

“He is not here, but has risen.”

Easter Sunday ~ April 11, 2004

Sermon Background Study

Scripture Passage (NRSV)

Luke 24:1-12

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.

*It is Easter. Christ the Lord is risen today.
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

You might think that writing one of these studies for Easter would be the easiest assignment of the year. After all, Easter is the biggest day on the Christian calendar. But the words don't come easily. Perhaps it is because there is so much to say. Or perhaps it is because words fail when we approach the blinding, world-shattering light of Jesus' resurrection. How can we really see Easter for what it is? Seven simple words – “He is not here, but has risen” – divide the world into *before* and *after*.

Before and after

Without Easter there would be no Christianity. It really is that simple. The resurrection is the only reason that there have ever been any Christians. But this probably takes a little explanation.

For hundreds of years before Jesus, the Jews had longed for the coming of God's Messiah who would free them from their hated oppressors (the latest of which were the Romans) and usher in God's kingdom, the time when God would be king (not Caesar). By Jesus' day, there were many Jews prepared to take this matter into their own hands. The revolutionary fervor was intense. During the period 100 years each side of Jesus, there were more a than few would-be messiahs who

The Burial of Jesus

Why do the women go to the tomb on Sunday morning? What are they there to do? Why is a stone rolled in front of the tomb? These questions and others can be cleared up when we understand that the Jews of Jesus' day did not bury people as we do – they practiced a two-stage burial!

When a person died, family members would wrap the body in cloth and place it on a ledge in a cave or a man-made family tomb. Perhaps a year later, when the body had decomposed, the family would return to the tomb and place the loved one's bones in a box. The bone box, called an ossuary, would then be stored in a crypt along with the bone boxes of other family members.

So, what about Jesus? Jesus was crucified and died on Friday afternoon. Because Jews could not touch a dead body on the Sabbath, which began at sundown on Friday, Mary and the others had to move quickly to take care of Jesus' body.

A prominent member of the Jewish Council, Joseph of Arimathea, asked Pilate that Jesus' body be entrusted to him. His request was granted. Jesus' body was taken down from the cross, quickly wrapped in some linen and then carried to an unused tomb that belonged to Joseph. Like most such tombs, a round stone was used to block to the entrance. The stone would keep animals out but still enable the family to come and go as they tended to the bodies and bones.

The women planned to return at dawn on Sunday, after resting on the Sabbath, to finish preparing Jesus' body for the year or more it would lie in the tomb. But of course, when they arrived, the body was gone!!

gathered together followers seeking deliverance from Rome. As you might guess, the Romans had no patience for these so-called “Kings of the Jews,” quickly eliminating them and their followers. One of these pretenders was Judas the Galilean. When the Roman soldiers executed Judas, no one imagined that Judas had actually been God’s true Messiah. Since Rome killed him, then, by

The Resurrection of Jesus

At dawn on Sunday, the women returned to the tomb in which they had laid Jesus’ body. There, they discovered that the stone had been rolled away and the tomb emptied! In a moment of understatement, Luke writes that the women were “perplexed” (meaning something like ‘at a complete loss’).

Little wonder they were at a loss. John tells us that Mary Magdalene assumed, naturally enough, that Jesus’ body had been taken (John 20:13). After all, Mary knew, as do we, that the dead stay dead, that death is a one-way street. Surely, if Jesus’ body was gone then someone took it.

But an angel tells the women, “He is not here, he has risen.” Jesus had passed through death to life-after-death and through that to ‘life after life-after-death’ – to resurrection.

We need to be clear about this. Jesus’ followers would not go on to claim that Jesus had been resuscitated; i.e., merely restored to a mortal life. Jesus had brought Lazarus back to life (John 11), but Lazarus had still gone on to die at some point. Lazarus had been resuscitated by Jesus, but not resurrected. The words simply don’t mean the same thing.

Having been visited by the risen Jesus in the weeks after his resurrection, his followers would proclaim that in Jesus, God had begun the great resurrection of all people. Later, Paul would call Jesus the “first-fruits” of this great resurrection. Jesus was first and one day, upon his return, we will all follow.

definition, he was not the Messiah since every Jew knew that when God’s Messiah arrived it would be in power and wonder and might and glory. Nobody would miss it. Rome would be swept away!

When Jesus was crucified by Pilate, it seemed to everyone that, as well-intentioned as he might have been, Jesus could not have been the Messiah. Simply put, in their minds the Messiah could never have ended up on a Roman cross. And there the whole matter would have stayed but for one thing – God raised Jesus from the dead.¹ And not in any ‘simple’ miracle of resuscitation; God had done that before. This was *resurrection*!! Jesus had not been raised only to die again. He had been changed. Jesus’ body had been perishable, but it was now imperishable. It had been mortal, but now it was immortal. Jesus could still walk, eat, and touch . . . but he had been changed in a twinkling. And so shall we all be changed, in just the same way.

