

Why We Need the Resurrection

Luke 24:13

April 17, 2022

Easter Prayer

Gracious God, we gather in the early morning of your Resurrection. We have been mourning and weeping believing that you have been taken from us. Instead, you meet us in the garden of new life. Here, in this sacred place, we discover that you are alive, that sin and death cannot defeat you. Now our tears of sorrow turn to tears of joy as we experience your presence among us.

Today, we begin to understand that joy comes from grief. That there can be no resurrection without death. You call us to go into the world to share this good news that no tragedy, no loss, no betrayal is final. You have the last Word. Grant us grace to live in the freedom of your resurrection, unhampered by fear of death or in doubt about life. When our course on earth is done, cause us to rise in your likeness and live in your light for we are children of the resurrection. Amen.

Sermon

This is a participatory sermon...mostly to keep you awake this morning. When you hear me say, "Christ is risen," your response is "Hope lives."

Imagine you had a piece of paper in front of you with a line drawn vertically down the center. You have two columns. Call the left column "good" and the right column "bad." Under good, write down all the things in your life that are good and enjoyable, blessings: friends, family, good food, health, shelter, pets, mountains, blooming cactus, hummingbirds.

In the right column, list disappointments, pain, fears, terror, griefs. The top of most of our lists would be war in Ukraine. Yesterday, a news station told the story of the children losing their lives in the war. The newscaster wept throughout the report with tears streaming down her face. Next on our list: shooters in subways, tornadoes, fires, floods, losses, poor health, broken relationships.

Now, let's say you wave your hand over the paper and all the bad things disappear. Your life would consist of only the blessings. You might call your world "utopia," or "paradise," or even "heaven.'

Now instead of the bad things in the bad column disappearing, imagine your life consisting of only the awful things in the bad column. What might you call your world now? "Nightmare," "hell."

As we know, our world consists of both the good and the bad. We call it the real world. One police officer was at a funeral for a fallen officer who had been shot to death. A reporter asked this police officer for comments, and all he said was, "We live in a fallen world."

As you look at your list of good things and bad things, you might say, "We live in a fallen world."

My question for you this morning: Why do we need the Resurrection? It helps us to live in a fallen world.

Christianity confesses a God who suffers. We would rather have a God who prevents suffering, but that is not the God we have. Christ conquered death, but Christ did not cancel death. The power of a suffering God is not to prevent pain but to redeem it, by going through it with us.

Christ is risen, Hope lives

From one man who has stage 4 cancer (Timothy Keller): "There is no greater hope possible than to believe that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead...If you grasp this great fact of history, then even if you find things going dark, this hope becomes a light for you when all other lights go out....You cannot have a resurrection unless you have a death. "

We know that sometimes it's not possible to immediately know whether something is bad or if it's good. We don't know which column it belongs. However, we have learned that Jesus has a way of transforming or redeeming things that at first we thought were bad into beautiful things.

Christ is risen, Hope lives.

The Resurrection does not promise that all the circumstances of life will go smoothly, but it does give us hope that we can be turned into the kind of people who can handle whatever comes.

In an article called “Ukrainians ‘are living the Resurrection’”, a Ukrainian named Ivaniv spoke after images appeared of civilians dead in the streets; “The main thing that’s keeping me is that God was, is and will be suffering with us,” said Ivaniv. “He was killed with all these kids. He suffered without food and water with all these women...He was with everyone there....It may look as if death has taken over. But no! Beneath the surface, life, strength, miracle sprouts.”

Christ is risen, hope lives.

The resurrection means we do not follow a dead, revered teacher but rather a risen Lord who is actually with us. He is not a deceased man we know only through books. Christ is alive and he is calling to us. We can have a vital, loving fellowship with a living Lord who is present with us.

Christ is risen, hope lives.

Why do we need the resurrection? The resurrection not only helps us live in a fallen world, it prepares us for the eternal world. Think again of that imaginary paper with the good column and the bad column. Where would you put death? I imagine most or all of us would put it under the bad column. Earlier I said that Christ conquered death. What this means is that the events of today are not the end of our story.

Resurrection prepares us for the life to come.

When a loved one dies, we focus on the past. We remember the good times, we struggle with our regrets, and we wish that we could have handled certain situations differently. But with the resurrection, the focus is forward, towards everlasting life. I say at memorials we need not fear death. Death is not the end but the beginning, not a wall but a doorway through Jesus Christ.

Christ is risen, hope lives.

And the reason hope lives is because there is another promise of the future. The power that God used to raise Jesus from the dead will someday finally destroy all suffering, evil, and death.

We hear this promise at the end of the Bible where God refashions a new heaven and earth, and the scripture says: "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

In other words, our tears will be replaced by laughter. Our confusion will be clarified. Our shattered relationships will be healed by forgiveness and reconciliation.

Christ is risen, hope lives.

So when I see one country attack another country, when I hear of a shooter in a subway, when I see tornadoes and fires rip through our country, floods in Africa, I need to know there is life after death. I need to know out of the evil, good rises up. I need to know Jesus has power over death. I need the hope of the resurrection.

We live in a fallen world, but we follow a risen Savior who takes all that terrible bad column stuff and puts it into a context of hope, until the day when the kingdom of God comes in its fullness, and bad stuff is no more!

Alleluia! Christ is risen, hope lives.

Before Jesus' death, Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. Do you believe this? When the women came back to tell the disciples that Jesus had risen, our scripture passage says, "But they did not believe the women because their words seemed to them like nonsense."

Do you believe this?

We are changed by Jesus's resurrection. Because Jesus is alive today, we are also alive in a whole new way. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is living in every Christian. God wants us not just to believe in Jesus's resurrection but to be transformed by it and to receive the power we need to live the way we know we ought. We are people of the resurrection bringing life to the fallen world.

Christ is risen, hope lives.

Shortly, we are going to sing a hymn called "Christ Is Alive!" was written by a pastor named Brian Wren. He wrote it on Easter Sunday 1968, just 10 days after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was assassinated. Wren wanted to acknowledge this terrible loss while also proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. He wanted to affirm the presence of a wounded, risen Christ with all who suffer. The risen Christ, says Brian Wren, is "saving, healing, here and now, and touching every place and time."

Christ is risen, hope lives.

As we prepare to sing "Christ is Alive," let us stand and declare what we believe as Easter people.

Easter Affirmation of Faith:

This is the good news which we received, in which we stand, and by which we are saved: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day; and that he appeared to Peter, then to the twelve, and to many faithful witnesses. We believe he is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He is the first and the last, the beginning and the end. He is our Lord and our God.

Sing "Christ is Alive"