

The Best Word: He Is Risen!

Luke 24:1-12

What a Great Day

This is a great day. There is no day quite like Easter. There is a certain lilt to our step and excitement in our hearts. It's the one day where Christians all around the world gather to celebrate the fact that Jesus is risen from the dead.

Christian people everywhere are proclaiming, "*Christ is risen!*" "*Christ is risen indeed!*"

We have every reason to celebrate. In a world where it's tough to remain hopeful, Jesus begs to differ. In a world where we are left to wonder what it's all about, Jesus offers clear direction. In a world where so much conspires to weigh us down, Jesus stands to lift us up.

I figure that's why so many flock to church on Easter. The message of Easter is a message everyone not only wants to hear but needs to hear.

Without Easter we are left to fend for ourselves in answering the deep questions that come regarding this life and the next.

Without Easter we are left to our wondering. With it, we are given a new leaf on life. We are charged to engage life, all in the name of the risen Christ.

Our Faith is Not Futile

Think of it, Jesus is risen from the dead. That's a big deal. So big that the Apostle Paul writes, "*If Christ has not been raised, then our faith is futile.*" (I Corinthians 15:17)

If Christ has not risen from the dead we might as well pack it in and go home, hopeless and in despair.

That's not our lot today or any other day for that matter. We are an Easter people.

"Ta-Da!"

The story is told of a Sunday school teacher who had just finished telling her third graders about how Jesus had been crucified and placed in a borrowed tomb with a stone sealing the entrance.

Wanting to share the surprise and excitement of Easter the teacher asked, "*And what do you think were the first words of Christ when he came bursting out of the tomb.*"

A hand shot up from the back of the classroom. Leaping out of her chair a little girl shouted, “*TA-DA!*”

God really showed off when he raised Christ from the grave and those with faith have stood in awe and wonder ever since.

Death no longer has the last word. Life, not death, is the order of the day. “*TA-DA!*” says Jesus.

Luke’s Account of the Resurrection

Luke has things this way.

“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. There they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.”

Immediately the women thought the body might have been stolen. Maybe they had the wrong grave. They really didn’t know what was going on.

As that scene began to sink in, *“two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.*

In their fright, the women bowed down with their faces to the ground.”

How would you have reacted?

“The two men asked them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!’”

The fact of the matter is this: the women had no idea they’d be finding the living among the dead. That was the farthest thing from their minds. As far as they were concerned, Jesus was dead and that was that.

Their memories were pretty short. They had forgotten what Jesus had said about rising on the third day.

Their grief had clearly gotten in the way. Their faith had carried them only so far.

I like the humorous story told of Joseph of Arimathea, the one who offered his tomb so Jesus would have a place to be buried.

As the story goes someone asked him, *“That was such a beautiful tomb. Why did you give it away?”*

“It was no problem. He only needed it for a weekend.” Now that’s faith.

Jesus Tried to Tell Them

All along Jesus tried to tell them. He spent his life trying to get his message across.

His teachings were revolutionary in every way. His miracles were a great show of God's power.

He was forever calling people to set their sights on God and his Kingdom. "*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,*" he said, "*and all these things shall be added unto you.*"

Christ not only wanted people to set their sights on God, but on others. "*Whatever you do to the least of these,*" he said, "*you have done it unto me.*"

Testing the Waters

In testing the waters of whether he was getting his message across, Jesus asked his disciples, "*Who do people say that I am?*"

The disciples responded by saying, "*Some say, John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.*"

It was then that Jesus turned to Peter and asked him, "*And who do you say that I am?*"

"*Why you are the Christ,*" he said, "*the Son of the living God.*"

It's interesting that upon Peter's confession, Jesus followed with a statement about his death and resurrection.

Now that they were beginning to understand, or at least Peter was, Jesus began to prepare his disciples for what was to come.

He wanted to move on to what was the real reason for his coming.

"*From that time on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*"

Christ's Last Words

As you know we've spent the past six weeks considering what Jesus he had to say from the cross. I don't know about you, but his "*famous last words*" have really challenged me.

“Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” “Today, you will be with me in Paradise.” “Mother, behold your son.” “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” “I am thirsty.” “It is finished.”

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Having heard these *“famous last words,”* we now turn to the resurrection.

As we emerge from standing at the foot of the cross, we now consider Christ’s best word. It was repeated by the angels as they greeted the women at the tomb.

*“Remember how he told you. The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinners, be crucified **and** on the third day raised again.”*

This word, this best word, was the very word Jesus wanted to get across all along.

“I Told You So”

“I told you so” is a phrase all of us use.

Cheryl’s been known to use it when I’ve gotten us lost and she’s tried to provide direction. You would think that after all these years I’d learn to listen.

“He told you so,” said the angels. What Jesus said would happen, happened.

Not only did Jesus die a horrible death, but on the third day he rose from the dead, stamping as true everything he ever said or did.

One day this life will come to an end for you and me. In the twinkling of an eye we will see Jesus at the threshold of heaven.

He’s prepared a room for those who so believe.

In that moment, he will stand before us, our faces awash with wonder and praise, and will sweetly say, *“I told you so.”*

A Best Word for You

What’s the best word you could hear right now?

“You got the scholarship?” “You made the team?” “You got the job?”

How about, *“I love you”* or *“It looks like you’re on top of your cancer”* or *“It’s a boy”* or, better yet, *“It’s a girl?”*

The good news of this day, the best news of all, is this, *“He is not here; he has risen!”*

“I’ll Deal with You after the Resurrection”

The story is told of a town that put together a Good Friday processional. The man chosen to portray Jesus was a burly truck driver. He was far from *“meek and mild.”*

Still, he wore the clothing of Jesus, put on the crown of thorns, and drug around an old rugged cross. Another man played the Roman centurion. He also got into the part.

As the truck driver walked by, the man playing the centurion jeered him, mocked him, struck him, and even spat in his face. It was more than the truck driver could stand.

It was then that the burly truck driver turned to the man portraying the centurion and said, *“I’ll be back to deal with you after the resurrection.”*

Here’s the good news, Jesus gets back with us after the resurrection as well.

His is to touch our lives with the hope and promise of new life. Death now longer has the same sway. Death has been conquered and *“life is worth the living all because he lives.”*

“Because he lives, I can face tomorrow, because he lives all fear is gone, because I know he holds the future, and life is worth the living just because he lives.”

“He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!”

In the early 1920s Communist leader Nikolai Bukharin was sent from Moscow to Kiev to address an anti-God rally.

For an hour he abused and ridiculed the Christian faith until it seemed as if the faith was left in tatters. At the end of his presentation he asked if there were any questions.

It was then that an Orthodox priest rose and asked to speak. He turned and faced the crowd and gave the centuries-old Easter greeting, *“He is risen!”*

Instantly, the assembly rose to its feet and their reply came back loud and clear, *“He is risen indeed!”*

This is good news for whatever you’re facing, *“Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!”*

The refrain has been consistent since Christ emerged from that tomb. In spite of untold grief, persecution, wars and rumors of wars, tremendous hardship, and attacks on the faith, the answer has always been the same, *“Christ is risen!” Christ is risen indeed!”*

The same rings true today. So here on this Easter morning, let’s repeat it as if our very lives depended upon it. *“Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!”*