

Sermon † April 4, 2021

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In the name of the living Lord Jesus, whose name is love and who is triumphant over sin and death, giving this world hope, I greet you! Now, having said this, let me ask you a question on this Easter Sunday. If you were in my place today and you had to preach a sermon on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is the basis of the Christian faith, how would you do it?

What I mean is how would you preach to anyone who is a part of this very modern and technical age . . . this world of facts and science . . . this age of logic. How would you begin this story about a young rabbi who died and then three days later rose from the dead? It does cause one to stop and think, doesn't it? Any person who wants to challenge a Christian's faith in the literal accounts of the resurrection story can "literally" have a field day.

Given the various reports of what happened on that first Easter morning there is great confusion about who went to the tomb . . . where Jesus was seen . . . who saw him. How reliable can the testimony be of the disciples of Jesus who would have their wishes and fantasies resurrect him?

Of course, we must remember that neither the disciples nor the gospel writers were as excessively concerned with facts as we are. For instance, we don't know, from the accounts in scripture, whether Jesus was 6'2" or 5'4". We don't know whether or not he had a beard. We know nothing of his physical appearance. The disciples were not concerned with these so-called facts.

They knew that while Jesus had been with them,
He had compassion for the poor...
He had healed the sick...
He made guilty men and women feel clean and worthy...
He made lonely people feel needed and important...
He made the proud feel humble; the rich poor; and the hungry filled.

Jesus, to the disciples, was more than a fact. He was the experience of God in the life of humanity. On Easter Sunday, they found more than an empty tomb . . . they experienced his living in their lives.

I have the feeling that all too often we come to church on Easter Sunday in the hope that we may catch a glimpse of the Jesus of history past by way of an empty tomb. We usually have all the trappings. A garden of lilies. The pastor proclaims the message of the angels. The choir proclaims the heavenly hosts.

The brevity and realism of Mark 16 is inspiring: "*He has risen, He is not here . . . He is going before you.*" We shall never find the risen Christ through factual investigation. We shall not find Jesus even on Easter Sunday in church. Jesus is an experience to be lived and he goes before us. Each of us must see and experience the living Christ in our own way . . . in our own day. Even as he appeared at different times, at different places, in different forms, to different people . . . so shall it be for us.

I did not see the Christ at the tomb and I never touched his side. I have seen him in the breaking of the bread . . . he is visible in your eyes as you receive the holy meal. He is known to us as we daily encounter one another.

I have seen him in the broad smile of a kindly, gentle woman of 83 living in a nursing home when her family came to visit. It made her day.

I have heard him in the voices of many a choir as they glorified his name in song.

I know him in a nurse who works all Saturday night at a hospital and then comes directly to church, without sleep, so she can teach Sunday school.

I've laughed with him as a family re-counted favorite experiences and shared stories during a special family celebration.

I've touched him as I've held the hand of a critically ill parishioner as, together, we prayed the Lord's Prayer.

I saw the risen Christ this past week . . . and Easter had not yet arrived.

I saw him in the dedicated volunteers at St. Luke's who assist with the taping of the services.

I've seen him in the masked worshipers gathered for prayer and renewal.

I feel his presence each week during our zoom Tuesday Bible and Sunday morning zoom coffee hour.

Yes, I saw the risen Christ this past week . . . and Easter had not yet arrived.

We shall not find Jesus at the empty tomb . . . or in the garden of lilies . . . or in the beautiful hymns of this day. Each one of us must meet and experience the living Christ daily . . . as he meets us in life. This Jesus is not some "way-back-there-when" kind of Savior. No, no, not our Lord.

You see, He has risen.
He is not here.
He goes ahead of us.



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