

The Resurrection of our Lord / April 9, 2023

Matthew 28:8

“So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell His disciples.”

He is risen. He is risen indeed. A blessed Easter morning as we gather to remember Jesus' resurrection and anticipate our share in His resurrection, which we will receive at His return and the renewal of all things. We celebrate His resurrection as the first-fruits of those who believe. St. Paul writes, “If Christ has not been raised your faith is futile and you are still in your sins...But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Christ has been raised as the first-fruits. On the day of the great harvest, He will call us and all believers to rise and take our seats at the feast of life in His Father's kingdom. When Jesus instituted His holy supper He told the disciples, “I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the day I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.” We receive a foretaste of that great feast today, partaking of His body and blood in the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

We celebrate Jesus' resurrection as the assurance that His words are true and that He Himself is truth and life. We can trust His words when He calls us to believe in Him as our God and Saviour. His resurrection shows that He is the resurrection and the life and that whoever believes in Him will live, even though they die and that whoever lives in Him will never truly die. Jesus' resurrection shows that He is God's Son from eternity, as He said both to His disciples and those who crucified Him. As He hung dying on the cross the chief priests mocked Him saying, “He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now if He desires Him. For He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” God delivered Him and declared Him His Son, by raising Him on the third day. He will deliver all who believe in Him in the same way. Jesus' resurrection shows God accepted His sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sin. We celebrate His resurrection in our lives and join the women at the tomb in telling others the good news of Christ the Saviour.

Jesus' resurrection came as a surprise even to His closest disciples. Judging by the angel's words of reminder and their intention in coming to the tomb early in the morning, the women didn't remember Him mentioning it. The women came seeking the dead, not the living. Jesus' enemies remembered. They sealed the tomb and set a guard, in case the disciples should steal the body and falsely claim He had risen. The woman came not to steal His body, but to anoint it for burial. They were shocked and completely taken by surprise when the angel said, “He is not here, for He has risen, as He said...Go quickly and tell His disciples.” They went with haste to tell the good news that He had risen from the dead!

They were surprised, but they shouldn't have been. Jesus spoke often of His resurrection. After He showed His divine glory to Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, He told them not to say anything until after He had risen. He told the disciples that it was necessary for Him to suffer and die and be raised on the third day. Resurrection was not a foreign concept to the Jewish people. His resurrection was prophesied by King David, who wrote not of himself, but of his great descendant in Psalm 16, saying, “For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let you Holy One see corruption.” Centuries earlier Isaiah sang about the resurrection of believers, saying, “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy.” Jesus' resurrection was the fulfilment of the words of the prophets and the beginning of His work of creating a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

This morning we celebrate the resurrection of Christ as the first-fruits of those who believe. We anticipate the resurrection of all who believe in His name and receive baptism into His death and resurrection. In baptism we are given a share in His death and resurrection. St. Paul wrote, “For if we have been united with Him in death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.” As we share in His death and resurrection, we also share with others the joyous good news that He is risen, so that they too may believe and receive life in His name.

The gospel writers, each in their own way, capture different aspects of the mystery and excitement of the resurrection of our Lord. John focuses on Jesus' interaction with Mary Magdalene and the disciple Thomas. We see her deep grief turn into an unimaginable joy when Jesus calls her name and her eyes are opened to see Him, her Saviour and Lord. One day Jesus will call us by name and we will see His face. In Thomas, John encapsulates the doubts of the disciples, who did not believe the witness of the woman, until they saw with their own eyes. Like them, Thomas would not believe until he saw Jesus with his own eyes. Jesus calls us to believe for the sake of the witness of word. He asks Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen?” He says to us, “Blessed

are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” We believe through the witness of the word. When we believe the word, we see Christ risen from the dead.

Mark wrote the shortest gospel and gives the briefest account of the resurrection. He emphasizes the utter shock of the dawning of the new creation in Jesus’ resurrection. In his account the women flee from the tomb terrified. Jesus’ resurrection turned the world upside down. It should have the same effect on the lives of believers. Luke shows the disbelief of the disciples, who refuse to believe the witness of the scriptures. Jesus opens their minds to understand the scriptures that said it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer these things and then enter into His glory. Matthew emphasises the witness of the women, who with great excitement run to tell the disciples the angel’s message, “He is not here, for He has arisen, as He said.” We share in their excitement and witness.

All the evangelists emphasize the need for us to believe through witness of the word, spoken by the angels and the women, in accordance with the witness of the scriptures. The women and the disciples first encountered the resurrected Christ through the word. The women through the words of the angel, the disciples through the words of the women. We encounter Christ in the witness of their words recorded in the holy scriptures, which are written to make us wise to eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus. We have the same word spoken to us as to them, as an anchor for our faith that we would know for certain that Christ has been raised and that God accepted His sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins.

God values nothing more highly than faith in His word and belief in His promises. In Genesis it says that “Abraham believed God and God counted it to him as righteousness.” The author of Hebrews goes so far as to say, “that without faith it is impossible to please Him.” To that end it is important to note that everyone who saw Christ risen from the dead first encountered Him in the words and witness of others. The angels told the women. They ran to tell the disciples. Jesus met them and they worshipped Him. The women told the disciples. Later that day Jesus came to them and they worshipped Him. We were invited to see Jesus in the word and know Him as Saviour through the witness of others. We encounter Christ in His word. Christ comes to us in the word. We see Christ through His word. Christ speaks to us in His word. He gives us faith to believe and opens our hearts to receive Him through the word and by the working of the Holy Spirit. We speak the word to others, because we too are given the blessing and privilege of telling others the good news of Easter that He is risen.

God bless us both to believe that Christ is risen and to share the glad news with others that through the word and by the working of the Holy Spirit they too may believe in Jesus as their God and Saviour. In His Name. Amen