

## **HE IS RISEN INDEED!**

Luke 24:1-12 and Acts 10:34-43

March 27, 2016

The resurrection tale Luke narrated mentioned the arrival of three women early in the morning where Jesus' body was laid. These women were broken hearted, confused, and their spirits were in turmoil. They were still reeling and rocking from the events that had taken place several days earlier. Their time with Jesus seems all too brief. Not only did it end too soon, but it ended in a way for which none of them expected were prepared. While it was true that they had heard him refer to his death at various times, none of them expected things to come crashing down the way they did.

At the beginning of the week, when he had entered Jerusalem, these women were among the thousands who had come for Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. People stripped palms from the trees and threw their cloaks to cushion the steps of the donkey upon which he rode. They rejoiced greatly as they sang glad hosannas to his name. They gave so much praise that some of the religious leaders wanted him to quiet the crowd. However, he had told them that if those who were giving praise were to hold their peace, the very rocks would cry out the message of thanksgiving for the presence that was in their midst.

Now they are draped in their garments of mourning, and with their stained eyes and with trembling hands they carry bottles of ointment to anoint his body. They have come in the dark to the tomb where they expected to his dead, cold and partially decayed body. It was hard to believe, and yet it was true, Jesus Christ had been crucified. As they got nearer to the tomb in silence, and in the stillness of the dark, half night, early in the morning hour that was occasionally pierced by a snuffle or muffled cries that came from various members of their number, they began to ask a question that became increasingly important as they approached the place where they assumed the Lord lay.

That question was, "Who will roll the stone away?" However, as they neared the tomb, they were startled when two men in dazzling garments appeared suddenly beside them. Instant, their grief was turned into terror as they bowed before them not knowing what to expect. The men asked them a question that was as startling as their sudden appearance. They asked them why they were looking for the living among the dead. The Lord was not in the tomb, because he had risen just as he had said while he was in Galilee. He had told them that he would be handed over to sinners, crucified, and then rise again on the third day. They now remember his words.

I wonder sometime how much of our grief, fear, and doubts due to the fact that we forget the Word of the Lord? These women, who had come to the tomb with low expectation, returned to the disciples and other believers with the most important messages that had ever been spoken. "The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!" They left the tomb with much more than they expected.

The resurrection was God's vindication of Jesus. His rejection, humiliation, and death at the hands of the Jewish and Roman hierarchy are not the final chapter. God has acted to reverse all that humanity has done to silence Jesus. The proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus is in effect a claim that his message and earthly life have divine approval and therefore must be heeded. That becomes the basis of Christian faith and life.

The story goes on because the resurrected Jesus comes and seeks his doubting, questioning, failing and hopeless followers. Fundamentally, the story in the book of Acts is a story of witnesses to the resurrection. The witness of the disciples placed confidence that Christ is risen indeed. Despite all obstacles, against all odds, the early church's witness to Jesus' resurrection is a great success. Peter for example emphasizes God as the agent behind all aspects of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Because *God* was active through Jesus, Jesus' story attests *God* as welcoming of all, and makes no distinctions among people.

"He Is Risen are the words that Oscar Romero was speaking as he was gunned down while celebrating the Eucharist in El Salvador. These are the words that Martin Luther King Jr. held fast to as he opposed the violent racism of our culture, the words that inspire Desmond Tutu's work in South Africa; these are even the words that Mother Teresa admitted had lost meaning for her, at the end of her ministry. And yet she so believed in their meaning for the world that she did not abandon her work with the poor. Jesus is risen from the dead.

C.S. Lewis once said, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." This is the story of our lives, the story of the life of the world, the story of life itself. It is the story of how life is stronger than death, how God's love for us is stronger than death. It is, in the end, the only story that there is.

Where are we to look for the living Christ? How do we find him? On what basis do we proclaim that Jesus is risen? What does our story still have to say to a world at war, a culture at odds, a people in pain? How will we be sure that they will hear our story of hope? Luke 24 offers some answers to these questions. Some Christians want to build their faith on solid proofs. For them, the empty tomb offers one such proof. But if that is the sole basis of faith, it is not enough. Early on, there were other ways to explain the empty tomb, such as the suggestion that his disciples stole the body (Matthew 28). While the empty tomb has certainly become a significant piece of the story in the gospels, it alone is not enough to bring certainty, meaning, and understanding needed for Christian faith and life.

The resurrection of Jesus must be understood as part of the totality of God's activity through Jesus. The angels tell the women to remember the word of Jesus. In word and sacrament, the church finds ways to remember what Jesus said. Without the word of Jesus about the kingdom of God and his call to us to take up our cross and follow him as disciples, the message of the resurrection loses much of its power and significance. Paul describes Jesus as the first fruits of the resurrection for His time in history, and

subsequently this resurrection is made available for all of humanity from Adam on down for those who are in Jesus.

Their witness survived the centuries and is passed on to us today. I believe it is quite instructive that in all four gospel stories of Christ's resurrection the writers all agree on the important facts. As I ponder Luke's story of the women on that first Easter morning, what stands out for me is that even though the women did not see Jesus at the grave, they heard the message that he was raised from the dead, believed the message, then went to proclaim it to the eleven apostles and the other followers of Jesus. We too have not seen the risen Jesus, yet what we have is the story, and, by God's grace, we too believe the story—even though we cannot prove it. We trust in the original witnesses of the resurrection.

Every day we write our story again, and we say that it is no less true today than it was on the first day; it is no less miraculous today than it was on the first day -- no less shocking, no less joyful, no less important, no less life-changing and meaningful. Jesus is risen from the dead. Run and tell the others what you've heard. And so, in Easter, we hear these words again: "Jesus is risen indeed!" Merciful God of might, renew this weary world, heal the hurts of all your children, and bring about your peace for all in Christ Jesus, the living Lord.