

'Christ is risen!'
by Rev. Frances Savill
Sunday April 9, 2023
Easter Sunday

Luke 24:1-12, 1 Corinthians 15:20-26

One of the great privileges, maybe the greatest privilege that I have as a Pastor, is that I get to walk with people in the last months, weeks, and even days of their lives.

I get to stand with family and close friends and accompany the one who is dying, through those last difficult, trying tumultuous, wearying days of holy drama that are the end of life.

I have wept with families as they say goodbye, watched hearts break as they go to the cemetery and lay the body in the ground.

Mary, and several other of the women had stood by Jesus at the foot of the cross, and watched His pain, endured His suffering, and stayed with Him until His death.

The Sabbath was approaching, no time to prepare the body.
Jesus' lifeless body was laid in the tomb.

The women went home to mourn, to pray, to keep the Sabbath holy, and wait until they could return to the tomb, to give their last gift, anointing Jesus' body with spices, and saying their final goodbyes.

Early in the morning, as soon as the Sabbath was over, they prepared the spices, made things ready, and set out together to the tomb.

Can you imagine their sorrow.

Jesus, their friend, their leader, Rabbi, who had touched each life so profoundly, Mary's son, their hope, was dead and buried.

When they arrived at the tomb the stone was moved aside, and the tomb was empty. Suddenly, two men in dazzling light appeared, sending the women to their knees.

“Why do seek the living among the dead? He is not here, He has risen.”

The women went back and testified to the apostles all that they had seen and what had been told to them.

The disciples didn't believe the women. Who would?
There are two certainties then as now – death and taxes.

Peter went to the tomb and found things as the women had said, but he didn't know what to believe.

Later, Jesus appeared to His disciples alive.
In pairs or groups, He stood among them in them in the flesh, raised from the dead. By His heavenly Father's love and power Jesus was alive.

Peter would later tell his story saying;
"Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. We are witnesses to all that Jesus did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree; but God raised Him on the third day and allowed Him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead." (Acts 10:38-41)

“Witnesses.” Peter and the others were witnesses to the truth.
They knew the truth about Jesus. They knew about His life, His death, His burial, and how He was raised from the dead by the power of God.

Peter was martyred as were the other disciples.
People will not knowingly die for a lie. They might die for something they believe as the truth, whether they are actually right or not, but people are not willing to be martyred for what they know is a lie or a fabrication.

Those who were in a position to know the truth suffered and even gave their lives for the sake of God's truth.

What was so important about their message that they endured hardship, trial, suffering, torture and death?

Peter said Jesus brought forgiveness of sins. The Apostle Paul, in the passage from 1 Corinthians expanded on that idea.

He said that just as death came through one man - Adam, life came to us through one man - Jesus Christ.

We know about Adam's sin.

He and Eve, his wife, wanted to be as God.

Somehow, they imagined that God was holding out on them, and there was something better, something more, and so they broke the only rule in the garden and disobeyed God.

That was the beginning of the end. As a result of their disobedience and sin Adam and Eve hid from God and hid from one another. The oneness they had shared with God was destroyed, and suddenly they didn't trust God, and the gulf of separation between God and His people grew and grew.

God didn't turn away from his people. From the moment of our rebellion, God has been calling us home, caring for us, trying to open our blind eyes.

God has been dealing with our sin since Adam. God acted to call a particular people, God sent teachers and prophets, God raised up leaders, and led His people by the hand, teaching them His ways, and in the fullness of time God himself came to do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

He took on human life, and in Jesus lived a life of trust in God, a life of relationships to God and to others restored. Jesus, fully God and fully human could restore us all to God.

Anyone who is joined to Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit has life in Jesus' name. Through Jesus' resurrection the door to eternal life has been opened to all.

So now the grave holds no fear.

Death is still painful and even heartbreaking because we have to say goodbye to the one we loved so deeply.

But we do not mourn as those who have to hope, and we are not afraid.

Death is only the second last word.

"Life" is the ultimate, the conclusion, the fulfillment of all.

Life is restored to those who have died in Christ.

New life, eternal life is given.

And we will be together again with the Lord.

All died in Adam.

But all are made alive in Christ.

Jesus Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Thanks be to God.