

RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

March 27, 2016

Luke 24:1-12

"Easter Treasure"

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You'll probably think it weird for me to begin today with a lengthy prayer for pastors on Easter, but bear with me, I think it's relevant. It's by Brian McLaren:

Dear Lord, I pray for all the pastors today

Who will feel enormous pressure to have their sermon match the greatness of the subject and will surely feel they have failed.

(I pray even more for those who think they have succeeded.)

Help them to know that it is enough simply and faithfully to tell the story

Of women in dawn hush ...

Of men running half-believing ...

Of rolled stones and folded grave-clothes ...

Of an empty tomb and overflowing hearts.

*Make them less conscious of their responsibility to preach, and more confident of the Risen Christ
Whose presence trumps all efforts to proclaim it.*

For death is not the last word.

Hate is not the last word.

Money is not the last word.

Condemnation is not the last word.

No: each of these things are left like rags in a tomb,

And from that tomb,

Christ arises,

Alive. Amen

You see, on this day my only task is to proclaim the resurrection of our Lord – and the new life we receive because of it. Sounds pretty simple, right? And yet, I worry about how to declare the Easter message in a way that is new and fresh.

And I ask myself, is there a way to proclaim it that will help those with wavering faith to believe again in the resurrection?

Fortunately, that part is really not up to the preacher. I'm only called to declare the Good News of the resurrection. It's up to the Holy Spirit to produce faith in the hearts of you, the hearers.

You see, no sermon can convince you of the resurrection. **It can't be done with words.** It's a question of faith, and that's up to God.

Mary and the other women discovered that when they tried to share the good news with Peter and the other disciples. Their reaction was lukewarm, to say the least.

Who can blame them? I mean, Jesus' resurrection seems so far-fetched.

First of all, we need to remember: NO ONE EXPECTED IT – NOT ONE SINGLE PERSON.

What we celebrate here today was **totally outside the frame of reference** of every single disciple.

Because **when people die, they stay dead**.

That was just common sense, **even though Jesus had told the disciples over and over again** that he would be killed, and that on the third day he would be raised from the dead.

He told them. Yet **not one of them understood. None of them believed it would happen.**

So, on Sunday morning – while it was still dark – Mary Magdalene and the other women went to the tomb of Jesus to finish the process of preparing his body for burial.

They went early, **not because they were expecting a wonderful surprise**, but because they wanted to be alone for a while in the graveyard.

They went because **their master and friend had been tortured and killed** and they wanted to grieve awhile before they honored Jesus by **treating his broken lifeless body with the dignity that the dead should receive**.

But **when they got to the tomb, something was wrong**. The huge boulder in front of the tomb had been rolled aside – exposing the entrance to the place where Jesus' body had been laid.

And when they went in, they didn't find the body! They were stunned by this, they're shocked – **not because they suddenly figure out that it was true after all**.

No, they're **shocked and stunned because they believe someone has stolen the body**.

But then, the angels tell them the truth: **Jesus is alive!**

So they go and breathlessly tell the disciples the good news. And do you **remember the disciples' reaction?**

Did they **jump for joy and shout Hallelujah?**

No. We read that after they heard the women's testimony, *"these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them."*

God's greatest treasure to us – the gift of new life – eternal life in Jesus Christ, is so easy to dismiss. It seem so improbable.

All we can really do this morning, is stand in the presence of other men and women and dare to proclaim and echo the good news: ***Christ is Risen. He is Risen indeed!***

They're nothing but words, of course. But they are words **filled with the power of the risen Christ – power that can bring about faith in even the most skeptical persons.**

One of my **favorite Easter stories**, which I've no doubt told before, took place **during the rise of communism in the Soviet Union.**

The Communist leaders were **foolish enough to think** they could **destroy the treasure of Easter.**

One of those leaders, **Nikolai Bukharin**, traveled from Moscow to Kiev in the Spring of 1930 to speak to a huge assembly on the subject of atheism.

Addressing the crowded auditorium, he **aimed his heavy artillery at Christianity**, hurling **ridicule, argument, and proof** against it.

After an hour he was finished. He looked out at **what he thought were the smoldering ashes of the people's faith.** *"Are there any questions?"* Bukharin demanded in a condescending tone.

Silence filled the auditorium, but then **one man approached the platform** and mounted to the lectern and stood beside the communist leader.

He slowly surveyed the crowd, first to the left, and then to the right.

Finally he **shouted the ancient greeting known to all Christians:**

"Christ is risen!"

At once, **the crowd arose as one** and THE RESPONSE CAME CRASHING LIKE THE SOUND OF THUNDER: ***"He is risen INDEED!"***

The fragile Easter treasure was alive and well in Soviet Russia!

To be sure, **Easter faith is not something that can be proven.**

If you have any atheist or agnostic friends, don't waste your breath trying to **prove the resurrection.** It can't be done.

Easter faith **can't be proven. It can only be lived.**

But as the communist leader Bukharin discovered, **the power of Easter faith is an amazing thing.**

The **spread of this treasure cannot be stopped**, not even by the **most powerful atheistic movement in the history of the planet.**

The Gospel of Easter brings the Joy of the risen Christ everywhere, transforming our world **from the living death of sin and self-doubt** into the everlasting treasure of new life in Christ.

Jesus' resurrection bursts the chains of sin and crushes the power of death, once-and-for-all.

I can't prove it to you.

But I believe it.

And as you look at your neighbors here today, **they believe it, too.**

- Some of them believe it **beyond the shadow of a doubt.**
- Some of them **believe it a little, but want to believe it more.** And
- **some of them just don't know.**

But all of them – all of us – will experience the treasure of Easter this morning in countless ways:

- in the joyful faces of our graceful dancers,
- in the soaring music of our choirs,
- in the words of the hymns,
- in the stunning visual of the cross, bursting open the treasure chest to shine brightly with the light of Christ,
- and in the bread and wine of communion, where the risen Christ will meet us.

There are **so many sermons here this morning** – all of them **more eloquent than anything I can say.**

And perhaps the **most powerful Easter sermon** will be heard in the voices of all of these brothers and sisters, **no matter how strong or weak their Easter faith may be.**

It's only a **four-word sermon, but it is unforgettable.**

Will you **help me preach it to your neighbor?**

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CHRIST IS RISEN!

C: *HE IS RISEN INDEED!* Amen