

Colossians 3:1-4 “Raised with Christ”

April 16, 2017

Jesus is Risen! He is risen indeed! This was the greeting of the early Christians centuries ago when they met together with one another to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This is the same greeting that we use today to trumpet the victory of Jesus over sin, death and hell. With it we proclaim the triumph over Satan, whose one aim has always been to destroy the works of God.

Who do you want to hear this wonderful message today? I want the devil to hear it. It is the church's version of the toss seen around the world. Do you remember Jose Bautista's bat flip when he hit a three run homer against the Texas Rangers in game five last fall to win their series? He is risen, He is risen indeed is my way of letting Satan know that it's over, and he lost. I want the world to hear it. It is the only hope for the endless struggle of hopelessness. I want my friends and my family to hear it too. It is their life and their salvation as much as it is mine. I need to remind myself of this blessed truth from time to time lest I despair in the face of the temptations and struggles that still pull at all of us while we live in this world.

The whole of Scripture is here in this one message. The whole centre and core of our faith lives in one short phrase and that's good. It's very good. When you are faced with the challenge to give reason for the hope that is in you to someone who is convinced that this whole god thing is all a lie, what would you talk to them about? Would you start with scientific proof for creation? That the heavens really do declare the glory of God, and that only a fool can say there is no God. Would you start with the ultimate concepts of right and wrong, of truth and error? That if there is immutable truth, there must be a truth-giver.

The place to start is right here before us, very short, very sweet: Jesus is risen! Three words, unless you do it in German. Germans are very concise and straight forward. Why use three words when one will do? “He is risen” actually comes out as one word; erstanden. This is the heart and core of Scripture. It is more important than Christmas. It is more central than Good Friday. Now it's true that the world could not have salvation or the promise of forgiveness had God not sent His Son to be born of a woman. And it's also true that there could be no salvation without Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. But even with these two events, there would still be no hope, no future, no promise to cling to unless Jesus is risen from the dead.

Jesus lives. He is alive. He has broken death's prison. He has triumphed over Satan. He has destroyed the power of death. And he did it for you. Because he is alive and reigns forevermore, you can have life the way God intended it now and life forever. Your life, your hope, your future, your eternity are connected to Christ through faith. You died when He died, and you rose when He rose. Scripture is bold to tell us today, “You have been raised with Christ.” Your challenge today is to understand what it means for our future and what it implies for your life and my life today. “You died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God”

So, let's explore what that means. When did we die? In the first place, we died with Adam and Eve. Their sinfulness infects us from birth. We are the walking dead. We are their offspring, formed in their likeness and image. We are born sinners, physically alive with heartbeat and pulse, respiration and brain activity, but spiritually unresponsive, spiritually dead, adrift in an empty universe with no ability to get ourselves home to the God who made us, or to the perfect life He intended for us.

I want you to put yourself in the place of the women who come to the tomb that day. Where were they at? They had been waiting for morning so they could go to the tomb, not a joyful trip but a sad errand. Probably they'd not had much sleep the last couple of nights since that dread day when Jesus hung on the cross and died. There had

been no time for them to go to the tomb that day, what with the Sabbath and all. They were feeling sad, grief-stricken, and worried along the way. Who would move the stone?

I often wondered why they hadn't thought of that before now. They were probably too preoccupied with everything else. Grief will do that because the loss of the one you love occupies your whole thought process. Guilt can do it too, and it is one of the stages of the grief process. Do you feel some guilt today? Imagine how the disciples felt, sequestered away in the locked upper room, fearful of the Jews, each one guilty, remembering how when the time came they had abandoned Jesus and run away. They were feeling empty and lost. What to do now? Where to go? How do we pick up our lives and go on?

As the women approached, they saw that the stone was already been rolled away. They went in and saw an angel there. They were no longer sad. They were alarmed and filled with fear. Then the angel told them the blessed Easter news. He is not here, he is risen. See the place where they laid Him. Go tell His disciples and Peter. He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him, just as He told you. Now they are trembling, bewildered, confused, and afraid. They ran from the tomb and didn't tell anybody at first. That's not the end of the story. Jesus would give them and the disciples many more Easter proofs of His resurrection. Let's see where that took them.

If we try and follow the Easter morning chronology of what happened next, we have to go to John 20. There John tells us that Mary Magdalene had overcome her fear long enough to go and tell Peter and John that the tomb was empty, that someone had taken away the body. So Peter and John went to see for themselves as Mary followed along. After they had looked inside and returned to their homes, Mary lingered outside the tomb. She was crying. Through her tears she bent over to look in again to see if what she had seen before was true. Now there were 2 angels where Jesus' body had been. They said, "Why are you crying?"

