

# He Has Risen!

Isaiah 25:6-9, Mark 16:1-8 (ESV)

June 29, 2003

“Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.” Jesus Christ, the Son of God, betrayed and deserted, condemned and convicted, crucified, dead, and buried, has been raised from the dead to a new and different life, forever beyond the reach of death. The tomb was empty. The grave could not hold him. God defeated the power of death. To God be all praise and thanksgiving!

This resurrection of Jesus Christ is the good news of Easter. This resurrection from the dead is the gospel we proclaim. This resurrection to eternal life is the chief article of the faith by which we live. And this resurrection of Christ is the good hope by which we are made brave to face tomorrow, for his resurrection is the promise of our own and of that of our loved ones. Make no mistake about it: this Easter resurrection of Jesus Christ is the heart of the gospel and the central doctrine of the Christian faith. As Paul wrote, “[I]f Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:14 (ESV)).

The Easter resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrates that God’s power for good, life, and salvation is greater than the massed powers of sin, death, evil, decay, and destruction. Christ’s willing death on the cross was the greatest victory in the history of the universe. And his resurrection to eternal life—his being raised to a new and different life forever beyond the reach of death—is the sign of God’s approval of all that Jesus preached and taught and is God’s vindication of Christ’s sacrifice and death.

When the women came early to the tomb, looking for the body of Jesus so they might anoint it with spices, a young man said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.” Jesus was no longer to be found in the tomb. Christ could be contained in a casket. The Son of God did not and does not remain in the graveyard. Jesus is not to be found among the dead but among the living. Christ has been set loose in the world, and nothing can contain him: no grave, no history, no race, no country, no church, no philosophy, no ideology, and no theology.

The resurrection is to a new and different life. It is the same person, Jesus, who was crucified. But since he defeated death, it is a different life, an eternal life, forever beyond the reach of death. So resurrection is not simply resuscitation. If Christ had only been restored to this life, he would have had to have died again. No,

the resurrection is to a new and different life, beyond our ability to describe or imagine. And because Jesus won this victory for us, this is the good hope by which we face the future. Beyond everything we suffer here, beyond all the suffering we cause here, there waits for us an eternal life where there are no more tears, no more sorrow, no more suffering, and no more pain, and where death can no longer touch, destroy, or even frighten us or our loved ones. This good hope for the life to come gives us the courage to face death here. This good hope for the life to come gives us the courage to live now. This good hope for the life to come is the strength by which we face the trials and tribulations of our day to day lives.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the source of our confidence in both the forgiveness of our sin and also the promise of eternal life. While the crucifixion showed the extent of God's suffering love for us, the resurrection shows the extent of God's healing power for us. Though we are dead in our sin, God makes us alive again. Therefore the resurrection is a source of great courage. It gives us not only the courage to die, since the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the promise of our own, but it also gives us courage to live. Life is fearful! Life is hard. It can be terrifying and overwhelming. Jesus helps us face life and live it, both with gratitude for this life and with good hope for the next.

Not only did the women who went to the tomb learn that Jesus was not to be found among the dead, but also they were told, "[G]o, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee." In Mark, there is no record of any resurrection appearance of Christ at the grave site. Not only had Jesus been raised, but also he had already departed. By the time the sun had risen, he was out of Jerusalem, going before his disciples, leading them in his way into his world for the sake of his mission. Still today, Jesus is going before us, into all the world! We will not find him among the tombs of our past accomplishments but on the fields of ever new mission. Jesus is not lying in the grave, and he is not even standing still. He is on the move, always going before us. If we want to be his followers, we will have to be on the move in order to stay with him. If we want to be a church faithful to Jesus Christ, we will have to run to keep up with him.

The disciples were to be told, "[H]e is going before you to Galilee." And he did not stay there very long! Soon the disciples spread out across the world, preaching the good news of God's love, forgiveness, salvation, and especially of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They were following Jesus who was always going before them. They followed him wherever he took them. This is what it means for us to be the church today. We need to be here in worship, where we hear the word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ read and preached. But we cannot stop here. Jesus is going before us into all the world, and so we follow him: into our families, into our neighborhoods, into our schools, into our places of work, trade, commerce,

and government—we follow Jesus into all the world, there to bear witness to him and to his victory, so that all might see and know and believe and obey. If the gospel means anything at all to us, it is imperative that we share it with others. Just as the resurrection body of Christ could not be contained in the grave, so the gospel of Christ cannot be contained within the church.