I’m unsure why it is that so many of us fail to understand that we shall all be bodily resurrected, just as Jesus was resurrected. Perhaps it seems just too weird. Regardless, this has been the Christian proclamation for 2,000 years. Every week, when we rise to say together the Apostles Creed, we affirm the “resurrection of the body.” It is our bodies we are talking about, not Jesus’ body! Really.

Jesus’ resurrection and our own

M. Craig Barnes recently wrote, “To say that Jesus is risen from the dead is not to say that he has returned to his earthly life. That was gone. It was dead. To say that Jesus is risen from the dead is to say that God reached into that tomb and into history, lifting Jesus up to new life. And it is to say that God will do the same thing for us.”²

Such a thing cannot be tamed, no matter how many Easter eggs we hide. Easter ought to jolt us, shake us up! We all stress ourselves out trying to cling to things that we cannot keep, whether it is our youth or our money or our time. All this will pass. *But* . . . if we keep our eyes focused on the new life that God gives, a life that will not end, we can live our present life as we were created to live it – loving God and loving neighbor, enjoying and sharing God’s good creation. All this because . . . *He is risen!! Jesus lives!!*

¹Notice that today’s passage from Luke begins with a “but.” Luke wants us to see that, yes, Jesus died and was buried . . . *but* . . . the story doesn’t end there. Luke’s “but” divides not only his gospel into a before-and-after, but all of human history. Similarly, when we come to place our trust in Jesus, our lives are divided into a before-and-after. As Paul would put it 25 years after Jesus’ resurrection, “If anyone is in Christ – new creation! The old has gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). *Before and after.*

²from “We’re all terminal” in *The Christian Century*, April 6, 2004. Craig Barnes is professor of ministry at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and pastor of Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh.

Daily Bible Readings

(here are some Bible passages related to Jesus' resurrection)

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>Day 1 Matthew 27:57-28:15 Matthew's account of Jesus' burial and resurrection.</p>	<p>Day 2 Mark 15:42-16:8 Mark's account. The original ending of Mark has probably been lost. Neither the "shorter" nor "longer" ending in your Bible is the original.</p>
<p>Day 3 Luke 24:13-49 Jesus' resurrection appearances in Luke's Gospel.</p>	<p>Day 4 John 20:19-21:24 More about Jesus' post-resurrection work with his disciples.</p>
<p>Day 5 1 Corinthians 15 Paul's great chapter on the resurrection of Jesus.</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>

Sermon Notes

Are You Part of a Sunday Morning Class?

Sunday School classes have always been a vital part of United Methodism. At St. Andrew we offer a wide variety of adult classes on Sunday morning. There are nearly twenty different classes! Whether you are looking for a discussion-oriented class that focuses on the Bible or a class that emphasizes parenting or even a lecture-oriented class, there is something for you! Information on the classes is available at the information counter in the Narthex and also on-line at

www.standrewumc.org.

Please visit one next week!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Alan Culpepper writes, “The defining conviction of the Christian hope is that because Jesus was raised from the dead, the grave is not the final reality of human experience.” But there is even more. The “final reality of human experience” is not some disembodied soul floating around somewhere; rather, our final destination is bodily, physical life on a renewed and restored planet. Just as Jesus was bodily resurrected, so shall we be bodily resurrected. Many, many Christians do not understand that this “resurrection of the body” applies to themselves, not just to Jesus. If this is the first time you’ve heard this, you can trust me that you are not alone! Nonetheless, when we gather to celebrate Easter, as Christians have been doing for 2000 years, we celebrate not only Jesus’ resurrection but the promise of our own.

Ok . . . so what does this mean for us now? God created a physical world and pronounced it good. God created us in God’s image. The “life after life-after-death” God promises each of us is a physical life. How might this change our view of the present world? Of our own bodies? Of our responsibilities in this world? There are many people who want to convince us that what really matters in life is the spiritual not the physical. What does our Easter proclamation say to them?

The resurrection of the body has been one of the most undisputed doctrines among Christians. We’ve found lots of things to argue about over the centuries, but this is not one of them. Why do you think this is so? Could it be that most people just don’t understand the affirmation in the Apostles Creed? Might it seem rather disconnected from our every day lives? How can we go about recovering this affirmation, making it part of our 21st-century faith?