

Easter Day

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[0:00] Lord Christ, we praise you on this most glorious day for the victory that you won for us.

! We thank you and we praise you as the conquering king over sin and death,! We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Christ is risen! The Lord is risen! That's a little weak. Let's do that again. Hallelujah! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

Well done. Now, imagine, I have a short story for you. Imagine a man who has spent his whole life underground. From birth, he has lived in a dim cave, never seen the sun, never breathing fresh air. Everything he knows is shaped by shadows and echoes. Over time, he learns how to survive in that shadow.

[1:36] He says, He is living in the darkness. He is living in the darkness. And occasionally, voices reach him from above. They describe to him a world of light, of open skies, the warmth of the sun against your skin, colors beyond imagination.

And they urge him, these voices, come up! There is more to life than this. And the voices are right. What they describe is beautiful. Compelling, even. But there's a problem. He cannot lift himself out of that cave.

No matter how inspired he feels. No matter how much he wants that world that is being described to him. They cannot give him the strength to rise.

There's nothing he can do to transform his condition. Then one day, someone descends into the cave. Not just to speak to him, but to act.

[2:45] He takes hold of the man. Lifts him up. And brings him out of darkness into light. And for the first time, the man sees the sun.

But more than that, his whole relationship to the cave has changed. He still remembers the cave. He can still go near it.

But it is no longer his home. Everything has changed. Nothing is as it was ever again. That is what St. Paul is saying in our epistle reading this morning.

If then you have been raised with Christ. Seek the things that are above. Where Christ is. Seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things that are above. Not on things that are on earth. For you have died. For you have died. And your life is hidden with Christ in God.

[3:55] Christianity is not just an aspiration to better living. Christianity is a declaration of transformation through the divine power that raises the dead to life.

It is the declaration that in Christ. We have been brought out of death into life. And given abundant eternal life through his resurrection.

Christ is risen. And because he is risen. You have been raised with him. Let's read St. Paul's words in his epistles to Colossians again.

Spelling it out clearly as we can. If then you have been raised with Christ. Seek the things that are above. Where Christ is.

Set your minds on things that are above. For you have died. And your life is hidden with Christ in God.

[5:04] When Christ. Who is your life. Appears. When he appears. Then you also will appear with him.

In glory. Notice. Paul does not say. Try to rise. Rather he says.

You have been raised. Easter is not just about what happened to Jesus. It is about what has happened to all who are in him.

We have died to the old life. And a new life has begun. Hidden. Yes. But very real. We will come back to this reality.

Of which Paul speaks about. But first let's turn to our gospel reading this morning. John tells us. In chapter 20. Beginning in verse 1. Now on the first day of the week.

[6:06] Mary Magdalene. Came to the tomb early. While it was still dark. That phrase matters. While it was still dark.

Mary comes in darkness. Not only the darkness of the early morning. But the darkness of grief. Of confusion. Of loss.

She comes. Surrounded by that darkness. The other gospel accounts tells us that she was not alone as she came. There were other women with her. These women came.

With spices. Intending. To find a body. And to anoint. That dead body. None of them came.

To the tomb. Expecting a resurrection. Mary perhaps. Walking faster than the others. Arrives first at the tomb. She sees the stone.

[7:04] Already rolled away. If you know anything about. First century Judean. Burial. This is not just a little stone. This is a really.

Probably better to describe it as a boulder. A circular boulder. That goes uphill. And when you close the tomb. You roll it down. Into a concave.

That it sits in. And so to open that tomb. You will have to roll this big stone boulder. Up. Back.

To open it. It's not just. It's not a menial task. None of these women could do it. It will probably take more than five strong men to do it.

But she comes. Finding the stone. Already rolled away. And immediately. She runs. She runs to Peter and the other disciple. John himself.

[8:04] Who are hiding. The apostles are in fear. Shattered by grief as well. Uncertain of what will come next. After Jesus' death.

And she comes running to them. And she says. Note what she said. They have taken the Lord out of the tomb. And we do not know where they have laid him.

None of them were expecting a resurrection. Our first assumption is not resurrection. It is that someone is still in his body.

Now. This is important. Because even the most devoted followers of Jesus. Were not expecting Easter. Listen to the eyewitness accounts. This is not a fantastical story.

With heroic characters. It is a story about grief stricken women. And men. Cowering in fear. And despair. They did not wake up early.

[9:04] Sunday morning. To find an empty tomb. Expecting to find an empty tomb. And even when they found that tomb empty. They came to the wrong conclusions.

About what they see. Until Jesus himself spoke to them. Mary. Grief stricken still. Eyes probably clouded by tears.

