

He is Risen!

Easter Sunday, April 12, 2009

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

Good morning and welcome to worship this morning! We're not here to worship a dead man; we're not here to praise a 1st guru, a nice guy, a sort of 1st century Mr. Rogers type with a beard and a robe; we're here to worship our risen Lord and Savior this morning. We're here because of Jesus!

Our Gospel reading this morning said it; ancient texts outside of the Bible say it; even the enemies of Jesus acknowledged it – Jesus came back from the dead. He walked the earth after He had been severely tortured, died from being crucified, and had a spear shoved through His side and into His heart. My friends make no mistake about it – Jesus was dead when He came off that cross. Make no mistake about the tomb He was buried in either – it was empty three days later! And again, no one denies this, no one doubts this. The *fact* that the tomb was empty is a given, the question is how did it get empty, and what does it mean to us today?

Did the disciples of Jesus come and steal the body out of the tomb? No! These were a bunch of men who were afraid of their own shadow. They would not have had the gumption, nor the ability, to sneak past the Roman soldiers stationed outside the tomb, roll a very heavy rock away from the face of the cave, go in, get the body and get back out without anyone noticing them.

Maybe Jesus didn't really die on the cross, but just fainted, and was revived in the coolness of the tomb and let Himself out! Please! If nothing else the Romans were experts at killing people. You just didn't survive a Roman flogging, crucifixion and a spear head and shaft driven through your lungs and into your heart. Besides, let's just for a moment pretend He really did just faint on the cross – do you really think He'd be in any shape after all He'd been through to get up, roll the rock away and walk out of the tomb, again with none of the Roman soldiers noticing?

My friends the tomb was empty. How did it get empty? Because Jesus came back to life from the dead and wasn't in that tomb anymore. We find out in the Gospels an angel came, scared the snot out of the soldiers who fainted dead away, and moved the stone. And why did the angel move the stone? He moved it so there could be no doubt to anyone who came to the garden – Jesus wasn't there and He was alive! Not only did the empty tomb show this, but Jesus Himself appeared to a large number of people after He rose from the dead, and at one point appeared to over 500 people at the same time. And again, even the enemies of Jesus had to concede this was happening, they knew what was going on! Perhaps even some of them saw Jesus.

We have to come face to face with the empty tomb, and there simply is no verifiable, believable evidence that anything other than a miracle happened that first Easter morning and Jesus came back from the dead. And that can be scary to think about. Scary, because it means if He came

back from the dead, then there are such things as Heaven and hell, eternity, real consequences; a real world behind the 'skin' of this world.

Why did Jesus die on the cross and come back to life? He did it because He loves you. He did it because there had to be a punishment for sin, and He would rather go through and to hell for us, taking the punishment for our sins, than to leave us on our own and be in Heaven without us.

I'd like to take a look at just one verse from our reading today. *But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him, just as He told you.'* ”

Why did Peter get singled out? There were eleven remaining disciples, eleven remaining close friends of Jesus who had spent the past three years with Him. Why Peter?

Before Jesus was crucified, Peter made a big boast. Let me read something to you, keeping in mind what I'm about to read took place shortly before, and right after, Jesus was arrested and was on His way to being tried, condemned and crucified:

Mark 14:27-31 – *“You will all fall away,” Jesus told them {the disciples}, “for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.” “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “today – yes, tonight – before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.” But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with You, I will never disown You.”*

Mark 14:53-54; 66-72 – {After Jesus was arrested} *They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together. Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire... While Peter was ... in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. “You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,” she said. But he denied it. “I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,” he said, and went out into the entryway. When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, “This fellow is one of them.” Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, “Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.” He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, “I don’t know this Man you’re talking about.” Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he broke down and wept.*

The last thing Peter promised to Jesus was that He would never deny Him, and when push came to shove, to save his own skin, he turned his back on Jesus. And it tore him apart.

Now, back to our verse for today: “You go tell the disciples, and be sure to tell Peter because he’s really feeling like a heel right now, that Jesus is alive and is going to come to them.”

Peter needed that reassuring word that not only was Jesus alive, but He had forgiven Peter and was coming to him.

Now what does this have to do with us today? I want to encourage you all today with those same words. I don't know all your names, especially since we have so many guests today, but put your own name in that verse. "Go tell ... Mary, Bob, Trevor, Lisa, Karin, Tim... that Jesus is alive and is coming to them."

Because you see, I don't know where you've been, I don't know what your life story is, and I don't know where you are right now in your life, but I do know this beyond a shadow of a doubt: Jesus loves you. He loves you so much it literally killed Him. Brought Him back to life, too. He loves you so much that He wants to come to you, right where you are. You don't need to go to Him, He's comin' to YOU!

There are no coincidences in this world, I'm convinced of it. It's no coincidence you're here today hearing this message. You may be here today because you're visiting with family, or you may be here today because it just seems like the thing you are 'supposed' to do on Easter, but I've got to tell you something: bottom line, when all else is stripped away, you are here today because Jesus wanted you here, and wanted you to hear this one thing – He loves you. He loves you more than you can ever know.

Jesus said to us in John 14:1-3, "*Do not let your hearts be troubled.* {In other words, don't be scared}. *Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*"

Don't be scared. The economy is doing things none of us expected or wanted – don't be scared.

Many are without jobs and don't know how to pay the bills – Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Someone got a diagnosis this week from a doctor that shook their world – don't be scared.

A marriage is on the brink of collapsing this morning, and a family is struggling to connect with each other and remain strong – don't be scared. Jesus – the risen and living Jesus – has the answers for all this and more.

This is the Jesus we worship this morning, and this is the Jesus who waits with forgiveness and love for all who will turn to Him. This is the Jesus who made sure Peter knew He was loved, and the same Jesus who wants to make sure you know that you are loved. This is the same Jesus that went to prepare a place for His people in Heaven.

Now I would be a very bad pastor, I would not be doing my job, if I didn't say this next thing: do you know this to be true for you personally? Will you do me a favor? If you don't know this Jesus, if you aren't sure if this forgiveness is for you, or if you are not sitting there right now and

saying to yourself, “I believe!”, will you come and talk to me after church, or give me a call sometime this week? Friends, this is just too important to let slide.

He’s alive! He’s alive! My Jesus is alive! He’s alive forevermore, He is risen, He is Lord!

He is risen! He loves you! And He’s coming back for His people! He’s risen indeed!
Hallelujah!

Amen!