

The Living Among the Dead
Easter, 2020
Luke 24:1-11, 36-43

We are going to Luke 24 today.

Today is a day when we gather to celebrate the fact that Jesus is risen. And each year when Christians gather, someone usually says, “He is risen” and the people reply by saying “He is risen indeed.” I’m not a very good televangelist, so I won’t ask you to say anything to your screen today. But He is risen.

And the strangeness of this Easter isn’t lost on me. This is the highest Christian holiday, the day that we celebrate the fact that Jesus conquered death, the day we celebrate the biggest event that unifies Christians around the globe - with all that we disagree about, we agree on this, Jesus died and rose - so Christians stand in unity to worship Him today, and we’re celebrating it not together, but separately in our houses.

And we’re celebrating it during what is possibly the apex or near the apex of the Coronavirus crisis in our country. It’s a hopeful day because if we are at that apex it means we’re turning a corner, but it also means this is when the most people will succumb to this infection.

So the contrast of Easter with our current situation couldn’t be more clear. We’re celebrating new life in a day of death.

But remember that first Easter took place at a tomb. As far as the people who ran to the grave knew, it was only a day of death. Surrounded by death, in a place of darkness and sorrow, new life burst forth.

And the message of that first Easter is still good news for us today, especially for us today. This is the message we need.

So we’ll walk through some of Luke’s accounts of the resurrected Jesus in the hopes that it will bring real hope in our day of death and fear, and new life into many hearts today.

Just three days earlier, the followers of Jesus had thought everything was over. They had followed this guy who claimed to be the Messiah, the one who was going to come to save His people, but like all the previous messiahs, this one didn’t seem to pan out.

A lot of people had claimed to be the Messiah before. There were guys who seemed great and eventually led military uprisings to rescue the Jews and free them from Roman rule. But just about every time those guys were put to death and the uprisings ended.

So when they started following Jesus who was the next guy who claimed to be the Savior, they probably had family and friends that told them not to follow him, these things never pan out.

But Jesus seemed different. His words were unlike anyone else's words. They saw Him do real miracles. A few of them even saw Jesus transfigured on a mountain where he glowed like lightning, and Moses and Elijah showed up.

Then on Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a colt, just like Zechariah had prophesied that the Messiah would do. And they are thinking, "It's panning out this time. He's going to kick out the ruling invaders and restore our independence and power."

But then it all took a turn for the worse. Jesus was arrested. He went to trial after trial. People mocked and beat him, and on that very bad Friday their dreams all died on a cross. The one they thought would save their people from Roman rule was crucified.

There he was, nails in his hands and feet, hanging dead on a criminal's cross - and in case they thought he had made it through and miraculously survived, a soldier stuck a spear in his side and blood and water flowed out, confirming that he was indeed dead.

So most of his followers took off. Their worlds had fallen apart. They had to go back to family and friends, with egg on their faces, and say, "Yeah, I was obviously wrong. I was fooled by another imposter." A few of them went back to working as fishermen just like they had done before they had followed Jesus.

It had been three wasted years, and it culminated in death, and when the rulers put a leader to death, their followers were often threatened, too. Rome was known to line the streets into cities with crosses where they crucified bands of rebels. So the disciples are defeated, afraid, hiding out in a house together.

But then on Sunday this happened:

Luke 24:1-11 "But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. 2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While

they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. 5 And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” 8 And they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, 11 but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

So they went to tomb, the place where death reigned, and they found the stone rolled away, but didn't find the body of Jesus.

And then they meet the angels who ask them “Why are you looking for the living among the dead?”

Jesus is alive! Here in the garden cemetery, the place of the dead, they first announce that Jesus is alive.

The women go on this mission of sorrow - to mourn and anoint the body of Jesus. They go in the darkness of early morning, in the darkest of places, on the darkest of weekends, and the angels show up in dazzling appareil to announce that, just as Jesus had told them, Jesus has risen.

So light has broken in to the darkness. A time of weeping becomes a time of awe and amazement and even fear at coming so close to the holiness of God.

And just like Jesus had said, “Blessed are you who weep, for you shall laugh” (Luke 6:21).

And they left on a mission of wonder, running to tell the good news that Jesus is risen from the dead.

This began 40 days during which Jesus appeared to more than 500 people, and in each encounter He brought new hope, the same kind of hope that we need today, the kind of hope that the life of Christ can bring to us in the day of death.

So let's look at one of the encounters with the risen Jesus that they had:

Luke 24: 36 As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" 37 But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. 38 And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate before them

So the disciples are talking about a previous time they had met the resurrected Jesus on a road, and suddenly, Jesus appears. They are frightened, and Jesus immediately offers them peace for their troubled hearts.

