

## What A Difference Easter Makes

**St. Mark Lutheran Church  
Easter Sunday-three services**

**by Pastor Ken Welsh  
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*It is recommended that you read Luke 24:1-12, on which this message is based.*

On this day, we join with Christians all around the world in proclaiming that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Praise God!

I ask you to use your imagination for a minute or so. Please imagine that someone you care for very much has left for a trip to Los Angeles for a few days. The person also had a ticket for a return flight back to Cleveland on the following Friday. When Friday came, a call was put in to you from California, but you missed it and your voice mail was full.

You were watching television later that Friday night, and the program was interrupted to give a special news report. A bombing had taken place. You are shocked to hear that somehow a bomb was planted on the flight to Cleveland. The plane exploded shortly after taking off. There were no survivors.

You are devastated. Your friend is gone. Your whole world is turned upside down. For you, life is never going to be the same again.

Two days later there is a phone call. You don't even feel like talking, but you answer it. That call changes everything. Your friend was not on the plane. An opportunity had come up to go on a special trip that was too good to pass up. When the tour group heard about what happened, a call was put in to you right away. Tears of sadness became tears of joy.

There are certainly highs and lows in our human experience, aren't there? But a key difference between our story and the experience of the disciples is this. The disciples did not just hear about Jesus being arrested, being tried during the night, and taken away to be crucified. They were there. They actually saw Jesus put to death on a cross. They saw him struggle to breathe until his final breath. Those who were close to the cross saw a spear go into his side, releasing a flow of blood and water, which scientifically proved that he was really dead. They saw his lifeless body examined and taken away.

They expected that everything in their lives would change now that Jesus was dead. All of this talk about a new life and a glorious future seemed pretty empty now. The invitation to come and follow Jesus was no longer relevant. What were they supposed to do now?

That wasn't all. Somebody was circulating the story that the disciples had come and stolen the body. Wasn't that ridiculous? Most of them had gone into hiding when he was arrested, and Peter had denied three times that he even knew him. What on earth would they want with a dead body? They would just have to bury it again, and they would have been chased down for stealing it! But the real problem was this. If the Roman authorities believed this ridiculous claim, the disciples could be the next ones to hang on a cross. They were even keeping their doors locked because they were afraid for their lives.

When the women went to the grave that morning, they were not expecting to see evidence of any resurrection. They wanted to help prepare the body out of respect for our Lord.

They were amazed when they got to the tomb and found that it was empty. Two men in dazzling clothes, believed to be angels, appeared to them. They said, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you when he was still in Galilee that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." Then the women returned to tell the remaining disciples and anybody else who would listen.

The initial reaction of the disciples was what we might expect. They did not believe the women. But Peter wanted to see what was going on for himself. He got up and ran to the tomb. He saw that the tomb was empty as the women said, with linen clothes lying there, and he went home marveling at what had happened. That is one important fact that virtually everyone believes is true, even Jesus' enemies attest to it. The tomb was empty! Jesus later appeared to the disciples on many occasions, and on another occasion to about five hundred people. Thus, we have the evidence of many witnesses along with the empty tomb.

But to me, the clinching point that the resurrection actually happened, was the difference it made in the lives of the disciples. In just three days, a scared, defeated, and hurting group of people were completely changed into a strong group of believers who were even willing to die for Jesus' sake.

Many of the disciples were actually arrested, beaten, and thrown into prison, and told that they would be punished severely if they kept talking about a resurrected Jesus. Do you know how they responded? They told those who imprisoned and threatened them that they could do what they wanted to them, but the disciples could not stop talking about what they had seen and heard.

The only way for Jesus to rise from the dead was if he were actually the Son of God as he claimed. Jesus knew that the whole world was afflicted with sin as a punishment for mankind's disobedience. Jesus came and led a perfect life, and when his life was sacrificed on the cross, it was a holy, perfect sacrifice for our sins that was acceptable to God the Father. Jesus promises us that those who believe in him will be forgiven of their sins and have eternal life. He was very candid about the fact that there was another place where we could go, to a place called Hell, where one is separated from God forever. He is quoted in Matthew 7:14, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

John 11:25 records one of the most significant things he ever said about himself. He had come to raise his friend Lazarus, dead for four days, from the dead. He spoke to Martha, the sister of Lazarus: "Your brother will rise again." Martha replied that she knew her brother would rise again on the last day. Jesus then said to her, "I AM the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Martha replied, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world." Not long after that Jesus called Lazarus forth from his grave.

New Testament scholar Don Carson tells the story of a teenage boy who was dying of cancer. Every day he had someone read John 11 to him, the account of Lazarus being raised from the dead. This young man received faith and spiritual strength from these readings as he faced the passing away of his physical body, and it helped him focus on the good news, that his soul would be receiving a new body. There is power in God's Word. That's how God works to bring faith and spiritual strength to us. That's one of many good reasons why one should go to church often.

The eternal life that Jesus offers us is most important, but he also cares about what is going on in our lives today. Jesus can transform our lives. He can change us into being a better person. He can help us overcome problems and give us wisdom as we face difficult decisions. Jesus gives us a peace which the world cannot give.

Many of you know who Winston Churchill was. For those who don't, he was the Prime Minister of Great Britain, who led and guided his nation through WW II. Before his death, Churchill became a follower of Jesus Christ.

He made his own funeral arrangements before he died. When they said the benediction at his funeral service, he had arranged for a bugler high in the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral to play "Taps", the universal signal that the day is over. There was a long pause, and then a bugler on the other side of the dome played "Reveille", the signal of a new day beginning. It was Churchill's way of saying that after it is "Good Night" here, it is "Good Morning" there.

When it's good night for you here, where are you going to go?

I have a question for you this morning: "Do you believe in this Jesus?" If you are a believer, take care, that you stay on the path that you are on. Jesus has some additional words for you this morning from Matthew 24: "See that no one leads you astray."

If you are here today, and If you don't believe this, or you're not sure what you believe, there is still time. There is a reason you are here today. God has been patient, and Jesus bids you to follow him. The evidence is overwhelming that Jesus is who he says he is. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose by checking it out. For you, as the Holy Scripture puts it, "Now is the day of salvation." You or I might not even be on earth next year at this time. That's the reality of life on this earth. Don't miss out on the benefits of the greatest event in the history of the world, for this resurrected Jesus is coming again, on the last day, that "Great Day of the Lord". May we all be ready. Amen.

