

Easter

Luke 24:1-12

April 17, 2022 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

Victorious!

How would you describe Jesus? If we could ask the people in Jerusalem on that Friday when the sun stopped shining to describe Jesus, they would have used all sorts of adjectives – ridiculed, abused, mocked, suffering, thirsty, lonely, forsaken, dead. But one word they would not have used to describe Jesus would be victorious. On that Friday when Jesus died, he looked like a loser. Friends ran away. His own nation rejected him. His limp and lifeless corpse dangling from spikes driven through it. And yet, this morning, we hear the great good news that Jesus is Victorious!

Women who saw Jesus die and get buried were walking to his tomb early Sunday morning. They were carrying spices that they planned to place around his body. It was a way of honoring him, just as we place flowers on the graves of our loved ones. Tears filled their eyes. Their friend, their Savior, their Lord was gone. Despair and sadness gripped their hearts. And on top of that, they had no idea how they were going to solve the problem of that big stone rolled in front of his tomb.

I think we can all identify with those women, putting one foot in front of the other not knowing how we are going to solve our problems. There are all sorts of things in our lives that we can not fix – health issues, strained relationships, inflation, crime, loneliness, etc. Sometimes it feels like we are simply plodding through life without making progress. There are all sorts of things we wish we could fix in the world, in our family, in our lives. We keep wishing that things were different, that things would get better. Our eyes fill with tears because of loved ones who are no longer with us. Or, we cry because of loved ones who ARE with us but are not in a good spot in life. Frustration is constantly nipping at our heels. The future seems dark and scary. What sort of adjectives would people use to describe you? Healthy, wealthy and wise? Maybe, but probably not. Maybe worried? Scared? Stressed? Depressed? Failure? Loser? Lonely? Confused? Aging? Sinful? Dying? We can all identify with those women.

They did not know that an angel had been to the tomb before them. They were horrified when they noticed that the stone was rolled away. How would you react if you went to visit the grave of a loved one and noticed a pile of dirt around the grave and an empty casket? The women looked more carefully into the tomb and were surprised by two angels who said (:5-7), “**Why**

do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!” That was the first Easter sermon ever. The angels said that Jesus was victorious!

Last year, the Milwaukee Bucks were victorious. They won the NBA Championship. It’s wonderful when you win a game, or your favorite team wins. It’s wonderful when you accomplish a goal and you feel successful. But that moment is fleeting. It doesn’t last. The very next day after winning the NBA Championship, the Bucks were tied for first place...as well as last place. As of this morning, the Bucks are in third place. There is an old Latin phrase; *Sic transit gloria*. It means, “Thus passes glory,” or, “Glory fades away.” The ancient Romans lived in the same world that we live in today. Happiness and victory in this world does not last. That’s what makes the first Easter sermon so special. Jesus rose victorious, never to die again. He was victorious and still is and ever will be. The devil and death tried their best, but they could not hold him in his grave. And that changes everything.

The resurrection proves that the Bible is true. Throughout the Old Testament, God said that the promised Messiah could back to life. That’s a pretty bold prediction. If the Bible got that right, we can trust it for everything else. God will keep all of his promises to you. He will hear and answer all your prayers. He will send his angels to watch over you. He will never leave you or forsake you. And on and on.

The resurrection proves that Jesus is true God. No mere mortal could come back to life on his own. Once you’re dead, you’re dead. A dead person can not even wish to be alive, let alone ask someone to give him CPR, let alone perform CPR on himself. But Jesus did come back to life proving that he is true God. You can trust him for every physical and spiritual blessing you need.

The resurrection proves that your sins are forgiven. God the Father sent Jesus into this world to take away the sins of the world. If his death was not enough to pay for each and every one of your sins and mine, then the Father would have told Jesus that he had to stay in his tomb because his work was not yet done. The fact that Jesus rose is proof positive that your sins are forgiven, completely erased. Every impure thought, every bad word, every dirty deed is completely gone. Do not turn your back on this great good news. Turn away from all your sins and turn toward Jesus who is eager to embrace you as his dear child.