Did not recognize the risen Lord. Standing before her. Until Jesus called her by name. And she upon recognizing his voice.

Her eyes also became open. And she saw Jesus. As if for the first time. She became the first human bearer. Of the greatest news ever told.

And she ran to tell the apostles. Now Peter and John heard this news. They heard. The tomb is empty. And they ran to investigate.

[10:05] John tells us twice. Interestingly. John tells us twice. That he outran Peter. As they went to the tomb. Now I don't think John is trying to boast here. It's this kind of vividness of an eyewitness.

When you're telling a story. He's a younger man than Peter. Naturally running. Our ranch Peter. And gets there first. And this is the kind of vivid eyewitness.

That's in the vivid memory. Of an eyewitness. Who was just something. That he can never forget. Every single detail. Is clear to him. John remembers.

We were running. I remember that I got there first. I remember that I was timid. I didn't go in. And Peter comes in. And he went right in. These are vivid eyewitness accounts.

There is urgency. There is confusion. There is fear. As they run to the empty tomb. And they arrived. They looked in. More accurately.

[11:09] John arrived and waited. And Peter eventually arrived. And went straight into the tomb. And John followed. And what did they see on that day? The linen cloths.

Are lying there. On the stone slab. The face cloth. The head and face covering of Jesus. Is folded separately. From the rest of the linen cloth.

Folded. But what is it in the tomb? There was no body. There's no course.

Also this is not the scene. Of a grave robbery. As Mary first thought. Now it's not uncommon.

That that could happen. That graves were robbed. In those times. In the time of Jesus. But people who rob graves. Do not first unwrap. The body.

[12:07] And sometimes. Part of the reason. Why they might want to rob the graves. Is for those expensive. Valuable spices. If they get there early enough. That's all on those clothings.

You don't unwrap a body. And then take that body. It doesn't make any sense. It's much harder to carry a body that's unwrapped.

Than one that's already wrapped in linen. This is not a grave robbery. But here the grave clothes are left behind. It's apparent that something entirely new has happened.

It is at this point. We need to be crystal clear. Brothers and sisters. Brothers. The resurrection. Is not wishful thinking. It is not metaphor.

It's not imagery. It is not wishful thinking. The gospel accounts are written. In a way completely unlike ancient fiction.

[13:08] If you were inventing a story in the first century. You would not make women. Apologies. Apologies. You would not make women. The first witnesses. If you were writing a story in the first century.

Particularly in a Jewish context. Yet here they are. Writing the first account. Of what has happened. And the first eyewitnesses were women. If you were making up a story.

You would not portray the apostles. As fearful. Bumbling. Confused. Cowering men. Yet here they are. Depicted as they truly were.

The details of this story. Are not polished. They are real. Nothing in this story. Seems.

Adorned. Or embellished. The eyewitnesses. To the greatest news. Ever told.

[14:08] Did not begin. With faith. They came to this reality. In confusion. And slowly.

Reality began to dawn. On them. The truth. Began to dawn. On them. And verse 8. Is crucial. In this. There.

John writes. Concerning himself. Then the other disciple. Who had reached the tomb first. Also went in. And he saw.

Saw. And believed. He saw. And believed. The theme.

Of seeing. And believing. Is especially central. In John's gospel. He will later give. The purpose for writing. Is. Is. The whole gospel. He will say.

[15:02] The purpose for which he wrote it. Is so that we. Who are reading. And hearing. In his gospel. May believe. That Jesus. Is the son of God. And by believing.

Have life. In him. The very author. Of those words. Now says. In verse 8. That upon seeing. He believed. But he would also say.

As he does. In both his gospel. And epistles. That he is. That he. Is a trustworthy witness. Because he was an eyewitness. To the life. Death.

And resurrection. Of the Lord. So John saw. The empty tomb. And the burial clothes. On the stone slabs. And though. He did not yet.

Fully understand. Everything that is. Going on. In fact. He says it. He doesn't fully. Yet understand. This is. In fulfillment.

[15:56] Of scripture. Yet. He believed. That Christ. Was no longer dead. He believed. That Christ. Was no longer dead. Now isn't this.

How faith works. John's exercise. Of faith. Here. Is not. Unlike ours. We see. The clear evidence. Laid out. Before us. And we trust. His word. Even when we do not yet. Understand. Everything.

John's.

John's. Burgeoning faith. Will grow. As he behold. The risen Christ. And as he's empowered. By the Holy Spirit. But his faith. Started.

In seed form. And perhaps. You're here. This morning. And you are not sure. You believe. Any of this. You may have your doubts.

[16:52] Your theories. Your questions. Let me gently challenge you. Examine. The evidence. Examine the evidence.