She said, "They have taken away my Lord and I don't know where they have put Him." Or maybe there was some sobbing and gasping and tears and shortness of breath. Then she turned around. Jesus was standing there but she didn't recognize Him at first. He spoke to her and she still didn't recognize Him. She thought He was the gardener. It was when Jesus called her by name "Mary" that she understood who it was and her fear was gone. Her tears were gone, replaced with joy at seeing Jesus alive. She ran and told the disciples the news, I have seen the Lord! Later when they saw the Lord and spoke with Him, their fears and worries were also replaced with great joy. And their lives after that were never the same. What rescued them from their fears and their tears, what changed them, was the reality that Jesus was alive. He had risen from the dead, just as he said He would.

His resurrection puts the "Amen" on all that Jesus said and did. In Romans 1, Paul says the resurrection confirms who Jesus is. He is declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead. Who He said He is, is true. What He said He would do, is true. By His suffering and death He has paid for sin. By His resurrection from the dead He has broken the power of death and the devil for us. Because He is alive and reigns forevermore, you can have life the way God intended it now and life forevermore. Because He is alive, you don't have to live like He is dead. You don't have to live with fear, or worry, or grief.

You and I may still live with the pain that comes from cancer. We may still have the weakness that comes with age. We may still struggle with sadness that comes from many different sources. But Jesus' resurrection changes what they can do to us. Jesus' resurrection takes us from fear and worry and sadness to joy and to life. St Paul tells us in Colossians 3:1-4 that our life, our hope, our future, and our eternity, are connected to Christ. By faith, you died when He died and you rose when He rose. Scripture says that we were buried with Christ in baptism. That the water of baptism drowned our sinfulness and brought forth new life, spiritual life. Unless a person is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. Unless a person is reborn by water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.

Scripture says, “You He made alive when you were dead in transgressions and sins.” God works by his Word and Spirit to give us spiritual life and to put to death and bury the sinful nature. By faith in Jesus we are made dead to sin and alive to God. By faith we died with Jesus. God’s word says, “The wages of sin is death.” All of us would die physical death and eternal death, unless God himself established a way out, a way of salvation, a way from death to life. God sent His Son Jesus Christ so that He could put on Him the guilt and sin and punishment that mankind deserves, that each of us deserves for our sins.

At the cross on Good Friday we saw the bitter pain and agony of the Son of God. The sky grew dark and the sun withheld its light. The wrath and punishment of God were poured out upon the Son of God. It was the accumulated wrath of God pent up since the world began, all aimed at the one hanging on the cross. It was more than human eyes could have watched or endured in full daylight view. There on the cross in those few hours Jesus bore the punishment for sin that would have taken eternity for us to atone for but God put our sin upon Him. He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Just so, we died with Christ. Our sinfulness went to the cross with Him.

That’s why this day of resurrection is a day of such joy and triumph, when Jesus won the victory over death. When Jesus rose from the dead we were raised too! His resurrection is the proof that sin has been paid for. His resurrection is the guarantee of heaven and eternal life for all who believe. That must be said in the strongest possible terms. Surveys suggest that many Christians are unsure of their salvation. They worry about what will happen when they die. They wonder, what will God say to me on judgement day? They’re afraid that there’s a nagging sin that they’re sure God has not forgiven or forgotten. Or there’s a recurring sin that has become so much a habit that they’re certain God’s going to get them for it.

So, let me tell you again, Jesus resurrection is the proof that sin, that all sin, has been paid for. Listen to the Scriptures: therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We have peace because Christ has borne the condemnation for us. Jesus’ resurrection is the guarantee of resurrection and eternal life for all who believe. You have been raised with Christ and you have the promise that when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. By faith you have died to sin with Jesus. By faith you have been raised to life with Him. You are forgiven, now and on judgement day. Jesus’ resurrection is the sign of the promise of your own. You are His and you belong to Him. Because you have been raised with Christ, you can set your heart and mind in a different direction. Set your heart on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things.

You have been raised with Christ. You can say with St Paul: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” That moved stone and the empty tomb tell us that death and hell could not hold our Jesus. He lives to set us free from guilt and fear, from worry and sadness and grief. He sets us free from death and hell. He has set us free to receive His resurrection peace, just as the disciples did. The news of the resurrection was news that they heard many times that day and it took them from sadness, to fear, to joy, and to new life.

You have heard the Easter news many times too. Each time it can convince you more. Each time it helps move you forward in your faith, strengthened in the knowledge that your sin is forgiven, that in Christ you have new life. You can live that new life in joy and peace.