And look what Jesus does for them.

The first thing He does is give them faith in the place of their doubts. He shows them His hands and feet.

I. The Resurrected Jesus Cures a Troubled Heart (v.38)

It's easy for days like this to breed doubts. Can God really be in control and really be good? This is the season when we were supposed to be enjoying the melting of the snow, graduations, barbecues, baseball, Easter, Mother's day, and the sun returning after a long winter, but we are quarantined in our houses, people that we love are sick, our economy is quaking, and the future is uncertain.

And we can doubt His goodness. We can doubt whether He is still working out His plan for good.

But Jesus conquering death confirms that God has a plan when all looks lost, that He does work everything out for our good, and that even the bleakest possible scenario is not an indicator that His plan has derailed.

In verse 38, Jesus says, "Why are you troubled?"

This resurrection is a cure for the greatest troubles of our hearts - God is in control, He is working for good.

And on top of that, Jesus asked in verse 38 “and why do doubts arise in your hearts?”

So this resurrection appearance of Jesus must be the remedy for our doubts too.

II. The Resurrected Jesus Remedies our Doubts (v.38)

And this appearance after the resurrection specifically, one with some mundane elements - especially confirms that the resurrection happened.

We can doubt that these stories are true, we can doubt that Jesus rose from the dead. We're 2,000 years after this event occurred. And people today look back at the story of Jesus, the godman who was crucified and rose from the dead, and they assume it must be a legend like the legends in all of the other religions.

But when you read the accounts of the resurrected Jesus, they don't read anything like legends. You can compare them to greek mythology where tales of the gods were told to embellish the god's abilities and dramatize their stories, and this account doesn't read like a legend at all.

In fact, if you were trying to make up a religion, writing this account of the resurrected Jesus would have been a bad attempt.

If Christianity were the product of the apostles sitting in a room with a white board brainstorming how to make up a religion, telling this story was a bad idea.

The apostles are sitting around with a white board brainstorming how to come up with a religion where people worship Jesus by saying he died but appeared to people after his resurrection. And one of them says, "Here's what we do - we say that Jesus walks into the room in his glorified resurrected body. What next?"

One of the other guys says, "Let's have his eyes shine like lightning. Or when he speaks, all of the walls rattle. Or he vaporizes his enemies."

And another guy says, "No, let's do this. Let's say he walks into the room and asks for something to eat."

They'd say, "That's a terrible idea, John. Something to eat? The resurrected godman walks into a room and asks if there's anything in the fridge? That's no way to start a religion. That's not the stuff legends are made of."

But that's exactly what happened here in Luke. Jesus comes in, says he's hungry, and they give him fish, and he eats it.

The Gospel writers' records of the post-resurrection Jesus are written like history, not like legend.

So if you have any doubt that the story of Jesus is just another mythological legend that has just taken time to go away, you need to ask why these things are written that way. These are written as historical biographies, not as legendary religious tales.

But the way he appeared to them didn't leave any of them still doubting whether he had risen from the dead.

Sometimes we think, "These events happened 2,000 years ago, and it was just a big game of telephone. 2,000 years ago Jesus died, and at the funeral someone said, 'He'll always be with us.' That was a nice sentiment, just like people say at every funeral today, but that got passed down for 2,000 years from person to person and now we have this blown up story about Him actually being with his disciples.

But this story is clear. He showed them his hands and feet, was with them with flesh and bone, clearly distinguished between what they were seeing and what they might imagine they'd see if it were a ghost. They thought he was a ghost and this appearance corrected that according to verse 37. He actually, physically rose.

And that dissolved their doubts. So much so that most of the guys who were present were killed for their faith. They had the opportunity to recant and say Jesus didn't rise from the dead when they were being tried, but they saw him and talked with him and ate with him and saw his hands and his feet and his side. They would rather be tortured and die than lie and say he didn't rise.

What happened in these encounters made these guys believe that Jesus actually, physically rose from the tomb. And they died for that story. They were fully convinced that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead.

And **we also know his early followers thought he rose from the dead because** they didn't turn his tomb into a shrine where they worshipped his body.

Nobody went to worship there in the first centuries. Which was weird, the Jews knew

where other heroes of the faith were buried and made their tombs into sacred spots: Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Leah, Isaac, Rebecca - so who not Jesus?

The early Christians later on turned the tombs of bishops and martyrs and apostles into sacred spots. But the tomb of Jesus didn't become a sacred spot for centuries later.

Now you can go there and worship at Jesus tomb today, but a dirty little secret that the Jerusalem Tourist Board probably won't tell you is that they're not really sure it's the right tomb.

