easter! Christ has risen!

Easter Monday

What must Monday morning have been like for Jesus’ disciples? On Friday afternoon, Jesus had been crucified by the Romans and the disciples had gone into hiding, fearful of being swept up by the Romans. Then, on Sunday, some of the women who had gone to finish laying Jesus’ body out for burial had come telling amazing stories about an empty tomb and a living Jesus. And then . . . on Sunday evening, Jesus had come to the disciples himself. . . . Alive. In the flesh. Not a ghost. Not even like someone brought back from the dead. No, Jesus had been bodily resurrected.¹ He was himself, though not quite the same as before. Not a guest; but the resurrected alive-again walking talking Jesus. He could simply appear inside a closed room, but it was still Jesus.

Surely they awoke on Easter Monday joyful and confused, excited and bewildered. Joyful and excited because Jesus, their beloved master and teacher, lived. Confused and bewildered because none of it made any sense to them. The resurrection of the dead was part of a larger package – Messiah, liberation, victory, judgment, the bodily resurrection of the dead, God’s return, the new heavens and new earth, and more. The Jews often referred to this whole package as the “Day of the Lord” and its coming meant the arrival of God’s kingdom and the fulfillment of all God’s promises. It meant the beginning of Heaven-on-Earth.

So . . . try to imagine for a moment that you are Peter. You wake up on Easter Monday, perhaps half expecting that you’ll stumble outside to find the resurrection of the rest of the dead underway and Jesus sitting in triumph over all Judea. But you quickly realize

¹Like most first-century Jews, the disciples believed that when the long-promised Day of the Lord arrived, all the dead would be *resurrected*. This is not “resuscitation,” which is returning to life only to go on to die at a later time, like being yanked back to life on the operating table. And it has nothing to do with ghosts or other spirits. “Resurrection” (*anastasis* in the Greek) was a word that meant passing through death to a new bodily (truly physical) and eternal life on the other side. Lazarus was resuscitated, having been brought back from the dead, but still going on to age and to die. Jesus of Nazareth, on the hand, was *resurrected* by God. Jesus passed through death to the other side. He lives still, and not just in our hearts or in the pages of Scripture – he lives, bodily, in God’s place, God’s dimension, God’s Kingdom. And, Hallelujah, God promises the same future for those who entrust themselves to Jesus.

that the world on Monday looks pretty much as it did on Sunday and Saturday and Friday and Thursday. The dead are still in their graves (with the exception of Jesus). There is still plenty of sickness and tragedy. The Romans still stand watch over the temple. To all outward appearances, the world was unchanged and the Day of the Lord had not arrived. But, of course, Peter also knew that Jesus had been resurrected the day before. What did it mean??!!

God's Future Now

What it meant was that God's future had arrived. God's kingdom had come. It was the time of New Creation. It was the long-awaited Day of the Lord . . . granted, it wasn't playing out like Peter or any other Jew expected, but it couldn't be anything else. Regardless of what it looked like, Jesus' resurrection could mean only one thing -- the resurrection of the dead had begun.² We can't know whether Peter thought that the playing out of the whole Day of the Lord package would last an instant or a day or a week or a month or longer. But however long it would take to complete, Jesus' resurrection meant that it had started. And what God starts is as good as done. No doubt about that.

Even now, this isn't really any easier for us to understand than it was for Peter and the others. We live in a world filled with sickness and tragedy. The dead are still in their graves. Our own eyes can tell us that what began with Jesus is still not complete. Yes, God's victory has been won, but the mopping up work goes on. We struggle to define the words to describe how God's kingdom, Heaven-on-Earth, has come already but not yet. Words fail us – but the truth remains. Jesus was resurrected.

The fact that it has now been 2,000 years since Jesus' resurrection doesn't change the meaning of Easter nor does it change the final outcome. Decades after the first Easter, the writer of 2 Peter would caution the Christians that a day for the Lord is like a thousand years for us (2 Peter 3:8). In other words, God will bring about the consummation of his kingdom according to his schedule, not ours. We can safely bet that it took a long time for Peter and the others to come to grips with this. Even now, many persons never do.

The Easter Challenge

We tend to diminish the meaning of Easter in two ways. First, we sometimes make the mistake of seeing the resurrection as no more than a demonstration of God's power, perhaps the greatest "miracle" ever but little more than that. Second, we might think of the resurrection as Jesus proving something about what will happen to us after we die, showing us the "way to heaven" as it were.³ The problem is that both of these meanings short-change Easter. For the New Testament writers, Jesus' resurrection meant that the kingdom of God had arrived and that it was time for the people of God to get to work being the light to the world and the salt of the earth, feeding the poor and clothing the naked, making disciples of all nations. Jesus had outlived his; it is time for us to outlive ours.

Hence, when Paul concludes his glorious chapter on the resurrection in his letter to the Corinthians, he doesn't say, "Jesus has been raised and God's victory won, so have faith and you'll get to heaven." Instead, Paul writes, "Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

²A little more than twenty years later, Paul would describe Jesus as the "first-fruits" of the resurrection, the first to be harvested in a harvest that had begun and would one day be completed.

³As in so many other things, the writings of N.T. Wright have helped me understand this. There is more on Easter in his book, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*.

