

“Good News – He’s Alive”
 Acts 2, 13 and other selected passages
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In study and preaching, my own soul is laid bare much too much for comfort.

Good Friday, Easter, observed once again.

I believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus but so what?

Must I, for others, on Easter morning pretend a passion and joy that I don’t feel?

Like going to a football game where the yelling and cheering, including my own, temporarily suggests excitement, Easter-music, well done, can give me a temporary sense of celebration.

I can get caught up in the moment, but **why are my emotions not moved at a much deeper and lasting level?**

Oh how well we know that facts alone don’t move the soul.

- I am a husband but that fact alone does not mean that my heart is engaged.
- I am a Christian made and being remade in the image of God but that fact alone does not mean that I consciously love God.

As I said, I believe in the facts of the death and resurrection of Jesus, but it feels too often like “so what?”

What can awaken my slumbering heart?

And you who do not even profess to be Christ-followers, why are you here this morning?

Is it habit, or obligation, or is there possibly a faint wishing the resurrection were actually true?

What can convince you and move me?

It cannot be conjured up, the Bible says it takes the Spirit of God using the Word of God.

Jesus said in John 6:44 “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

And the Bible further says in 1 Corinthians 2:14 “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

Ephesians 1:17-20 “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead...”

That’s my prayer this morning for you and for me.

PRAY (using Ephesians 1:17-20)

The most startling truth to which the Bible gives witness is the resurrection of Jesus.

The Bible’s claim that there is a God is not so startling; haven’t all civilizations believed that?

But that God became a man and died and rose again that is unique!

All of Scripture hangs on that one pivotal historical event.

And it is not too much to say that all of human history hinges on that event.

If Jesus did not literally, physically rise from the dead then we don’t **know** anything about the purpose of life or the future of it.

If Jesus is dead, then the most we can know is that everything dies, us included.

But listen please to the testimony of those who were there.

The Apostle Peter stood before a crowd in Jerusalem just 50 days after the resurrection and said,

Acts 2:23-24 “This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. **But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.**

The Apostle Paul stood before a crowd in the town of Antioch in the province of Pisidia, just a few years later, and said,

Acts 13:29-32 “When they (those who killed Jesus) had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. ³⁰ **But God raised him from the dead,** ³¹ and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people. **We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers ³³ he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus.”**

Paul says **that** is the good news, the gospel – He has risen, he's alive!

For a few minutes this morning I want you to please think with me about **the implications of a dead Jesus who literally, physically rose from the dead and is alive today.**

1. First, the resurrection of Jesus establishes who Jesus is.

Ancient religious literature is rife with stories of the death and resurrection of gods.

Osiris of the ancient Egyptians and the avatars of Hinduism were mythical gods who faked their humanity and only appeared to die and rise again.

But the Bible says in Romans 1:3-4, Jesus “who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Jesus, the eternal Son of God, actually became a man.

Christianity is unique in its claim that a fully human being, the man Jesus, was raised from the dead.

He died in his humanity and he arose in his humanity.

By his human death and his resurrection he proves he is fully man and fully God.

As the infinite God/man he is able to do for humanity, for us, what no one else could do.

Acts 4:12 "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

The Resurrection establishes who Jesus is.

2. Secondly, the resurrection of Jesus is the very root of our Christian faith.

The Apostle Paul said it so pointedly in 1 Corinthians 15:14,17 "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith...If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."

There is no way for a sinful people to have a relationship with a holy God other than through a real forgiveness of sins.

And the forgiveness of sins is even evil, if those sins are not treated justly.

Only through the sacrificial death of the perfect man, Jesus, could our sins be atoned for and the wrath of God against us be averted.

And only the resurrection proves the effectiveness of his sacrificial death.

"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."

Listen again to the Bible in Romans 4:25 "He (Jesus) was delivered over to death for (on account of) our sins and was raised to life for (to bring about) our justification. (See Cranfield, *Romans*)

And Romans 5:10 "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"

Our life is now bound up with his life – his resurrection being essential.

John Bunyan in his allegory entitled *Pilgrim's Progress* describes a man named Christian who sets out to find God only to discover that he is irremediably hindered by his burden of sin.

Then by God's grace he came to the place of deliverance.

It is described this way: "Christian came up to the cross his burden loosed from off his shoulders and fell from his back. It began to tumble and continued to do so till it came to the mouth of the tomb where it fell in and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad lightsome and said with a merry heart, 'He has given me rest by his sorrow and life by his death... Then Christian gave three leaps for joy and went on singing.'"

