

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

**St. Mark Lutheran
Three Easter Services**

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Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you. So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." Matthew 28:1-10

Max Lucado, in his book, Six Hours One Friday, tells the story of a missionary in Brazil who discovered a tribe of Indians in a remote part of the jungle. They lived near a large river. The tribe was in dire need of medical attention. A contagious disease was ravaging the population. People were dying daily.

There was a hospital, not too terribly far away, across the river. But the Indians would not cross it because they believed it was inhabited by evil spirits. They believed that to enter the water would mean certain death. The missionary explained how he had crossed the river and was unharmed. They were not impressed. He took them to the bank and placed his hand in the water. They still would not go in. He walked into the water up to his waist and splashed water on his face. It did not matter. They were still afraid to enter the river. Finally, the missionary dove into the river and swam beneath the surface until he emerged on the other side. He punched a triumphant fist into the air. He had entered the water and escaped. It was then that the Indians broke out in a cheer and followed him across.

This account has some great similarities to what Jesus of Nazareth did! He told the people of his day that they need not fear the river of death, but they wouldn't believe. He touched a dead boy and called him back to life. Some people still did not believe. He whispered life into the body of a dead girl and got the same result. He let a dead friend spend four days in a tomb and then called him out, and some people still would not believe. Finally, he entered the river of death himself and came out on the other side. That's why, this day, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Christianity is a resurrection religion. There is no event in the history of the world more important than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the foundation on which we place the

living of our lives today and the hope of life after the grave. But just as in Jesus' day, there are skeptics. There are those who refuse to believe. There are even Christians who have not done their homework, and therefore are not sharing the testimony that they should be giving. 1 Peter 3:15 tells us this, "in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you..."

The evidence, that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, is overwhelming. Let us briefly look at six chief points so that we might be prepared to give a strong witness to this historical event.

First, his resurrection was foretold by Jesus Christ. This was common knowledge. That's why the angel said to the women, "He is not here, for he has risen, as he said." To disprove the claims of Jesus and his followers, one would only have had to point to a dead body on the fourth day after he died. This was impossible to do because he had risen.

Second, the resurrection is the only reasonable explanation for an empty tomb. There is one point on which everyone agreed: Christians, Jews, and Romans. The tomb was empty, despite the fact that a Roman guard had been posted to watch it. Mohammed is still in his grave; Buddha is still in his grave; Confucius is still in his grave; but about 40 hours after he was crucified Jesus Christ was no longer in his grave.

Three, we have a large number of witnesses that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead. There were at least ten appearances that we know about from Biblical records: the women returning from the grave, Mary Magdalene, Peter, Cleopas and another follower, the ten apostles with Thomas absent, the eleven apostles including Thomas, several of the disciples fishing, the apostles and over five hundred others at an appointed mountain in Galilee, James, and the apostles at Jerusalem before his ascension into heaven.

Fourth, the resurrection is the only reasonable explanation for the beginning of the Christian church. If his claims were not backed up by his resurrection, then there was no purpose for continuing his church. Without the fact of his resurrection, the church would have had very little to offer its followers. What good would have been brought by a dead Messiah?

Fifth, the resurrection is the only reasonable explanation for the transformation of the disciples. They had seen their leader arrested and crucified, and they feared for their own lives. Yet days later, they were transformed from a timid group in hiding, to a dedicated group of men who were willing to testify in public that Jesus was indeed the resurrected Son of God. There was no possible reason for them to fabricate this story, and they were faithful until their death with this testimony.

Finally, for our sixth proof, we have the transformation and subsequent life of the Apostle Paul. There is no other reasonable explanation than the one he gave for his giving

up a life of prestige, power, and persecuting of Christians, to serve Jesus Christ by bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Dr. Simon Greenleaf, the famous Royal Professor of Law at Harvard University, sums it up well for us. He said that according to the laws of legal evidence, there was more evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ than for just about any other event in history.

But what does that mean for us today? We see that often we do not benefit from the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ as we should. That is because we have a sinful nature which controls many of our responses. Sinful pride tells us that we are really pretty good people, and if there is a heaven surely we will be there. Sin tells us that God and the spiritual side of life can wait. Pleasure, money, sleep, and all other sorts of things in life come first. Sin tells us that it doesn't matter the company we keep, that we can handle taking dangerous drugs, that pornography won't hurt us. Sin tells us that it is all right to believe in God just as long as he doesn't mess around with our lives and cost us anything, since we spend practically all our time and all our money on ourselves! Sin tells us it is all right to follow Jesus, but from a distance, and that discipleship and involvement in Christ's church is not important. This can lead to spiritual death, and the destination is hell.

But this day Christ offers us life! Christ is risen! The crucified Christ is alive again. Resurrection has already begun. We who are joined together with him in Baptism and believe in Him are next. We will go through death and burial just as Jesus did. But physical death is temporary. The resurrected Christ says to us in John 14:19, "because I live, you shall live also." We will live again, in our bodies, at the resurrection. Christ offers to rescue us from sin, death, and hell.

But there is even more to it than that. What do we see around us as we look at our world today? We see economic disasters and fear; we see continued war and terrorism; we see hatred and greed; we see family after family broken apart as people break their marriage vows. We are obviously not quite as good as we think we are.

But the resurrected Jesus is here to help us today also. In John 14:6 he said "I am the way...", obviously referring to the fact that he was the way to heaven. But he also said that he was "the truth and the life...". Jesus said in John 10:10, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." The living Christ is here to help those who believe and are willing to trust in Him. He who mastered sin and death is a living resource for us. He told his disciples in Matthew 28:20, "behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." For the believer, Jesus is with us always, where we live, where we work, where we play, where we go to school. He is here to help us, both home and away, in all that we do.

St. Paul put it this way for the Christian: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20) He is alive in us, and we are alive in Him. Thus, God can enable us to handle any situation, no matter how tough it may be.

So on this Easter Sunday, we have great reason to celebrate, for Christ has risen! He has risen indeed! Alleluia!