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My Lord, What a Morning! – Luke 24:1-12 Easter Sunday 2013

The entire Bible comes to a very fine, sharp point in one thing, the resurrection, an event that has always been a problem for those outside the church looking in, and a difficulty for many inside it. Some people just reject the resurrection, and get into the other fun things we've built up around Easter; others, well, it makes their head hurt, and they avoid the pain, and leave it alone.

Paul, especially in his first letter to the church in Corinth, works hard to make clear just how important Jesus' resurrection is to our understanding of God, and of who we and what we are. He writes, "Now if the rising of Christ from the dead is the very heart of our message, how can some of you deny that there is any resurrection?...If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot. But the glorious fact is that Christ *did* rise from the dead!" (I Corinthians 15, *passim*, Phillips and Peterson paraphrases.)

That changes everything. Paul's bold statement tells us without any qualification that God keeps God's promises, and that God loves us.

But there are questions. People always have questions, usually at the most inconvenient time; and Paul quotes some he's heard: "Show me how the resurrection works. Give me a diagram; draw me a picture." (Peterson) And lots of people struggle with "why:" "Why did Jesus have to come back to life? Why did he even have to die? Weren't all the other things he was and did good enough?"

The answer – and there *is* an answer – has to start at the same point: Jesus *did* rise from the dead; Jesus *has* defeated death; God *did all this for us*. That's the foundation that Christianity is built upon. The rest doesn't make any sense if that's left out.

Yet that focus, all by itself, is too narrow. That's why we have all the rest. For this to be more than just an abstraction, like "one plus one equals two," it has to have a context, a concrete reference. One apple plus one apple makes two apples. We can see that. We can eat them. Apples are real, not numbers. Jesus' resurrection is *Jesus'* resurrection, and we can't reach out and touch that – we weren't physically there.

But Jesus' resurrection makes the rest possible; it proves the truth of his teaching, and *that* isn't just about Jesus, it's about us,

about you and me. We are *all* headed for resurrection; we all will conquer death. Jesus' example is just a taste of what's to come for all of us.

But even that's "out there." That's *then*, we live *now*, in a world of chocolate bunnies and marshmallow chicks. One day, we'll be resurrected; we may go out to lunch after the service. Those things are *then*. Right *now*, we're sitting in church. Our *then*, our resurrection, like our death, for that matter, can't be grabbed like an apple and examined. We all know, in a vague sort of way, that we will die, but the details – how? When? What, will it be like? What happens next? That's not so clear.

We aren't given a lot of details about what happens at or after death. That's okay. If we had to *know* everything, and had to know it before we died, we've got a lot of work to do – and a really good reason to put off studying!

All we really need to know is that it will be all right. That's the faith of the Church: God is God, we are not; we mess things up, and God, in Jesus, makes them right. It's not in the Bible, but it's a great saying: "Everything will all be all right in the end. If it *isn't* all right, then *it's not the end.*"

Back to the questions, because there's always more: what use is the resurrection to me *now*? In the pews right now, at lunch later? This: the new life Christ promised *isn't* only something yet

to come; it's right smack-dab in the middle of today. Christ didn't just break the power of death to hold us forever, he broke the ability of sin to keep us down. We're right with God, and if we can be right with God, as Christ promised we are, anything's possible. We don't have to carry the guilt of our mistakes, misjudgments, and misunderstandings one more minute. We can experience a kind of resurrection, a fresh start, right now. A new beginning for you and me, from this moment.

There's a Sunday School song, "Every morning is Easter morning from now on." That's the whole point: every morning – every moment "from the hour I first believed" – is a new reality, if we take Jesus at his word. The Letter to the Hebrews, 4:7: "God keeps renewing the promise and setting the date to *today*."

Chad Hedrick had an amazing athletic career – from a champion in-line skater, to an even better ice skater. He won five Olympic medals: a gold, two silver, and two bronze.

But after the last Winter Olympics, Chad retired, at the age of thirty-two. His announcement was offhand, quick, almost an aside. Wow, to retire and bask in the glory of the twenty or so years you were among the very best in the world. For most athletes, competing in the Olympics is the high point of their life, how they identify themselves. They're always introduced as "former Olympic athlete X."

Not Chad. When he was asked about his five medals, his amazing career, he said, simply, in a statement that stuck in my head: “It’s a good start to a great life.”

A good start to a great life. That’s Easter talk; that’s a statement of what life in Christ means: not medals, not celebrity, not memories of what you were – it’s about *today*, it’s about *tomorrow*. Paul writes, “if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. The past is over and done, everything has become fresh and new.”

But can we allow that to happen? Be *in Christ* enough to let Christ be *in us*? Look back on your own personal history. Some has been good, some’s even been great, some’s been very, very forgettable – a lot, we’ve forgotten. It made us what we are, though, brought us here, we can be grateful for it.

The truth is, all of our life so far is a good start to God’s great life. You may wish to see that “great life” as the one to come, the resurrection-life after we die that Jesus gave us for an Easter gift, or it can be this very day; your choice. Many of us are already half way to this way of resurrection living: you left *what you were* behind, and now it’s *who you are* that matters. What you *were* made what you *are* a reality. And there’s more to come.

Perhaps you’re thinking, “Well, that’s fine, but it’s just talk.” And you’re right – if you leave it at that. “After I die” is

unknowable, except that we will all experience it someday; but you *can* make a new start today. It's not an "either/or": you can have *both*.

You see, God lays a beautiful future right in front of each of us, but you need accept the gift of that future. If today's a new day, treat it as a new day; the surest way to make today the same as yesterday is to refuse God's offer. "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." Just because it's a cliché doesn't make it any less true. Will you accept today as a beginning, or more of the same?

Whatever your past has been, whatever has been at its center; whatever you've put first; whatever you've allowed to push you around, or whomever you've spent your life pushing around, Easter is God's way of inviting you to reset, to start again, and from a place better than where you were.

You can have your own resurrection Sunday here and now. Take God at his word, that today is a new day for you to enjoy, you and everyone you meet. Christ died and rose again for you to have it. The Message's version of Psalm 18:24 says, "I feel put back together, and I'm watching my step. God rewrote the text of my life when I opened my heart to his eyes." (As if we could truly keep it closed to God anyway!)

Finally, back to our lesson in Luke: two important things happened among Jesus' followers that first Easter. First, the women discovered his body was missing. But when the angels reminded them: "He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again?" They remembered, believed, and told the rest. They spread what they'd already known, news no longer abstract, but real, now. It becomes real when we live it, too.

The second: most of the rest of Jesus' followers didn't believe them. No surprise; the women heard it straight from angels – it was easy for them to accept. It's also easy to see why the rest might be skeptical – they only heard secondhand. But Peter kept his heart open. He decided to look for himself, saw *enough*, and went home, amazed, taking with him everything he needed to change his – and our – world.

We're like Peter, but the story's gone through even more hands by the time we've heard it. You, like Peter, will all go home from here. And that's where you can make the resurrection a part of your life. So, will you live a new life there, today, the resurrection life and all it offers? Has God shown you enough to believe? New life. It's yours, and Jesus Christ is handing it to you. Happy Easter.

