

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“This Good News”

Rev. David K. Groth
Easter Sunday, 2022
Luke 24:1-12

Are you one that likes to walk around cemeteries? I am. Cemeteries are quiet, reflective places. Walking through Lutheran cemetery in Watertown, when I see the familiar names, sometimes I smile, sometimes I give thanks to God. This one was a quiet and humble saint, that one was loud and arrogant, and also a saint. But all's quiet in a cemetery. It's a peaceful, contemplative walk. I never expect any surprises.

But then, there's the tomb of Jesus, and what happened there turned the world upside down. Three women, friends and followers of Jesus, set off for the cemetery early on Sunday morning. It's mostly dark; there's just the beginning of a faint glow on the eastern horizon. They are going to anoint the body with spices and oils according to custom. They are not expecting anything unusual. On the way, they are probably recalling the events of the past week. The parade on Sunday, His arrest on Thursday, how unjust the trial was, followed by the inhumanity of his flogging and crucifixion. Surely they expressed their anger at Judas' betrayal, and their irritation with the other eleven for running for cover like startled rabbits.

When they arrive at the tomb, to their surprise the heavy stone has been rolled away from the entrance of the tomb. Is this the work of a grave robber? But what was there to take? Have they removed His remains to inflict further abuses on it?

When they look inside, they are astonished to see two men standing there in dazzling apparel. Blithely, they say, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen.” The message was not that someone has broken into the tomb, but rather that someone has broken out!

The women hurried back and told everything to the disciples, but their words seemed to them an idle tale. Of course, they did. Things like that just don't happen. And so it has been, down through the centuries. Many simply will not believe it because they know better.

But does that really make sense? Just because we cannot do something, does that necessarily mean God cannot do it either?

Some people try to domesticate the Easter account and tame it. They call it a metaphor for the fact that his followers, even after his horrific death, felt forgiven by their Lord. But does *that* make sense? Can you imagine Paul and the other apostles racing around the Mediterranean (and to their deaths) in order to tell people they felt forgiven?

Some try to reduce the Resurrection of Jesus to a myth. The resurrection of Jesus is a symbol of the cycle of nature or the circle of life. But C.S. Lewis said those who think that the New Testament is a myth just haven't read many myths. Myths are timeless and teach timeless truths. They have a “once upon a time” feel to them, or, to bring them up to date, “a long time ago, in a galaxy far away.” Myths are not historically specific.

But the Gospel writers are eager to tell us that Jesus' birth, for instance, took place in Bethlehem while Quirinius was governor of Syria and Augustus was Emperor of Rome. It took place at a definite moment and place in history. We know Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate. We know Pilate was governor from 26 to 36 AD. We can examine the coins that Pontius Pilate himself designed and put into circulation. Of all the towns and villages and cities named in the New Testament, we know where nearly 100% of them are. And in a speech recorded in Acts, Peter tells his listeners about Jesus who was put to death and whom God raised from death. Then he adds, almost as an aside, that he and the other Apostles “ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.” This is just not the way mythmakers talk.

Moreover, the Greek word used most often by Paul to characterize his message is *euangelion*, which carries the sense of “good news.” The heroic gods of Greek mythology might be intriguing and illuminating, but the one thing they are not is news. Paul is not speaking about myths. He wants to take everyone by the shoulders, look them in the eye and tell them about something that has changed the world, and at the heart of it is the good news of the death and resurrection of a man named Jesus.

Now, Christians have been pondering the implications of this good news for two millennia, so there are countless possibilities, but I will focus on just three. First, the resurrection of Jesus means Jesus is Lord. *Iesous Kyrios*. Jesus is Lord. It's the first creed of the early Christians. It's found everywhere in Paul's letters and was likely on his lips when he

preached. However, he preached mostly in lands conquered and occupied by the Roman empire. And when the Romans conquered the land, they were quick to demand their subjects swear that “Caesar is Lord”, meaning everyone owes ultimate allegiance to Caesar. But Paul is saying the true Lord is not Caesar, but the one whom Caesar put to death and whom God raised from the dead. That goes a long way to explaining why Paul spent a good amount of time in Roman prisons and why he was eventually decapitated by the Romans under Caesar Nero. If Jesus is Lord, it also goes a long way to explaining why nations like North Korea are still persecuting Christians unto death, because Mr. Kim likes to think he’s Lord in those parts, and the faithful Christians there are not playing along.

Now, if Jesus is Lord, it also means you are not. If Jesus is Lord, it means your political party is not. If Jesus is Lord, it means all that is trending in our culture is not. If Jesus is Lord, mutual consent is not sufficient grounds for sex outside of marriage. If Jesus is Lord, we must render to Caesar what is Caesar’s, because our Lord Jesus said we must. We could mine that vein for more oar, but you get the gist. If the crucified Jesus is risen, it means Jesus is Lord and we simply must make him unambiguously the center of our lives, our decisions, our words, our actions. So, 1) the resurrection means Jesus is Lord.

Second, the resurrection of Jesus means His promises are true. It ratifies the extraordinary claims Jesus makes about himself. When His followers saw Him alive again, they knew immediately He is who He said He was. When Thomas saw the risen Lord, he fell to his knees and said, “My Lord and My God.” It ratifies the claims Jesus made about Himself, but it also confirms the promises He made to us, such as “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved”, or “This is my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins”, or “I am coming back to take you to be where I am” or “we will all be changed, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changes.” If Christ is raised from the dead, all the promises have been confirmed, and we too will be raised physically. It also means God is still active in this world and in your life. He has not given up on this world that He loves, or on you as a person He loves. It means God really does have wonderful plans for you.

And finally, the third implication for us is this: If Jesus is risen from the dead, it means God’s love is more powerful than anything else in the world including your sin and your death. The bible teaches that Jesus is the Lamb of God. He has taken on the sins of the world, the sins of humanity, all of it, all of yours: the hatred and envy and jealousy, the violent impulses, the cruelty, the injustices, scapegoating, the slander, lust, adultery, lying, theft, covetousness . . . anything on that list belong to you? Not anymore, because it was all on him. His love is more powerful than that list.

For a time, it appeared our sins overwhelmed Him. It appeared they were too much for Him. But He fought not with weapons of man, not with brute power, but rather with grace and mercy. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” The resurrection shows these words were not spoken in vain, and the battle was not fought in vain.

Afterwards, when Jesus appeared before His disciples, he typically did two things: He spoke the word *Shalom* to them, peace. Then He showed them His wounds, how He earned our peace with God. On the one hand we should not minimize the depth of our depravity and sin. On the other hand, because Jesus is risen from the dead, we know His love is greater than any possible sin of ours. We killed Him with our sin, but Jesus rose from the dead, victorious over our sin, and returned to us His forgiving love.

Paul expressed this amazing grace with these achingly beautiful words: “I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” That is, in the Resurrection of Jesus God has won the victory over sin, and over death itself.

This is the Good News that was first announced to the women in the empty tomb. This is the Good News that has echoed up and down through the centuries. This is the Good News that has been proclaimed once again to you this morning. Jesus is risen from the dead, and it means,

1. Jesus is Lord.
2. His promises are true.
3. His love is more powerful than anything else in the world, even sin and death.

Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!