

Sermon for Zion Presbyterian Church, April 11, 2021 – 2nd Sunday of Easter

Hymns: 249 – The Day of Resurrection; 252 – He Is Lord; 260 – Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the Risen Lord; Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Scripture: Luke 23:44 – 24:12

Sermon Title: Four Questions

Luke 23:44 – 24:12 (NLT)

By this time it was about noon, and darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. The light from the sun was gone. And suddenly, the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn down the middle. Then Jesus shouted, "Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!" And with those words he breathed his last.

When the Roman officer overseeing the execution saw what had happened, he worshiped God and said, "Surely this man was innocent." And when all the crowd that came to see the crucifixion saw what had happened, they went home in deep sorrow. But Jesus' friends, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching.

Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph. He was a member of the Jewish high council, but he had not agreed with the decision and actions of the other religious leaders. He was from the town of Arimathea in Judea, and he was waiting for the Kingdom of God to come. He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Then he took the body down from the cross and wrapped it in a long sheet of linen cloth and laid it in a new tomb that had been carved out of rock. This was done late on Friday afternoon, the day of preparation, as the Sabbath was about to begin.

As his body was taken away, the women from Galilee followed and saw the tomb where his body was placed. Then they went home and prepared spices and ointments to anoint his body. But by the time they were finished the Sabbath had begun, so they rested as required by the law.

But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes.

The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day."

Then they remembered that he had said this. So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told

the apostles what had happened. But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it. However, Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, he peered in and saw the empty linen wrappings; then he went home again, wondering what had happened.

In this Easter season, on this second Easter Sunday, we remember the death and celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We proclaim that “Christ is Risen!” In song, in Scripture, in story and in sermon, we continue to confess that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; that he descended to the dead; and that on the third day he rose again from the dead. It is our creed. It is our confession. It is the cornerstone of our faith. And it raises, among many others, these four questions:

- Is it true?
- What does it mean?
- What does it matter to me?
- How do I make it my own?

Is it true? It is most assuredly true. Its truth is testified to by many eyewitnesses to the event. We have extensive contemporary documentation proclaiming that very fact, and naming the primary eyewitnesses, as well as inviting investigation of the many hundreds of other eyewitnesses. It is an historical event, with solidly attested historical figures participating, verified by contemporary literary and historical second- and third-party accounts. It is an event which profoundly transformed the character and personality of those most intimately associated with it, people like Peter and Mary and Martha and James and John, among countless others, with no credible alternative explanation to account for these transformations. It is attested by modern archaeology, where discoveries in even the most recent years have consistently corroborated the accuracy of the eyewitness accounts, and which enable us to even so much as pinpoint exactly where, within a few metres and sometimes within a few feet, these momentous events took place. Is it true? As much as history, archaeology, tradition and subsequent impact can ever hope to demonstrate, it is most assuredly true.

What does the Resurrection mean? It means, first of all, that Jesus is who Jesus said he is – the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Jesus proclaimed himself to be the Messiah, the chosen one of God, saying at the very outset of his ministry, that, *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim*

the year of the Lord's favour.” And he did, he did. The impact of his deeds, his words, and his example, resonate to this very day, 2000 years later, throughout every corner of our world.

More than that, Jesus revealed that as the Messiah, he came, *“not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many,”* that he *“must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”* And he was; he was. He was, and is, as the Resurrection proves, the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

The Apostle Paul, initially an opponent of the followers of Jesus, was himself radically and quite unexpectedly converted through an encounter with the Risen Christ. He devoted the remainder of what was to be a busy, often difficult, but incredibly impactful life to spreading the news. And for Paul, the Resurrection was key; the faith stood or fell upon it. He makes this as clear as he can, when writing to his congregation in Corinth (1 Corinthians 15):

If Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave... And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.

But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead.

Paul believed in the Resurrection of Jesus. Paul experienced it firsthand, and spoke with countless others who had as well. And he staked his life – his life now, and his life eternal – on the truth of it. That Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, became no longer a statement of faith – with the Resurrection, it became, and remains, a statement of fact.

What does the Resurrection mean? It means, secondly, that the barrier between God and humanity has been broken down. We are told that when Jesus died, the curtain in the temple, the curtain representing the separation of humanity from God, was torn from top to bottom; that our sinfulness which had for so long come between us and our creator, had been borne by Jesus, carried by him onto the cross, and crucified there; that he took upon himself our sin, our punishment, our death; that through his sacrifice, he made possible our reconciliation, our reunification with our heavenly Father; he made possible our coming home. The Resurrection

proves that this sacrifice, this death, was not a random tragedy, but a part of God's plan to bring us back to God's-self.

What does the Resurrection mean? It means, thirdly, that the power of death is broken. It means our greatest fears, our deepest worries, even death itself, is no match for the power and the love of God. That in our end is our beginning; that this life is not the only life; that we shall be together once more with those whom we have loved and lost and shall never lose again. That we can live in love, in compassion, in kindness, in generosity, for our true life and our eternal reward await us, even as we await our Resurrection in Jesus.

So then, what does the Resurrection mean? It means that Jesus is who he said he is - the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. That the barrier between God and humanity has been broken down. That the power of death is broken. The Resurrection means these things, and it means so much more. But what does it mean to us? What does it matter to me? What does it matter to you?

The Resurrection matters to you because Jesus wasn't just who he said he was for people in long ago Judea and Galilee. Jesus is who he said he is **for you**. Jesus is **your** Saviour. He is **your** Messiah. He has come to set **you** free. When he "*gave his life a ransom for many,*" he gave his life for **you**. When he suffered, and when he died, he suffered and died for **you**. It is the barrier between God and **you**, which he has broken down. It was **your** sinfulness he bore on the cross; it is **your** punishment he endured; it was **your** death he died. Jesus did all of this for **you**. He made possible your coming home. It was God's plan to bring you back into his love. To bring us all back into his love. To bring us all home.

And it matters to you because now, for you, the power of death is broken. Your greatest fears, your deepest worries, even your death itself, is no match for the power and the love of God. It matters to you because this life is not the only life; you shall be together once more with those whom you have loved and lost and shall never lose again. Now, you can live in love, in compassion, in kindness, in generosity, for your true life and your eternal joy await you, even as you – even as we all - await our Resurrection in Jesus.

All those stories, all those miracles, all those images in paintings and movies and stained glass; they all point back to something that happened, something real, something huge, something beyond our ability to comprehend or imagine; they all point back to Jesus living, dying, and living again; and he did it for each of us. He did it – it happened – for **you**. **You** are in the stories. **You** are in the miracles. **You**

are in the paintings and the movies and the stained glass; that's you there; it happened, and it matters, to you.

How do you make it your own? How do you become a part of the story, a part of the song, a part of the Resurrection of Jesus? Open your heart to God's love; open your soul to God's saving grace; open your mind to the teaching of Christ; open your strength to following Jesus, and with the help of the Spirit of God, live in forgiveness, in service, and in the sure and certain hope in the Resurrection of Jesus, and of your resurrection with him. In short, turn to God, and with your heart, your words, and your actions, say Thank You. Thank you. "For creating me, for loving me, for living and dying for me, for forgiving me, for making me your child. Thank you. Thank you for being the Saviour of the World. Be my Saviour, too. Be my Lord. I will follow you. Amen."

And together with the billion strong around the world who know, beyond all doubt, that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; that he descended to the dead; and that on the third day he rose again from the dead; shout out these words:

Christ is Risen; "He Is Risen For You!"
Christ is Risen; "He Is Risen For Me!"
Christ is Risen; "He Is Risen Indeed!"
"Hallelujah!" Amen!