

“He is Risen”

Matthew 28:1-10

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Well, this the day we celebrate Jesus' victory over death. This morning we'll take a look at what that means.

I think our culture gives a lot of money and thought to making arrangements at the time of death, but we don't think so much about what happens *after* death.

Maybe that's because people aren't too sure what happens next. A lot of people think it's like the atheist Christopher Hitchens says, that when we die, that's the end of the story, and to think otherwise is simply naïve. Well, if that's really all there is, and when you die, it's all there is, game over, then that's tragic.

So the question is, which is it? “End of story,” or “He is risen!”

The message of Easter is that death isn't the end, it's only the beginning. When you die, it's just a change of address.

The Bible tells us that a new day dawned on that first Easter Sunday morning. The angel at the tomb rolled away the stone that covered the tomb, and that wasn't so Jesus could get out. He was already gone! The angel rolled away the stone so the women could see in. Then, the angel gave them four messages that I think are also messages for us this morning.

First, Jesus isn't in the tomb any more.

Jesus isn't dead, and he isn't to be looked for among the dead. He's alive, and he's with his people. You want to find him today? Then don't look in a tomb for someone who is alive.

See, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the central fact of the Christian faith. The church is built on it. Without it, there is no Christian faith. The Apostle Paul wrote in the New Testament,

And if Christ weren't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever. If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot. But the truth is that Christ has been raised up, the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries. (1 Corinthians 15:17-18, 20, *The Message*)

If you go to Jerusalem today, you can go and visit the Garden Tomb. It's a pretty, quiet, green place in the middle of a noisy city, and a lot of people think it was the site of Jesus' tomb. When I went there an Englishman who looked kind of like Mr. Rogers welcomed us at the entrance to the gardens, and he said, “We're so glad to welcome you here today. We think there is good evidence that this is the place where they laid Jesus in the

grave. But the important thing is he is *not* here. He is risen!" He's not in the tomb any more.

### Second, "Come see."

The women were invited to come look for themselves. They could see the evidence that he wasn't there any more. It's reasonable to believe. It's the best explanation. And the resurrection is a historical fact. You don't find Jesus in the tomb, because he is risen. Now you find him in his Word in the Bible, and you find him among his people.

The town of Summerland, about six miles from Santa Barbara on the central coast of California, was founded by a Civil War veteran who was interested in talking with spirits of dead people. There's a restaurant there called "the Big Yellow House." That was where he lived, and he used to hold séances to contact the dead. Is that what the resurrection is about? Some kind of wishful thinking? Is it a *spiritual* resurrection?

That's not what Christian faith is about. John's gospel tells the story about one of Jesus' followers named Thomas. He was a concrete kind of guy, and he wanted empirical evidence. The other followers saw the risen Jesus before he did and they tried to convince Thomas to believe. John's gospel tells the story:

Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." (John 20:24-25)

Thomas has earned the nickname, "Doubting Thomas." But he has raised an important issue. He's saying, "It's not enough to know that Jesus is a ghost or an apparition." He was saying, "It's not enough to give me some platitude about love triumphing over the grave. Unless I know that Jesus was raised in the flesh, unless the same Galilean rabbi, who preached and healed the sick and announced the kingdom of God, unless he is raised physically, I won't believe." And because Thomas raised the question, we can know that at least one disciple insisted on hard evidence.

That evidence is that Jesus' little band of followers were so convinced he rose bodily from the dead, they were willing to suffer exile, hardship, and death, to tell the world the good news about Jesus. No one would ever do that for something they knew to be a lie.

The tomb was empty on Easter morning, and it's empty today. Check out the evidence. come and see.

### Third, don't be afraid.

The reality of the resurrection brings joy, not fear. Because all our fears, all the bad things we've ever done, all the bad things that have ever been done to us, all the shame we've caused or felt, that's all been driven into the hands of an innocent man by a brutal Roman nail. Jesus took all those things to the grave with him, and when he rose from the dead he left them behind where they belong.

Because now, that means there is nothing that can ever separate us from God's love, not trouble, not hardship, not danger, not death, not persecution, famine, nakedness or the sword. We might suffer those things, but the resurrection of Jesus means they aren't the last word, they cannot win, they cannot stop us, because God can always bring life out of death.

Because there is now nothing in our past, nothing in our future, nothing in heaven, nothing that can ever cut us off from the love of God that is revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Because he is risen, that means if we know Jesus as our leader and the forgiver of our sins, that we always overcome, because we always have him at the center of our life. We don't have to be afraid, because he has risen for us.

Fourth, go quickly and tell.

When the women follows of Jesus went to the tomb, the angel announced the good news about Jesus. They were supposed to tell the story and to spread the joy. They were commissioned to be his servants and to share his life with others. That's what we're supposed to do, too. Even with our fears and doubts and problems, we get to share the best news in the world, and to tell the difference Jesus has made for us.

The amazing thing is that Jesus uses scared, frail, problematic us to get the good news out that he is alive. And when we do that, he promises to replace fear with joy, and to be with us as we go.

Respond with worship.

Sometimes when our lives get flat and boring, it's because we forget the majesty of the risen Jesus, and we forget to worship him and give him his due. Instead we get distracted, and we focus on lesser things.

In our family we love movies, and there have been a lot of movies made about Jesus, because he is the most compelling story ever, or like one movie title, "The Greatest Story Ever Told." But no matter how good a movie about him is, it can't possibly compete with the real Jesus. No movie will ever satisfy your longing for his greatness and beauty and kindness. You want to experience the real Jesus.

Matthew says the right response to the risen Jesus is to worship. When the women saw him they ran to him, held his feet, and worshiped him. Then, when the eleven followers of Jesus meet him later on the mountainside, they worship him. That's amazing, because Jesus in his temptation told the devil, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only will you serve." Jesus is saying he is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, God himself. And when he rises Easter morning, he receives worship. You know how "Doubting Thomas" responded when Jesus showed himself? He said, "My Lord and my God," and worshiped him. Good response!

Easter reminds us Jesus is not just a man, and he's not a phantom or a nice idea, and he's not an angel, but he is God, and he is worthy of our worship.

Jesus rose from the dead just like he promised. So we know he will keep his word in everything he promised. We know he's the true king, not a false prophet or impostor. We know death is not the end—we have a great future.

You can have that hope. Maybe you've never put your trust in Jesus, and he's asking you today, will you trust me? Because becoming a follower of Jesus is simply saying, sorry, thank you, and please. It's saying I'm sorry for all the wrong I've ever done. It's saying thank you for dying on the cross for me. And it's saying, please be the forgiver of my sins and my leader for what's left of my life. If you say that and mean it, you will spend eternity with Jesus on the other side of the grave, and whatever you face, even death itself, you're not on your own any more.

See, on Friday, they tied him and condemned him. They beat him and they whipped him and spit in his face. They hung him on a cross to die and laid him in a tomb to decay like every other human body since death entered into this sorry old world. And they said, that's all, folks. Time to go home. But death couldn't hold him.

I don't know what you're facing in your life. What tough stuff. Maybe it's your health, or a marriage that looks hopeless, or it's stress at work. Maybe it's someone you love who's struggling, or maybe it's financial pressures. Maybe you've made a mistake and it feels like it can't ever be right again. Or maybe things are going pretty well, and there's no crisis. But I can tell you this, there will be. Whatever it is, God says death isn't the last word. And Jesus says to everyone who trusts in him, there is hope, and there is life.