Once when I was a pastor in Georgia, I found myself on a platform with a number of ministers from other denominations, all of us taking turns in a program. I think it was at the local college. A young man from another tradition went before me and rallied the crowd with his claim that they were going to “take Jesus to China.” I wanted so badly to tell him that Jesus was already there! It is not that I am opposed to world missions. I am all for world missions. But when we go on world missions, and even if we were to name the name of Jesus Christ where it had never been named before (which certainly is not the case in China), we must realize and remember that Christ is going before us, that he is not there because of us but we are there because of him, and that we have not taken him anywhere but he has taken us everywhere. To be the church of the resurrected Jesus Christ, the church has to be alive and to be on the move, following Jesus Christ into the world.

Finally, when the women who went to the tomb were confronted for the first time with the good news of the resurrection, they “went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid.” We can understand this. It was overwhelming. It was incomprehensible. But if they had not said something to someone, eventually, it is hard to see how the disciples would have learned of the resurrection or how we would have heard about the resurrection. So what does their silence mean? I am convinced that this abrupt ending is aimed directly at us as we hear the gospel still today. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was not the end of the gospel. The burial of Jesus Christ was not the end of the gospel. And even the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not the end of the gospel. Jesus was and is going before us into all the world. So the question is not how the women responded to the announcement of the resurrection. The question of the gospel of Jesus Christ is how are we going to respond? The first line of the gospel according to Mark is: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” That is not simply a marker for the first verse. Instead, it is effectively the title of the work. It means that the whole document is only the beginning of the gospel. The ending to gospel cannot be written in ink on a page. The ending to the gospel can be written only in our lives and in the life of this church. Will we be faithful, or faithless? Will we be brave, or cowardly? Will we go out and follow Jesus into all the world to tell the glory of God and to win more disciples for him, or will we say nothing to anyone? Do we believe in the resurrection, or do we believe that death won the battle? Do we believe that

Jesus is going before us, or do we think he is still lying in the grave? Do we want to be with him, or do we want to stay back on our own?

If Christ is going before us—and he is—how can we do anything but follow? If Christ is our life—and he is—how can we let him out of sight? If Christ has won the victory for us—and he has—how can we do anything less than honor that victory by our every effort to spread its influence throughout the world? If Christ has saved us for himself—and he has—how can we wait another moment to tell others? If Christ gives us marching orders—and he does—how can we be content with silence?

In that the resurrection means Christ is going before us, into life and into the world, the resurrection means that the Christian life is an active life. We face the future with confidence, courage, purpose, joy, and gratitude. Jesus Christ is out there ahead of us, moving on into life and into the world. So we have to be on the move to be with him and to stay with him. It is a temptation for us as Christians to try to stay in a safe, comfortable place in our faith and in our lives. It is a temptation for us as the church to try to stay in a safe, comfortable place in our faith, life, and mission, to try to keep things the same, to try never to change. But these are temptations, not virtues. We are called to an active life as Christians. We are not yet done with what we are to do!

Look around at the beauty and majesty of this sanctuary. This was not built by people who did not believe in the resurrection! This was not built by people who lacked conviction. This was not built by fools, and it was not built by cowards! This sanctuary was built by brave, wise, and faithful people who staked their lives on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. By their witness, they challenge and invite us today to join them in believing the good news that Christ has risen.

The window behind me depicts the apostles Peter, John, and Paul, all of whom are thought to have been martyred for the sake of Jesus Christ, killed for their faith in Jesus Christ, witnesses who made their witness at the cost of their own lives. They would not have done this if they had not believed absolutely in the reality and truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So we stand here in an unbroken line of witnesses, reaching back beyond those who first told us the gospel, beyond those who built this sanctuary, beyond those who settled this country, beyond the Reformers, beyond the church fathers, all the way back to the first disciples, all the way back to the women, all the way back to the young man who said, “He has risen; he is not here.” Today it is our turn to receive this witness; and receiving it, it is our turn to believe it; and believing it, it is our turn to share the unbroken line; so that we join the succession and extend the witness to others.

Grace Covenant is strategically poised in the heart of the city, made up of wonderful members, blessed with beautiful facilities and the privilege of radio broadcasting, graced with heart and soul and mind and strength, and positioned and called to serve this community, this city, this country, and the world. We are ready and set to go. I want to be part of our bringing more people here to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and to worship God, and I pray that each of you want to be part of this, too, because we are the ones who can do it. I want to be part of our sending more people out into the world to follow Christ and serve God there, and I pray that each of you want to do this, too, because we are the ones who will be sent. God has brought us to this point in our life and history for a reason. God is expecting great things from us now.

Do you not hear the risen Christ calling us forward into faithfulness? There is not a mission field in the world, or a neighborhood in this city, where he is not waiting for us to come and speak a good word for him and for his gospel. How, then, shall we respond to the good news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

*To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.*

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