

Dear Friends,

This week we come together to celebrate Easter—not the cross or the empty tomb—but in fact the very resurrection of Jesus! Yes, the story of the cross and tomb are important parts of this day, but they are not to become our focus. The cross, an instrument of torture and death, and the tomb, a vessel to contain the dead, appear to be final. And yet God used both to accomplish His will, to bring life back to mankind. Through these instruments of death, He brought eternal restoration.

This is what are celebrating today, complete restoration for those who choose Jesus as Lord. Even moments before His death, we see Jesus claiming a soul hanging on the cross beside Him.

Luke 23:39-43

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Him: “Aren’t You the Messiah? Save Yourself and us!”

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this Man has done nothing wrong.”

⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”

⁴³ Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise.”

Eternal life choices were made that day by two men, both convicted of the same crime and paying the cost for their actions, and yet one answered the call of God. Come to Me. We too were on that cross of death because of our sins. Jesus was on that cross for both of the convicted robbers, just as He was for us. Life and death choices were made that day, just as they are today.

We who answered the call of God and chose Jesus as Savior are to leave our sins at the foot of the cross, but that is not the end of the story. We are to present Jesus to non-believers as the Son of God who pardons our soul from eternal death to eternal life.

John 19:38-42

³⁸ Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

This prominent member of the Jewish council, collecting the body of Jesus, like a lot of believers, was in the shadows of conversion. At just the right time his faith took over, and he was able to serve God by laying His Son to rest. Joseph and Nicodemus chose to proclaim their belief despite the repercussions. They are an inspiration to us.

In this world of people looking for answers, we are called by God to exercise our faith and to use the spiritual gifts He equips us with to proclaim that Jesus Lives! Jesus in His human lifetime was loved and hated, respected and ridiculed, sought after and rejected. He resurrected from the tomb to Kingdom life. The earthly tomb is meant to receive earthly things; it cannot receive and hold the Creator of all things. This is why the women found an empty tomb.

Luke 24:1-8

24 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. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" ⁶ He is not here; He has risen! Remember how He told you, while He was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " ⁸ Then they remembered His words.

We have lived through many Easter celebrations and so know the story well: the women and disciples looking for Jesus in the tomb, and the angel saying, “He is not here He has risen!” In the last part of verse 5, we read the rest of the story: “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

Because of Jesus raising from the dead and living in the Kingdom, we also are no longer dead, but alive to God. We, like Jesus, are witnesses to the truth. We, like Jesus, are alive because Jesus conquered death!

This day, Easter, is a day of rebirth. Hosanna: save us, we pray!

The following scriptures are for reflection on how to view death as we celebrate Easter today and especially as we face tomorrow.

Hebrews 2:14-15

¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

1 Corinthians 15:55

*⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?”*

Romans 8:31

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

He Is Risen!

Archie