

Easter  
Luke 24:1-12

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Today we celebrate the Glory of Easter. Jesus Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! This is the most important day of the Christian church. It is so much more pivotal to our faith than Christmas, because Easter gives what happened on Christmas significance. Without the resurrection, the birth at Bethlehem, amazing as it was from a virgin and the Holy Spirit, would not have made a stir in history. The story was only written down by the gospel writers after Jesus rose from the dead and they knew, they were certain, that he was the Messiah, the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, the Son of God. Only after his death and resurrection did the disciples start to recall what Jesus had said, what he had done, they started to tell others of his miracles, of his life, of his healings and his promises. And before the Gospel writers even wrote their first words describing this resurrection and what it all meant, years before they would write their gospels, St. Paul was writing about the Resurrection to the early churches that were gathering for worship through out the Mediterranean. In our second reading we get Paul's explanation of this first importance, the mystery and power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And he is right, it is a mystery. I wonder what those forensic or police detective shows would do to explain this mystery. Those TV show's entire premise is usually trying to solve the When, what, why, where and how a death has occurred. I wonder what they would do with the story that Paul is talking about and what Luke is writing about in our Gospel reading. What would they think about a dead body that suddenly is gone and the grave empty. Throughout history people have been trying to do this very thing, study what happened, why, where, how, when. There have been studies done by believers and ones done by atheists trying to prove the resurrection never happened. Even in the first century 20-30 years after the resurrection Paul is grappling with the same debate. People are beginning to say that Jesus didn't really bodily rise from the dead. Paul begins chapter fifteen pointing out that the resurrection is the beginning of the gospel, the good news, the foundation of our faith. St. Paul the trained lawyer starts to lay out his debate from the beginning of chapter 15 he lists his evidence and then he sets up the fallacies to knock down only to prove again the very fact that the resurrection took place, on this our entire faith is based on, and on this good news is we have everlasting hope.

Paul starts by telling tells them first that he has preached to them the first of importance, that Jesus died for our sins, was buried and rose again to life everlasting. He is saying this as a fact of history. Let's look at some of those facts ourselves today.

First, Jesus was dead. But after Three days is ALIVE! Paul had heard the rumors, some people may have thought Jesus wasn't really dead when he was placed in the tomb. Many, even today, believe Jesus was not dead. They think He just went unconscious, then regained consciousness and came out of the tomb. However, the Romans were experts at excuting people. They knew how someone should and can die, and die horrible they had it down to a science to make it painful and last a while so that others may see and learn from this pain.. They knew dead when they saw it.

The gospels say that Joseph of Arimathea, a Jewish religious leader of the Sanhedrin asked for the body so he could bury it before the Jewish Sabbath began. Before Pilate would grant him permission to remove the Body, Mark tells us that Pilate summoned the Roman guard to make sure that Jesus was truly dead. And the Roman executioner confessed it to be so. John's gospel tells us that Pilate even ordered the soldiers to break the legs of the crucified to make sure they couldn't lift themselves up anymore and breath, so in fact suffocating them to death by their own weight. According to John when they came to Jesus they saw that he was already dead, but they double checked anyway and drove a spear into his side, and blood and water poured out. Jesus was in fact dead.

They took his lifeless body down and placed it in a tomb and sealed it shut with a large stone, a round rock that easily could have weighed hundred and hundreds of pounds.. Matthew even records that the Jewish leaders had confirmed that Jesus was dead, but they wanted to make sure no one tampered with his grave and said he rose, so they requested Pilate seal the tomb with his seal and place a guard there. A roman guard was a squad of soldiers from 12 to 30 men. These men were exceptionally disciplined. If any were to fall asleep during duty, the entire bunch was executed. So Jesus beaten, whipped, flogged wounds all over his back, nailed to a cross and hung there for hours, a spear wound in his side, would he be able to regain enough strength after one day in the tomb, much less three days without food and water to move the thousand pound stone without disturbing the guard, sneak past them, then walk miles to see His disciples on feet that had been pierced with a nail the size of a railroad spike? No, Jesus was dead.

Another theory says that the women who went to anoint Jesus' body went to the wrong tomb. But Matthew, Mark and Luke all agree that the women were there when they laid Jesus in the grave, they saw the stone, they saw the seal, they saw the guard, there was no mistake.