Michael Alison, a British policeman said,
My conviction about the certainty of the resurrection is based upon the profound sense of forgiveness which I enjoy, in dissociating myself from the dark deed I have done or might do and associating them with the dead and mutilated Christ. My old self is, in a way I can actually experience with inward conviction, done away with and destroyed in Christ. The profoundest element in my fellowship with God lies precisely in this: that he can allow himself to be destroyed by the worst in me, and yet come back loving. Without the actual fellowship of knowing God in Christ, the past transference of guilt would be merely expediency, a cause for deepening, not relieving, self-centeredness and remorse." (In Michael Green, *The Day Death Died*, 89)

Listen again to the Bible. 1 Peter 1:3-4 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us **new birth** into a living hope **through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead**,⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you..."

The Resurrection is at the very root of our Christian faith.

3. Thirdly, the resurrection of Jesus establishes a whole new future for us.

The Church proclaims the death and resurrection of a man.

As I said earlier, without the resurrection of Jesus we have nothing but death to look forward to.

Not only among most of the people of the world throughout time who have believed there is some kind of life after death but also among those who refuse to believe it, there is a great fear of death.

And all religions and philosophies, in some way or another, attempt to deal with that fear.

William Butler Yeats in his poem "Death" wrote,
 "Nor dread nor hope attend
 A dying animal;
 A man awaits his end
 Dreading and hoping all."

(In Michael Green *The Day Death Died*, 99)

Those with no hope, are left only with what poet Dylan Thomas wrote:

"Do not go gentle into that (dark) night,
 Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
 Rage, rage against the dying light."

But the resurrection of the man Jesus introduces humanity to a new experience – the foundation of a real hope.

The resurrection means a whole new possibility.

C.S. Lewis wrote, that by his resurrection Jesus has "forced open a door that had been locked since the death of the first man. Jesus has met, fought and beaten the king of death. Everything is different because he has done so. This is the beginning of the new creation: a new chapter in cosmic history has opened." (C.S. Lewis in *Miracles*)

Another said, "In the man Jesus the human race commenced its journey through death to life... As forerunner, Jesus became our high priest and mediator. Opening the way for us, he was the first to pass through every stage of human existence and experience, including the stage of death resultant from the fall of Adam, and to attain mankind's new and definitive state, the Resurrection. Rising from the dead, he became the true and efficacious Head of the human race..."

God's eternal son became man (and) took upon himself the fallen race of men, in order to re-create all humanity through his own **humanity.**" (Richard Reardon, "The Son Risen with Healing" p18-24 in *Touchstone Journal* April 2007)

Those who trust in Jesus have begun their journey through this life, and eventually through death into the life to come – resurrected life.

4. Now fourthly, the resurrection of Jesus assures us that there is a physical life after death not just a theoretical or ethereal life.

Jesus had a real physical body before his death and he had a real physical body after his resurrection.

Luke wrote in Acts 1:3 "After his suffering, he (Jesus) showed himself to these men and **gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.** He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."

Peter said it this way, Acts 10:40-41 "God raised him from the dead on the third day and **caused him to be seen.** He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen--by us **who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.**

Paul testified in Acts 13:30 "But God raised him from the dead,³¹ and for many days **he was seen** by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem."

These witnesses are very clear about how physical the resurrected body of Jesus was.

Contrast that with the prevailing opinion of so many, even those who claim to be Christians.

Just over a month ago the Discovery Channel released a film entitled, "The Lost Tomb of Jesus."

The director says, "It's mind-boggling. It's an altered reality."

The burial box of Jesus and one said to belong to Mary Magdalene will be on display at a press conference in New York City this morning to announce the \$4 million documentary.

James Tabor, chair of religious studies at the University of North Carolina... says the film cannot be as easily dismissed as

The Divinci Code novel, even though it too suggests that Jesus had a child with Mary Magdalene.

"This is archeology. We've got the casket. We've got the bones; I think we can say, in all probability, Jesus had this son, Jude, presumably through Mary Magdalene." February 26, 2007 Toronto Star <http://www.thestar.com/article/185708>

As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, even the press found this absurd, as did most historians and archeologists.

But to me the claim that the remains of Jesus' body were in a grave in Jerusalem was not the most striking feature of these stories.

What is most disturbing is the director's claim that it doesn't matter. He said that the discovery of Jesus' bones should not shake anyone's belief in the resurrection of Jesus, saying he consulted several theologians in making the film.

They believe Jesus rose spiritually but not physically.

But that belief is even harder to accept than Jesus marrying and fathering a child.

The Bible is very clear about Jesus physical resurrection.

He went to great lengths to demonstrate his physical body to them.

He talked to them, he walked with them, he ate with them, and they touched him.

As Luke said it, "he showed himself to these men and **gave many convincing proofs that he was alive**. He appeared to them over a period of forty days."

Most people then and now believe in some kind of spiritual presence after death.

But Jesus impressed his followers of the truth of his physical presence, a flesh and bone resurrection, so much so that they were fully convinced and radically changed men and women.

And one of the most central and encouraging claims of the Bible is that because Jesus lives we too shall live.

