

“Jesus Is Risen: Giving Reality to Second Chances”

Mathew 26:75; John 20:11-18; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Sermon for the Resurrection of our Lord 2022

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

Rev. Charles Westby, Pastor

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Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia.

That certainly is good news. It reminds me of what Isaiah the prophet says: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns” (Isaiah 52:7 ESV).

These feet are your feet today. They can be your feet any day.

God and Jesus reign. The resurrection of Jesus is the demonstration of it. All the actions of the human beings and the devil that brought about the suffering and death of Jesus are undone. They are reversed. They brought death through injustice, evil intent, cowardice, and betrayal. God has brought life out of death, because Jesus is risen. God has the ultimate victory.

How do we know He is risen? They saw Him. They touched Him. Jesus appeared to the eleven and those with them. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 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.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet (Luke 24:38-42 ESV).

Mary Magdalene stood outside the tomb weeping. She was beside herself with grief. They had put Jesus, her salvation and everything good she had known, to death. And now even His dead body was gone, apparently (John 20:2). It didn’t seem to even register with her that two angels were talking to her, she was so distraught (John 20:12-13).

She turns around. It is Jesus, but she doesn’t recognize Him at first. She thinks it is the gardener, and that he has taken Jesus’ body away (John 20:14-15). He speaks to her. He calls her name. She hears His voice. She sees Him. She hugs Him. He tells her not to cling to Him but to go and tell the eleven that He has risen and will be ascending to the right hand of God. She goes to them and says, “I have seen the Lord” (John 20:16-18).

But this did not happen in private. It was not some subjective experience only in the head of a few people. Paul says that Jesus was seen by Peter and then by more than five hundred of His followers at one time (1 Cor. 15:6). Seen with the eyes. Jesus’ resurrection was an objective thing, not a private mental experience, or a private opinion. Many saw Him at the same time.

And how do *we* know about it? We say by faith, yes. But this means that we do not know about it by having the eye-witness experience of it as they did. We know about it by hearing the good news and by believing the testimony. Paul says, “Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed” (1 Cor. 15:11 ESV).

You are part of this great tradition in the Christian church of the preaching and telling and celebrating that has gone on down through the ages to us right here. It all began when they saw Him, heard Him, and touched Him.

This is no different than many things that we believe, like, How do you know that George Washington crossed the Delaware River to attack a garrison at Trenton, New Jersey during the revolutionary war? Were you an eye-witness? No you weren’t. But many others were. And it has been told down through the last couple of hundred years.

But having said that, the resurrection of Jesus requires faith in a way that believing that

George Washington crossing the Delaware does not. George Washington crossing the Delaware is not something unusual, unexpected, outside the normal course of events in this world. But the resurrection of Jesus is, even though it took place in this world. It has to be so that we can have the hope of forgiveness and life arising out of death for each of us, because forgiveness and life arising out of death is not something that happens in the ordinary course of this world.

And so believing that Jesus rose from the dead takes faith in this way: that our faith in Jesus' resurrection does not rest in human power; it does not rest in what human reason ordinarily understands, or what human beings can ordinarily do and not do, in this case, cannot do. Rather, as Paul says, his preaching was not in the persuasive words of human wisdom but in the demonstration of the Holy Spirit and power so that our faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 Cor. 2:4-5).

Paul means that his preaching was about Christ crucified and Christ risen. The Holy Spirit empowers this preaching and accompanies it with the power to penetrate the darkness of sin-wearied and grief-burdened hearts with the light that is Christ; the light that is sin atoned for and pardoned, and the light that is life arising out of death.

And so they saw Him and preached it. We have heard the preaching in the church in our time and place, here, and participate in it. But we believe that Christ is risen not by the powers of human reason, even though human reason has no valid objection to it; we believe it in the demonstration of the Holy Spirit and power, so that our faith rests not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Believing in our hearts that Jesus is risen is just like Jesus' resurrection and a miracle of the same kind, for it is life from death, spiritual life in God arising out of spiritual death, being surprised by joy, as C.S. Lewis put it. The proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead raises our hearts to faith to believe it and hope in it.

This hope is a specific thing. It is that we too will rise from death in Him. It is also that Jesus' resurrection makes second chances possible.

We can see this with Peter. At the last supper, Jesus told the twelve that they would all desert Jesus in His time of trial, when He was arrested. Jesus went further and told Peter that Peter was going to deny Jesus three times that night. Peter, boldly and confidently said, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You" (Matthew 26:34-35 ESV).

Then came the time when Peter's boldness and confidence was put to the test: "You are also one of His disciples, aren't you," they said to Peter in the courtyard outside where the high priest was putting Jesus on trial. "I do not know the man," Peter said. He said it three times. The third time he even cursed and swore (Matt. 26:69-74).

Jesus then looked at Peter. Peter remembered what Jesus had said (Luke 22:61). What he had just done came over him like a flood of fear and shame. He went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22:62). He was so deeply disappointed in himself. But, fortunately, he did not take matters into his own hands to destroy himself.

One day before Jesus ascended to the Father's right hand, Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, James and John, and two of the other twelve disciples, were back in Galilee. They went fishing. Jesus was on the shore. They had not caught anything. Jesus told them to cast the net on the other side of the boat. They caught so many fish that they could barely drag the net onto the shore. John says to Peter, "It is the Lord" (John 21:1-7)

Peter meets Jesus on the shore. What will Jesus say to Peter? Scolding? Rejection, like just doing to Peter what Peter did to Him? No. Rather, three times Jesus asks Peter if Peter loves Him. Three times Peter says, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Three times Jesus tells Peter,

feed my lambs, feed my sheep (John 21:15-17).

Jesus restores Peter and calls him into the ministry of the Gospel. That conversation was like forgiveness to Peter and life from the dead.

Now that Jesus is risen, Peter's abandonment of Jesus is overcome. It is in the past. It is forgiven. Peter now has a second chance.

In fact, the resurrection of Jesus is the power of a second chance for every human who was involved in His crucifixion, if only they would take advantage of it. It makes turning to the truth possible. It makes repentance possible. It makes rising in faith in God possible. Jesus' resurrection is the second chance for each of us in relation to God, since it was also because of our sins that Jesus died. His resurrection is the event that meets all of those events head-on and moves us beyond them in life arising from death. Jesus' resurrection is God's action that is His response to all human actions of sin and death. It is God's action to restore. It is the reality that makes possible the forgiveness that raises us out of the death of what we have done into new life with God and one another. It is the reality that can bring healing out of mourning. It is the reality that makes second chances possible.

So you and I too in Christ's resurrection hear and receive absolution, for Christ rose to speak peace to them and to you and me, to all the nations. In His resurrection, He raises us up and puts us on our feet again, as He leads us to the promised land of our resurrection and eternal life in Him.

What joy and hope then it is to be able to say today and every day, Jesus is risen. He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Praise be to God. Amen.