The resurrection. Is not. A fragile. Idea. You can look. Turn the pages. Poke. Every fact.

It has stood. The scrutiny. Of centuries. There is no question. That the tomb. Was empty. There is no question. About that. Even the enemies.

Of Christ. Did not attempt. To disprove. The question. The fact. The fact. Of the empty tomb.

Instead, they made up lies. Fantastical lies that the disciples stole his body.

Despite the fact that there were gods there. Despite the fact that these disciples were cowering, fearful men. They could not provide a body to disprove the fact of the resurrection.

[18:00] They could not provide a dead body. Do not dismiss the testimony of those who were there. Whose words we have in the gospels. Do not dismiss the story without seriously weighing the very fact that they spoke about and they wrote about.

And perhaps you're closer than you think. Maybe you're like John who saw and believed. Even before everything made sense. What began to dawn on them on that morning was this.

With Jesus, the direction of reality itself has changed. That's what's dawning on them. As they see what they saw in that empty tomb. The natural order says this.

You're born, you live, and you die. That's the natural order. Life to death. But in Christ, it's now become death to life.

Death to life. Death to life. You have died. And your life is hidden with Christ in God.

[19:26] Death to life. If you are in Christ. If you are in Christ. If you believe in this story. You believe in the person that this story speaks of.

Jesus Christ. And his person and his finished work. If you are in Christ. Then you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Your story does not end in death. It passes through death into life. This is why Easter is not just about Christ's victory alone.

It is about our victory. And yet, this gospel story ends quietly with this phrase.

Then the disciples went back to their homes. It almost feels like an anticlimax, doesn't it? You've seen all that you saw.

[20:28] Of course, if you continue to read John. You recognize there's even more climax. Jesus reveals himself to them. It's glorious. But this verse 10 seems to end in an anticlimax.

They've seen the empty tomb. They've witnessed the evidence. And still, they go home. Why? Because their understanding is incomplete.

And they needed Christ himself to reveal more of himself to them. Their faith is real. At least John's at this point. Faith is real. He knows that Christ is alive.

But their faith is not yet fully formed. They suspect something extraordinary has happened. But they do not fully grasp it yet. And perhaps that's where some of us are this morning.

You have seen enough to wonder. Enough to question. You've seen enough. You've heard enough. To begin to believe.

[21:31] But not yet enough to feel certain. What can I tell you this morning? To take heart. Even the apostles began where you are.

So keep pressing in. Keep examining the eyewitness accounts in the gospels. Read the gospel of John. From beginning to end.

Don't depend on your own intellect. And insight. To arrive at the truth. As you press in. And you examine the evidence.

Also listen to the voice of Jesus. As he calls you to himself. In his word. He is the one. Who has descended into the cave.

To bring you up. Into the noonday sun. Listen. You cannot do it on your own. No one can. No one has. You need him.

[22:31] Hear his voice. Listen to it. Obey it. Respond in faith. Now to return lastly to St. Paul.

Seek the things that are above. Set your minds on things that are above. For you have died. If Christ is risen. If you are already here. And you have already been taken out of that cave.

Into the noonday sun. If Christ is risen. And if we are risen with him. Then our lives must begin to reflect. That reality.

So let me ask plainly. Where is your mindset? Where is your heart? Anchored? Are you consumed with things that are passing away?

Are you rooted in the life that is eternal? The resurrection is not only a future hope.

[23:30] It is also a present calling. So what does that look like? For the resurrection to be a present calling. Right here and now.

Well it means that this day. As Paul wants us to see. This day is your victory day. Sin is defeated. Death is conquered. The grave is not the end. Christ has already done the work. You do not need to earn your way to God.

His death has paid the price. His resurrection has secured your life. So stop striving. In your own power. Continue to trust.

And believe in him. And if you believe. This greatest of good news. It is not meant to be kept to yourself. Just as Mary ran to tell the disciples.

[24 : 33] We are also called. To proclaim. This good news. This good news. That there is life to be found. In Christ. That there is hope beyond death. That there is a risen Lord.

Jesus himself says. I am the resurrection. And the life. Whoever believes in me. Though he die. Yet shall he live. Death to life.

Do you believe this? That is the question of Easter. Brothers and sisters. Not merely. Did it happen? But. Do you believe it?

Let us pray. O God. Who for our redemption. Gave your only begotten son. To die upon the cross. And by his glorious resurrection. Who delivered us. From the devil. And the power of death. Grant us grace. To die to sin. And to live daily. With him.

[25 : 36] In the joy. Of his resurrection. Who lives and reigns with you. And the Holy Spirit. Now and forever. Amen.