Our future is not merely in the short-lived memory of those who follow us.

Neither is our future found only in our absorption into the great oneness of the cosmos.

But neither is our future found only in disembodied spirits floating forever in some God-consciousness.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus comes again, our **bodies** will be raised and joined with our spirits; we will be whole again.

And the Bible says that when Jesus comes again, God is going to recreate the heavens and the earth.

And in real, touchable, physical, human bodies we will be forever with the Lord and his people on the new earth.

The resurrection of Jesus assures us that after death there is physical life with Jesus when he comes again.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 “We do not want you to...grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him...For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”

5. But now fifthly, the resurrection of Jesus is not only about life yet to come, but Jesus’ resurrection also gives purpose and dignity to our lives now as easy or hard as they may presently be.

If there is no resurrection, if death is the end, then what is the point?

Life is meaningless.

There is so much injustice, unfairness, cruelty, and evil in this world and in the end death wins.

Is that it?

Is there no vindication?

If I labor to do right and good and it all ends in death, what is the point?

But if Jesus the righteous judge is alive and is coming again, the right and the wrong matter – really matter.

Life is not meaningless

But life has dignity and value.

Not only will good be vindicated in the end but also the risen Jesus said that the Kingdom of God, the rule of God, is growing now.

God calls us to participation in his kingdom work.

My part may be large or small.

My part may be obvious to all or my part may be so obscure that it is even hidden to me so that all I can do is be faithful.

My getting up, being kind to others, living ethically and morally, doing what is before me day after day is exactly what God has called me to.

Micah 6:8 He has showed you, O man, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God.

I have spoken before of one our Partners, Irvin Ennes.

Irvin has lived most of his 70 plus years of life in intense and relentless pain that has kept him from being able to earn a living for his family and has kept him from being able to do what his highly intelligent mind is capable of.

And yet Irvin is one of the most joyful people I have ever met.

Until eyesight and his mind failed him, he would peck out letters of encouragement on an old typewriter and send them to the people for whom he spent hours each day in prayer.

When I think of Jesus' words about the servant to whom he gave only a few talents to invest, I think of Irvin.

And then I think of the greatest words one could possibly wish to hear from the King of the Universe: "Well done good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord."

Whether our actions are perceived as great or small, they matter.

My life matters because Jesus is alive and that risen Jesus says it matters and it matters to Him!

6. The sixth implication of the resurrection of Jesus is that I'm not alone.

Jesus stood with his disciples and said in Matthew 28:20 "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The Jesus who claimed that "with-ness" was the resurrected Jesus.

It is so very possible to be alone in the midst of a crowd.

One man said, "Jesus is the only person with whom I can communicate in every situation, knowing immediately that he has understood completely...I find it difficult to believe that he loves me and cares about the smallest as well as the largest details of my life; that he is willing and able to forgive me time after time for doing what I know to be wrong. But experience has show that all this is true and I am assured it always will be."

(quoted in Michael Green, *The Day Death Died*, 91)

The Bible says, Deuteronomy 31:8 "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

7. The last implication I mention today is that the resurrection of Jesus feeds my passion for obedience and witness.

Look with me briefly at those men and women who were convinced of the physical resurrection of Jesus.

In the first public appearance of the disciples after Jesus' ascension to heaven this is what they so boldly declared:

Acts 2:23-24 "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ **But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him...** 2:29-32 "Brothers... (Christ) was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. **God has raised this Jesus to life**, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

Standing in the Temple courtyard, Peter dared to say,
 Acts 3:14-15 “You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but **God raised him from the dead**. We are witnesses of this.”

No one **mis**understood what the disciples were teaching.
 Acts 4:2 “They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and **proclaiming, in Jesus, the resurrection of the dead**.”

Threatened to keep them from speaking,
 Acts 5:29-32 , “Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men! ³⁰ **The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead**--whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. ³² **We are witnesses of these things**, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

Again Peter declared to a Gentile audience:
 10:39-41 ““We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰ but **God raised him from the dead** on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen--by us who ate and drank with him **after he rose from the dead**.”

Even the pagans understood what the Christians were preaching:
 Acts 17:18: “They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about **Jesus and the resurrection**.”

This is what we find throughout the book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament.

Those disciples believed it!
 They staked their lives on it.

And it was not just the apostles.

Acts 8:1,4 “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria... Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.”

For all of us who accept the truth of the resurrection of Jesus we can say with the Apostle Paul:

Romans 1:16 “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...”

Pray:

“Oh Spirit of God, capture not only my mind but my heart with how stupendous this truth of the resurrection of Jesus is.

Deliver me from being so accustomed to the facts that I miss the significance.

Stir in my heart the awesome reality and significance of a risen Savior.

May I join Joshua of old in declaring from the depth of my soul:

But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." Joshua 24:15