So why the early total disregard for the tomb? Because he rose, and Jesus being alive made the location of his burial meaningless.

If a tomb is the last thing you have to remember a person by, it's a sacred spot. But it wasn't.

I have stuff in my house which would just be clutter, but I keep it because it was my dad's, and he died. Once a person dies, their stuff takes on new meaning and becomes sacred. When they're alive, you don't care so much.

They didn't care at all for the tomb or for artifacts in the first century.

It was centuries before people cared about things like the Shroud of Turin, which is probably not authentic, or the nails from the cross - most of the holy Christian artifacts have proven to be fakes anyways. To the point where during Martin Luther's life, he said there were enough supposed nails from the cross on display in Rome to shoe every horse in Saxony.

That early church acted like Jesus really rose and paid no attention to his stuff. It was all about Him! These encounters with the bodily resurrected Jesus gave faith to these disciples and dissolved doubt, so much so that they gave their lives for what they say happened.

What happened in those encounters after the resurrection removed their doubts and replaced them with confidence, and the historical fact of the resurrection can do the same for us.

There's much to be uncertain about, especially in our day - our jobs, our futures, we don't know when church can meet again, we don't know when our area will end this

lock-down, we don't know about school, and summer, and plans. But we know that Jesus rose from the dead.

So the resurrection of Jesus is a cure for troubled hearts, it dissolves doubts and replaces them with faith, and it also gives us the ultimate relationship.

This is some of the significance of Jesus sitting down to eat with them.

3) The Resurrected Jesus Gives the Ultimate Relationship

When you sat down to eat with somebody back then, it had incredible significance. That's why it was so alarming to people that Jesus would often sit and eat with tax collectors and sinners and gluttons and drunkards.

Because when you ate with someone, that was an act of making a deep connection with someone as a friend. It was associating yourself with them. Who you ate with said something about who you were.

Eating with someone was an act of relational intimacy.

And here comes the resurrected Jesus, not just with a display of power, but a display of relationship.

He isn't only out to elicit worship from His followers, He is also out to extend the offer of the greatest relationship.

We all have this innate sense that there's someone out there who can love us well and complete us. There's some relationship with a person who is good enough that can make us whole. When we're single, we're pretty convinced that that person will be a spouse - so we look for Mr. or Mrs. Right so we can get into that relationship with someone who completes us.

And then we get into marriage, and even the best of marriages don't offer that. We still feel that there's something missing. So maybe we married the wrong person. So we end the marriage and continue the quest for the right one. Or maybe the one we married just isn't functioning the right way. So we pile on demands, crushing the spouse under our unmet expectations.

Because we know there's a relationship out there that's supposed to complete us, and

we assume it must be the relationship with a spouse. This is the premise we sometimes build our lives on, and it is the premise of every romance movie - there's someone out there who will complete me. That's why those movies are all terrible.

They're fiction. They're myths.

But as Tolkien and Lewis knew, the Gospel is the true myth. It's the story that all of our stories are really about - a universal longing for someone to come and fix me and love me and accept me.

And when Jesus sits to eat with his disciples, he is demonstrating that he is that kind of a savior, the kind that is powerful and rescues us from the greatest of all possible enemies, but then offers a relationship that does complete us. He is the one who will always be there for us. He is the one who identifies with us and shares our joys and our sorrows. He is what we long for.

He is the superhero who conquered our three greatest enemies of Satan, Sin, and Death. And he calls us not only to stand in awe of his power, but to feel comforted and accepted in his presence.

He is the far off God who is near. Transcendant and immanent. He is the holy God who loves. He is the majestic God that calls us his friends. He is far beyond us and present. He is the one who completes us.

So he...

- 1) Cures troubled hearts
- 2) Gives faith where there was doubt
- 3) Gives the greatest of all possible relationships
- 4) and also gives meaning to suffering.**

When Jesus shows them his body, he shows them his hands and his side and his feet, where they see scars from the cross.

So what does that teach us?

Now that seems odd, because he has a resurrected body. You would think that in our new bodies, all of the stuff that was broken gets fixed. I'm expecting a full head of hair on the other side. And muscles. And healthy joints. And the same metabolism I had

when I was 20. All the stuff that has become broken gets restored.

But Jesus has scars still. And when he shows it to the disciples in verse 41, their response is joy and amazement.

When Jesus was crucified, those nails going into his hands and feet ruined the lives of the disciples. Those nails were the worst things that ever happened to them. They were the tools used to destroy their Savior - the miracle worker, the only one whose words resonated like that - he was put to death by those nails.

And what he is beginning to show them now is that the nails actually saved their lives. And joy is starting to break through - not just in spite of the worst thing they ever experienced on good Friday, but actually because of it.

