

We have seen in our lifetime some events of epic proportion not the least of which were the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War and tragically, September 11, 2001. As I look around now, I see great events playing out on the world stage: Democracy is being brought to regions of the world that never really understood the dignity of individual citizens or the joy of liberty. The World Health Organization is working around the clock to stem the tide of SARS CoV-2 (severe acute respiratory syndrome 2 caused by a coronavirus), and COVID 19, a disease which is wreaking havoc all around the world.

We also have seen an unprecedented ability to communicate ideas and beliefs to any part of the world and to any person in the world which has become commonplace. And the ability to move produce and goods around the world makes it possible as never before to bring significant relief to regions of the world that suffer. These too are world-shaping events. They are literally changing the course of history. And as I watch, I wonder. I wonder, “What am I doing in a pulpit.” I wonder if the real action isn't out there in the world shaping society economically, medically and perhaps politically. And then I am reminded of three things.

First, I am unquestionably clear that God has called me to do just this – to preach, teach and care for His sheep.

Second, and more importantly, I am reminded that no event in history has shaped the world like the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. No. Event. Ever!

And third, I reminded of this simple fact about life. Life does not go on forever. There is death. Every one of us must face our mortality. There is no military victory, no political success, no medical cure, no global village that can prepare any individual to answer the ultimate questions in life. And this morning I proclaim Hope, the hope of His Resurrection. There is death. Yes. But in Jesus Christ there is life and the hope of resurrection. And not just the hope of resurrection but the hope of our resurrection. Yours and mine.

Folks, you may be reading these words this morning with a sense of anticipation and longing. There may be sobering questions on your mind where much hangs in the balance. Is there hope? Is there new life? Is there reason for joy? The answer to your questions is found in a three-word message: **Christ – Is – Risen!** Good news for the depressed. Good news for those who have lost loved ones. Good news for those who are ill and suffering, which right now many are, all around the world. Good news for those who have lost their joy or see no hope in their future. Our hope is found in the fact that the tomb is empty, and **Christ is risen!**

Consider with me this morning the implications of Easter.

First, the disciples were changed. The most telling evidence of the resurrection begins first with the empty tomb but then resides in the transformation of the disciples. Their disappointment changed to exhilarating joy. Their fear changed to an evangelical boldness. They stepped into a new courage. In less than two months they went from being cowardly disciples who self-quarantined themselves behind closed doors for fear of the Jewish authorities, to being courageous apostles who stood before thousands in the presence of the Jewish authorities proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ.

But it is not as though the resurrection is without sound evidence. Over the years the many arguments have been made in support of the resurrection. Very succinctly, here are four:

A. The story appears to be historical and not metaphorical. Why? The disciples would never

have simply believed in the resurrection of Jesus without it being actually, factually true. For a first century Jew, the idea that a man might be raised from the dead while his body remained in the tomb was simply ludicrous and a contradiction in terms. Thus, it was not seen as a metaphor but a historical event.

B. On the night before and the day of His crucifixion the disciples, out of fear, left Jesus and one denied even knowing Him. Some even went back to their old businesses and way of life. But they returned to be His disciples. Why? Only the Resurrection would have given them the conviction to get back together. They lost their businesses, their reputations, their families, their personal well-being, and even their lives for their testimony that they ate and drank with Jesus after He rose from the dead. Other than the resurrection itself, can you think of another reasonable explanation why they would make this claim?

C. The tomb was discovered empty by women. Women occupied a low rung on the Jewish social ladder and the testimony of women was regarded as worthless. If the disciples wanted to create a more believable story, they would have had men discovering the tomb first. Thus, the evidence is that they told the story as it actually happened.

D. The story is simple and lacks legendary development. Likewise, archaeology over the years has overwhelmingly proved the historical accuracy of the Gospels. And furthermore, the secular historian, Josephus, has an account in his 4-volume history of the man, Jesus of Nazareth, rising from the dead.

If you need proof or evidence, this is what can be offered. After this it is a matter of faith. But this was enough for the disciples. It changed their lives. May it, may He, do so in ours.

Second, because of the resurrection, our view of death has changed. I like the story of a pastor who on Easter morning was visiting the grave of his parents. He was quietly standing before the headstone when he heard music blasting from a car radio. He said he could hear the bass even before he spotted the car. Around the road of Memorial Park came a car filled with teenagers. They were laughing and shouting, and his first inclination was that they were there to cause trouble.

Surprisingly, however, the car stopped by a grave in the distance. They all got out and went over to a particular marker. They stood there quietly, and then all broke down in tears. They embraced one another and then they slowly got back into their car and quietly they drove away. They came in joy and departed in sadness.

The pastor later said, "I cannot help but think how that first Easter was completely different. The women came in sorrow and left in joy." You see, because of Easter our whole view of death has forever changed. The Resurrection is the absolute bedrock of faith. Take it away, and you no longer have a church. As Paul once wrote to the Corinthians: *"If Christ has not been raised from the dead then your faith is in vain and our preaching is in vain. Not only that, we have been found to be misrepresenting God, for we testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead."*

The resurrection affirms our instinctive conviction that somehow death is not the end of a person's story. Our story is rooted in the heart of God. It is, of course, true, that a day shall come when each of us shall die and enough time will ultimately pass that no living person will speak our name. But the resurrection affirms that God will always know our name and that He will never stop knowing or loving us. Simply because our hearts have stopped beating, does not

mean the last chapter has been written. And so, it is not death that we should fear, it is sin that we should fear. Death has been swallowed up in victory.

Third, because of the resurrection, our view of Jesus has changed. It is interesting that the story ends as it began. At the birth of Jesus, the angel's message to the shepherds is: "*Do not be afraid.*" When Mary comes to the tomb on that first Easter Sunday the message is: "*Do not be afraid.*" We have come full circle. The message seems to be that, despite the fact that we have been taught from childhood that God is love, the truth is we remain very frightened of God, and with good reason. We know God's purity and we know our inadequacy.

But, because of the resurrection, our whole understanding of God is different. Why? Because our understanding of Jesus is different. The One on the cross and the One who rose from the dead is none other than God incarnate. Jesus the Galilean, Jesus of Nazareth, is God in human form. Our Judge has nail prints in His hands. Our God, in Jesus, has experienced human suffering firsthand. He is our sacrifice before God for the sins we have committed. No other can plead our case before God. No other is qualified to stand before God and do so. And how do I know this? One reason. He lives. It is the resurrection and because of the resurrection our whole understanding of Jesus is different.

In the winter of 1982 Vice President, George H. W. Bush represented the U.S.A. at the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev's widow. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev's wife performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed: She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest. There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, a life best represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that the same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband.

You see, she knew that death was not the final word. Even though she had been told all her life by her husband and by the Kremlin that death was the end, she knew that there was One who was (and is) resurrected and she hoped her husband might be also.

We have that same hope! Through the lens of the resurrection we see the disciples differently. We see death differently. We see Jesus differently. We can even see this epic pandemic we are experiencing differently. So, we need not fear or despair. The message that we have been waiting for has arrived. It is a three-word message filled with hope and expectation: **Christ Is Risen!** *The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!!!!*