Our work to be Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the earth, to make disciples of Jesus, to feed and to clothe, all the ways that we outlive our lives is, quite simply, work that can never be in vain. We are working toward a sure and certain outcome, and we participate in that outcome even now. Can we build Heaven-on-Earth as God's people empowered by his Spirit? No. The consummation of God's work is, well, God's work. Christ will return, bringing with him the final restoration and renewal of the cosmos. But we can, even now, build for this Heaven-on-Earth, ensuring that the world can see the light of Christ in us and in all we do.

Easter is a very public proclamation that God has acted decisively in human history to rescue us and to renew all of creation. God has called us to build *for* his kingdom as we confidently await its final consummation. And, thankfully, God is with us in this. God's Spirit enables us to do the work that God has given, refreshing us in our prayers, our worship, our learning, our loving, and our serving. God's new creation has begun and we are summoned to be part of it. Alleluia. Christ is risen indeed!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

We struggle for words when it comes to Easter, or at least we should. Easter is BIG. It is public. It matters for the whole world. It is about God's victory over sin and death, a victory won on the cross. It is about the God who keeps faith with his creation. It is about the arrival of God's kingdom and the beginning of God's new creation. When we pray "your kingdom come" in the Lord's prayer, we are not praying for its arrival but for its fulfillment, that what was begun in Jesus' death and resurrection will be consummated.

How does the understanding of Easter that I've tried to convey in this brief study differ from your own, from what you were taught, or from what you've read? Why does it matter? What makes Jesus' resurrection the linchpin on which Christianity stands or falls?

God's work of new creation goes on still. Paul wrote, "If anyone is in Christ – New Creation! The old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). What evidence do you see in our world of God's work of new creation? Where do you see glimpses of Heaven-on-Earth in the world around us? If we are to build *for* God's kingdom, to what work has God called you?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Monday, Matthew 28 Matthew's account of the resurrection and one of Jesus' appearances to his disciples</p>	<p>Tuesday, Mark 16 Mark's account of the empty tomb. The shorter ending may be authentic; the longer is not. The Gospel may well have originally ended at v. 8.</p>
<p>Wednesday, Luke 24 Luke's account including the Emmaus incident</p>	<p>Thursday, John 20 & 21 John's full account; John 21 is an epilogue appended to the rest of the Gospel.</p>
<p>Friday, 1 Corinthians 15 Paul's great chapter on the resurrection. This will repay many close readings! This letter was written 20 years before any of the Gospels.</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>

How can we be “raised with Christ”?

In 1 Corinthians, Paul refers to Christians as having been raised with Christ. But how can we be resurrected with Jesus when we haven't even died yet? Good question.

But he means exactly what he says. For Paul, it is as real as the chair you are sitting in. How could it have happened and yet still be coming?

We have a bit of experience with such a notion. We once spoke of marriages as being consummated. Though the bridal couple might be pronounced husband and wife at 3pm, the marriage wasn't “official” until it had been consummated later by the couple's sexual union. If there was no such union, then there had been no marriage; the couple's subsequent separation wouldn't be a divorce but an annulment, which is the recognition that there never had been a marriage.

Thus, if you asked the couple at their reception immediately after the wedding, “Are you married?” They could legitimately reply “yes” and “not yet.” Until the consummation, the couple would be in a kind of “in between” time.

Now, that illustration is a mere shadow of what Paul claims. With the death and resurrection of Jesus, God's kingdom, his new world, has come *already*, but *not yet*. Though the consummation (our own bodily resurrection) lies yet ahead, God's people are *already* part of this new world. What is true of Jesus, is true of us. As Tom Wright puts it in his commentary on Colossians, “You died with the Messiah, so you don't belong in the old world any more . . . You were raised with the Messiah, so you possess a true life in God's new world.”

Granted, we don't feel like it much of the time, but believing something that is true even when you don't *feel* like it is faith. My wife, Patti, may not always feel like I love her, but I do. You are a new person in Christ, even if you don't feel like it or have much to show for it yet.

Memory Verse of the Week

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. . . . If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

1 Corinthians 15:17, 19 (NRSV)

It's simple. If Jesus was not resurrected, for real and in the flesh, then Christianity is built on a lie. Paul, for one, has no interest in believing a lie and would deserve only pity if he did.. He knows that if Jesus was not raised we are still estranged from God and, thus, dead in our sins. But . . . Christ is risen! Alleluia.

Scott's 11:00 Sunday class in Festival Hall

Our current series: *Who Will Be Saved?*

When a prominent Christian preacher shows up on Good Morning America twice in the same week, you know something is up. Such is the case with Rob Bell, a young and influential preacher in America's Christian landscape. The founding pastor of Mars Hill church in Michigan, Bell's new book, *Love Wins*, is drawing charges of heresy from some critics. We'll use the arguments over whether Bell is a universalist (all will be saved) to survey and discuss the history of answers to the question: Who will be saved?

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

In God's Time: The Bible and the Future

We meet at 11:45 in room 127 every Tuesday. This week we continue our discussion of **Revelation**. We'll be in it for a while as we discover that this strange book is actually meaningful to us today.

Join us whenever you can. Bring a study Bible.

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Scott Engle is leading a trip to the Holy Land in the fall of 2011.

In addition to Israel, we will visit the Pyramids, Ephesus, Athens, and Rome. It will be quite an experience. Dozens of St. Andrew members have already joined the trip. We hope you'll join us.

For more information, go to www.scottengle.org.

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