It isn't just that Jesus overcame the nails. It's that Jesus used the nails - the horrible things - to accomplish the greatest purpose for us.

And as followers of Jesus, the scriptures teach that we follow His story. What happened to Him in many ways happens to us.

1 Corinthians 15:20-23 “**20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.**

So Jesus rose on Easter as a first fruit - the first one - like the first bloom on a tree that we can see today, they're the signs of things to come.

Jesus rose from the grave first, but when He returns, everyone who is in Him, that is united to Him by faith, will also be made alive.

What happened to Him in dying and rising again will also happen to those who have that relationship with Him.

Which means that the bad things that come into our lives will not only be overcome, but somehow used by God to accomplish His purpose to give us an even better resurrection.

Keller points out that the resurrection will not only replace the tragedies in our lives, it will

explain them. We'll see them as part of the back story that had to be for us to get ultimate joy.

So Christians, all of the problems we're experiencing. All of the pain. All of the tragedy. In the resurrected state, it will somehow enhance our joy, not just be overcome to get to our joy. The resurrection will explain our tragedies, not just overcome them.

The bad things make the joy possible.

That doesn't mean we have to understand all of the bad things, and it certainly doesn't make God the author of evil or sin. We don't know how this all works together anymore than the disciples knew how this would all work together on Good Friday.

But this can free us up now from crushing despair and bitterness when tragedies do come our way. Yes, Good Fridays happen and we experience tremendous losses and frustrations and pain. But for those who believe, God causes all things to work together for good.

This crisis has punched us in the gut.

Many of us have been sick. About 20 of our members have lost jobs. Weddings have been cancelled. Plans have been changed. We've been cooped up. It has been a dark season for us.

There's a lot to mourn and lament. But if we can't get over bitterness and anger over how our lives have gone, we don't deeply believe the message of the resurrection: that there is a future, there is hope and that FUTURE JOY comes because of present pain.

Angry people don't believe this. Bitter people don't believe this. Because this does not make pain go away, this does not minimize sin and tragedy, but it does give us hope and joy.

That's why there's joy and amazement in this moment for the disciples. This is the moment at the end of the movie when everything comes together, and you had never seen it coming, but all of a sudden you just get blasted by the joy and the beauty and you are overwhelmed at how it all came together.

It's the moment where you see how God engineered your pain for his glory and your ultimate joy. Sometimes we have these moments in this life looking back, but the

resurrection will be one of those moments for us - where there is joy and amazement, and all the odd pieces of our stories that seemed meaningless all resolve into a beautiful story, another one that will feel too good to be true, but one which is the story underneath all the other stories we love to tell.

God makes sin and death and pain and loss and disappointment contribute to future joy.

But remember that Easter isn't primarily about us. It is about what Jesus did in history.

- 1) Cures troubled hearts
- 2) Gives faith where there was doubt
- 3) Gives the greatest of all possible relationships
- 4) Gives meaning to suffering
- 5) Replaces Judgment with Forgiveness

There have been many people in history who have died noble deaths for noble causes. There have been many martyrs. We have volumes of stories of guys like William Wallace who died for freedom. And their deaths accomplished important things.

But none of them rose from the dead.

Which tells us that Jesus was very different than all other martyrs. He actually had power over death and the only one with power like that is God himself.

His death wasn't only symbolic, it wasn't only heroic, it was far more than those things.

The death of Jesus was not just the death of a heroic man, it was the death of Jesus who was truly God and truly man.

So his death carried an infinite weight. And because He was sinless, it was the only undeserved death in history.

But still he died, because He was dying somebody else's death for them. Still he suffered the punishment of God for sin, because he was taking somebody else's punishment for them.

And if you'll turn from any other god, any other ultimate, and even relinquish your own control of your life to Him, if you'll trust in Him and what He accomplished there on the

cross to pay the price for you, than you can receive the guarantee that His death was a death died in your place, that He paid fully for your sin, and that He has given you everlasting life.

We receive that greatest of all possible relationships from Him not by working our way there, not by becoming religious or joining a church, not by giving money, not even by doing important and good things like serving our neighbors.

We receive that relationship by faith - we know that Jesus died and rose for us, we agree that that is the remedy for our sin, and trust that Jesus died for us and turn from whatever took that ultimate place in our life before.

And scripture says that God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

So if today you'll turn to Him, yield to Him, trust in Him, cry out to Him for mercy and forgiveness, He promises to give you eternal life.

Let's pray.

Today, if you have trusted in Christ, if you believe God is working in your life, if you have questions about the faith - email us info@graceroadchurch.org, we'd love to hear from you and speak with you about your faith or prospective faith in Jesus.