The resurrection also proves that you will rise from the dead. Through faith – simple trust in the heart – you are connected to Jesus. For most of you, that happened at your baptism. Since we are connected to Christ, we will follow him wherever he goes. He died so, yes, we will die. But Jesus rose and – since we are connected to him – we also will rise and enjoy a glorified body with no more aches or pains, no more stress, sorrows or sadness. Perfect unending health and happiness. This crazy world with all of its crazy issues – war, crimes, greed, bitterness, hatred, racism, harsh weather, storms, broken hearts and homes, disease and death – all of it is going to be gone forever. Death is now just a doorway. Because of Jesus you will experience perfect joy and gladness without end. Victorious forever. It's hard for our minds to grasp such happiness.

The women at the tomb that first Easter morning were not yet rejoicing. The angel reminded the women how Jesus predicted he would be crucified and then come back to life. Then they remembered, but it was still hard for them to wrap their minds around that truth. Peter also went to the tomb to investigate. Indeed, Jesus was not there. The strips of linen lying there as if Jesus' body had simply evaporated through the cloths let him know that Jesus had risen. But, his mind was not grasping it yet. It's hard for us to grasp this truth, too. You've been to funerals. You know that once someone is dead, they are dead. There is nothing that you and I can do to change that. But Jesus can. And Jesus did. How do we know? How can we know for sure?

Did you notice something about Luke's Easter account? It's hidden in plain sight. You do not see Jesus at all. Even if you keep reading through chapter 24, you do not see Jesus until late in the day when he revealed himself to the two Emmaus disciples and then, finally, to the rest of his disciples. What lesson is Luke trying to teach us? Why not start with the visible and physical proof of Jesus' resurrection? It seems to me that Luke is pointing us to God's Word. Instead of Jesus being in the tomb to greet the women, he sent angels who shared God's Word and reminded them of what Jesus said. On the long road to Emmaus, Jesus kept pointing those disciples to God's Word before he revealed himself to them. How do we know that Jesus rose? He gives us his Word, the Bible.

Where can you find Jesus today? Where he has always been – in his Word. Jesus did eventually show himself to his disciples and even a crowd of over 500 people. By giving them the physical proof of his resurrection AFTER they had heard the word, he was teaching them – and us – that we need to look to God's Word first. My friends, do not expect Jesus to make a physical appearance to you. Do not expect him to appear in your hospital room and

instantly cure you of cancer or COVID. Do not expect him show up at the border between Russia and Ukraine and make all the fighting stop. Do not expect Jesus to reveal himself in Washington DC and straighten out every crooked politician, or pass the perfect laws for peace on this planet. Do not expect Jesus to physically come into your house to fix everything that is wrong with you and your life. Jesus does not need to make a physical appearance because he has already given you everything you need in his Word.

When Jesus seems far away from us, maybe it's because we are far away from his Word. When you see sin and its sad effects in your life, find Jesus in his Word as he tells you that you are forgiven. When things in the world and in your life are not going that well, find Jesus in his Word as he tells you that he is working all things together for your eternal good even though you do not always see it or feel it. When you are confused and wondering who you can trust, turn to Jesus in his Word as he tells you that he is the way, the truth and the life. When you are worn out and weak, turn to Jesus in his Word as he tells you that he will provide you daily bread and strength for each moment. (And in the process you learn to trust him even when you can't see any solution and your faith in him gets even stronger.) When the future looks dark and dreary, find Jesus in his Word as he tells you that you have a bright and glorious future. When you face the death of a loved one or your own death, find Jesus in his Word as he tells you (John 14:19), “**Because I live, you also will live.**” No matter what situation you are in life, find Jesus in his Word. Turn to his Word, again and again and again. Make church attendance a priority in your schedule. Spend quality and quantity time with God's Word during the week. Spending time with God's Word can not be something that we do just once in a while as if it was a hobby – something that we enjoy when we are not too busy with other things. No. We would not stop eating because we are too busy with other things. God's Word is the food that your soul needs. Feed your faith. Nourish your soul. Hang onto Jesus no matter what. He conquered sin, death and the devil for you. You need him and he is yours. Find Jesus in his Word as you hear again and again that Jesus is victorious and, therefore, so are you. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.