Yet another theory says that the Jewish leaders took the body to keep the disciples from stealing it and saying he came back to life. But if you think about it that couldn't be true either, because as soon as the disciples start preaching the resurrection, all the chief priests had to do is produce the dead body and show the people their lies. But they couldn't stop them, because Jesus was alive.

Some think maybe the disciples saw a hallucination a ghost. Even Thomas thought that when the others said they saw Jesus. But the gospels tell us people saw him and touched him. Thomas himself touches his side and his hands. The disciples even eat with him after his resurrection. The last time I heard a hallucination don't eat food or can be touched.

And one last theory, this one I have heard says that the disciples stole the body. But this one can't be believed also. What makes someone think that all of a sudden the disciples who had fled, were in hiding, sacred for their lives would suddenly be brave enough to overcome a Roman guard, and sneak away with the body of Christ. Can you imagine a bunch of fisherman sneaking past the guard, moving the stone ever so quietly, and taking the body? Then there's the fact that they fearlessly proclaimed the resurrection, being threatened with beatings, imprisonment, stoning and eventually all but John death for preaching that Jesus is alive. No one willingly suffers and dies for what they know to be a lie.

And then there are the witnesses, Mary, the women, Peter, John the other disciples, on the road to Emmaus, on the seashore at breakfast, On the Road with Paul. To the 500 witnesses, and finally on Ascension day to the large crowd that gathers outside Jerusalem. In any courtroom around the world two or three witnesses are generally enough to assume factual confidence. But we have hundreds and hundreds of witnesses. Even historical books like the historian Josephus mention the stories of Jesus' resurrection and the movement called Christianity.

He rose from grave. Make no mistake. It is a historical fact. And Paul says it is also a Theological Fact. "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." The whole of Christianity rests on the resurrection. Christ has been raised, and that gives me hope. It goes beyond just being a theological teaching. It goes to the very heart of where I am now in life and where I will spend eternity. It goes beyond the very heart of where you are now in life and where you will spend eternity. For in fact "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep... Each in his own order, Christ the first fruits and then at his coming those who belong to Christ."

When Jesus was nailed to that cross and breathed his last, when he was sealed in that tomb, the Romans thought it was over, the Jewish chief-priests and Sanhedrin thought it was

over, the Disciples thought it was over. But thank God it wasn't over – not by a long shot. For with out a doubt, Jesus Christ is Risen, He is Risen Indeed!  
Amen.

May the peace and grace of God be with you throughout this Easter Season. Amen.

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Heavenly Lord, We come to celebrate this day the victory over the grave that you have won for all people. The fact that death did not hold your Son, assures us that death will not hold us. That he has come to give us all new life and a place in your Kingdom to come. We give you thanks this day Lord for this Resurrection promise.

Lord in your Mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, In Faithful obedience to you, Christ gave his life that death might die. Bless all those who have given of their lives for peace and the restoration of life in all the parts of the earth. Be with all those in need around the world who are afflicted by natural disasters, wars, and violence and abuse. Send your spirit of comfort to raise up hearers of your love and grant us to work together as one people in your creation so that all your people may live without fear, disease, or pains.

Lord in your Mercy, hear our prayer

God, in his death and resurrection, Christ our Lord revealed your merciful heart. Strengthen those who look to you in the midst of pain and suffering. In your compassion, bring the power of the resurrection to those who are sick or in need, especially this day we pray for our hospitalized our shut-ins and all we lift up before you now in our prayers....

Lord in your Mercy... hear our prayer

Almighty God, empower your people today, as you empowered those first disciples. Breathe the power of the Holy Spirit into our lives so that we can be filled with courage, boldness, and Vigor for the life of your Word. Inspire all bishops, pastors, and other ministers in the ways of wisdom, love, and integrity. Be with the people gathered at this Church with our newest baptized members to our longest members, make us one family, filled with your grace and your peace, to go forth as witnesses to your resurrection throughout our community and beyond.

Lord in your Mercy..... hear our prayer.

Into your hand O lord we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy through your Son, Jesus Christ.

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ we are of all people most to be pitied.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.