

“Jesus Lives”

Luke 24:1-12

Jesus lives. He continues to be experienced after his death, though in a radically new way. He is no longer a figure of flesh and blood, confined to time and space, but a reality who can enter locked rooms 2,000 years ago and today. He can journey with followers without being recognized 2,000 years ago and today. He can vanish in the moment he's recognized and abide with his followers always, “to the end of the age.”

Jesus lives and you will see him. Unless you're hiding from him, too afraid of stepping out into the sunlight. Some of his more courageous and more feeling followers gathered together as the sun began to peek over the horizon. Their arms were filled with bottles of spices and ointments as they began the hike to the tomb of their friend. Now they could finally be alone with him as they rubbed and massaged the spices and ointments over his body, embalming him as their last act of love.

As they neared the tomb, they wondered how they would get past the huge stone that sealed the entrance. They did not know, but their faith pushed them along the path. Suddenly, there it was, the rock in which Jesus lay wrapped in a linen shroud. As they came closer, they found the stone rolled away from the

tomb.

Their faith had pushed them this far and now they did not hesitate to enter the tomb. They would get to anoint Jesus' body after all and they were excited. When they entered the darkness of the rock, their eyes were momentarily blinded. As their pupils adjusted, they still could not see the body they came to anoint and they became perplexed about this. How did this stone get rolled to the side? What happened to the body wrapped in linen?

“While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. They were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.’” Jesus lives.

Flashback. My brother and I are going with our shovels to dig up the thick, green moss growing around the base of the trees in the woods that surrounded our house in rural Valley City. We carefully carried the moss to the house and built a big, soft nest for the Easter bunny right under the overhang of the picture window on the front of the house.

Then the first thing on Easter morning, we rushed outside to check the nest.

There were big, brown, hard-boiled eggs in that nest. The Easter bunny lives.

We carried the eggs into the kitchen and proceeded with the first of many egg-cracking contests throughout the day. We would hold our eggs up, first round side to round side, bang them against one another, and discover who had the strongest egg that would not crack. Then we would turn them around, pointy end to pointy end, and bang them together. When your egg cracked on both ends, you ate it. Shaking a little salt on the peeled egg, you could end up eating a lot of hard-boiled eggs on Easter day.

We went back outside to get our chores done and then headed to church for an Easter breakfast and worship service. The church was full and we shared Holy Communion. A full church and celebrating Holy Communion were both very unusual in that small, rural congregation. But then the following Sunday everything would be back to normal so that I would have plenty of room to spread out my papers and pencils in the “right pew”. Jesus lives every Sunday and everyday.

Flashback. These words of these two angels in the tomb instantly bring images flashing through the minds of his followers. They visualize the beautiful hillside overlooking the lake back in Galilee and Jesus miraculously feeding the 5,000. Then with full bellies sitting down together, Jesus said, “The Son of Man

must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” They had not understood.

I had not understood. Following worship, we would head to Grandpa and Grandma’s big farmhouse for a huge Easter dinner. The Gunkelmans like to eat – alot! But while the women were making final preparations, we grandchildren began our search for our Easter basket which would be filled with all kinds of candy, more hard-boiled eggs, and even a hollow plastic egg with a brand new ten dollar bill inside. We grandchildren would diligently search that old farmhouse from room to room until all nine grandchildren had located our baskets.

By then the food would be on the table and we would sit down and eat. We would sit around a big, long table in the family room, an addition to the original house, fireplace roaring, and grandpa at the head of the table. My grandfather was a big man who dominated any table. He had huge arms and hands from all the years of baling hay and straw and milking cows. He was bald on top and had a stare that would look right through you.

You did not want to get grandpa mad at you. You only wanted to impress him. So the grandchildren, of which I was the oldest, would sit very politely at the table with our best manners while he prayed a prayer of thanksgiving. As we ate the meal, the first wrong move that we made or the first time we spoke out of line

would bring an immediate reaction from our grandfather. “Doug, you talk too much for your age. Pass the potatoes.” He didn’t miss a thing that happened at those Easter meals.

Following the meal, we would sit at the table for about a half hour to talk over pie and ice cream. Then the women would gather in the kitchen to wash the dishes while the men retired to the living room to sleep or watch a basketball game. Finally, everyone would depart for home to do evening milking and chores.

Now the followers remember his words and they finally understand. They run from the tomb to share this good news with the eleven in hiding and all the rest of Jesus’ followers. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and other women with them who now hurried to the upper room to tell all this to the apostles.

These followers, these women banged on that wooden door and the men reluctantly let them in. As the women rushed into the room, the eleven listened to their frenzied story. Women are in mourning, who are beside themselves with grief, are seeing and hearing things. Jesus lives? The words of these women seemed to the eleven like an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

It is possible, given the earthshaking nature of their news, that the women were really excited, tripping over one another’s words in trying to tell their

fantastic story. And besides, what would women know about such things? What could grandpa and grandma know about such things? What could you and I know about such things? What do you remember? What do you remember from your early Easters as a child growing up? What memories will your children have of this Easter day and the Easters of their childhood? What makes this a special day for you and for your family? What do we know about such things?

Jesus lives! Are these words of an idle tale or the words of victory? Is Easter the answer to Good Friday? Do we listen to the words of the women or do we live our lives as if nothing has happened? That choice is yours. As for me and my house, we listen to the women and we celebrate on this day a great victory. Today we are joy-filled for the victory of Christ and we share in his victory every Saturday night and Sunday morning throughout the year.

As we come forward to share the body and blood of the resurrected Christ, let each of us recommit ourselves to being active followers of Christ, and not waste our time during this next year behind closed doors. The victory over death is won for all of us who believe and follow him. Make Christ's victory your victory. Jesus lives!

#389 - Christ is Alive! Let Christians Sing