

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! A greeting that appears to back to the early church and comes right from Scripture.

The question I want you to think about today is this: What path are you on? Are you on the path of life, or the path of death? These are the only two eternal paths. Which are you on? The text before us today helps us find an answer. I want to read the first verse of text, and talk about it, and then we'll look at the rest:

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. If you would have asked the women on the way to the tomb that morning, they would have told you that they were on a path of death. Jesus their Savior had died. They were witnesses. And so were you if you came to church on Friday. Through the eyes of the Gospel writers, we saw what they saw. We saw Jesus' body beat up, bruised and bloodied. He was almost unrecognizable. We saw his back ripped open from scourging. We saw his hands and feet pierced with nails. They saw the spear pass through his side, upward through his heart, and the blood and water pour out. They heard him give his spirit into the Father's hands and saw him breath his last. They saw what appeared to be the path of death of Jesus.

And because they also saw his hasty burial by Joseph and Nicodemus. Now they were also on this path to death in order to bury Jesus properly. Their task for the day was crystal clear in their minds. They had no doubt about what they would see. Their only question in their minds was who would roll the grave stone away for them.

But things were not as they appeared, as we will soon see.

We too may feel we are on a path of death. Sometimes life isn't so bad. We're healthy, the kids are doing okay... tax season is almost over. Other times, the path of death is all too evident. We look around at the economy. Jobs. School. Divorce. Fighting at home. Chronic sickness or pain. The death of a loved one. As the hymn "Abide with Me" says, "Change and decay in all around I see." We are often clearly reminded that we walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

But a single event in human history changes everything. Listen to what happened to the women who were on the path of death that was taking them to Jesus' tomb:

2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. [two angels] 5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " 8 Then they remembered his words. [The two angels are very blunt with the women. "So you came here looking for Jesus? Well, that's odd, because if you're looking for him, then this grave was the absolute last place on earth you should have come to. Jesus is a live, so of course he wouldn't be in a place that houses dead bodies. He has a risen, exactly as he told you he would. Remember how he told you again and again: "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again." Then, it says, they remembered his words. "Oh, yeah! I guess he did say that, didn't he?"

You thought that was just you, didn't you. That you come to church and hear the words of God. Then something happens in your life and God's word spoke exactly to that thing... but you don't make the connection. It's like there are two separate compartments in our brain: in this one we store the word of God, and in this one we process what happens in real life.

So here is a vital life skill that will entirely transform the way you process what happens in real life. Open the compartment where you store the word of God and build a bridge to that compartment where you process real life. What God says and what he teaches and what he promises... has everything to do with your everyday living. If you can learn to keep Scripture in mind as you go about your daily life, your life will literally be transformed.

Had the women done this, they would have gone to the tomb that day joyful and with eager anticipation. But they went with fear, sorrow and hesitation. They thought they were on the path of death only because they did not remember the words of Jesus. The truth was they were on the path of life all along! They just didn't know it, and so they unnecessarily suffered because of it.

Here's the rest of the story:

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Jesus had truly risen! And because he rose, his path was not the path of death, but the path of life. And ours is not the path of death, but the path of life.

Psalm 16 is a Messianic psalm that speaks of Jesus:

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

God spoke through David a thousand years before Christ was born to speak these words about him. His body did not remain in the grave, it did not see decay. He rose, and so he knew the path of life. He ascended to the right hand of the Father and knows eternal pleasures with him.

And because he has been raised, your heart is glad and your tongue rejoices. Your body will not be abandoned to the grave but will rise. You are on the path of life, so you will be filled with joy in God's eternal presence!

When you know and believe that you are on this path of life through the risen Lord Jesus, it totally changes your outlook, your attitude, mood, your interpretation of events, your boldness, your hope, your expectations, your purpose and meaning, etc.

So let's take a moment and talk about the fact of Christ's resurrection. What circumstantial evidence do we have?

- 1) First we must note that Jesus was **truly dead**. For him to rise he must have been first truly dead. There are some who hold to the "swoon" theory... that Jesus passed out and came to in the cool grave. Impossible. It was a public, professional execution. And the spear jabbed deep into Jesus' side, piercing his heart was the guarantee that he was truly dead.

- 2) As we just read, the first ones to the tomb were **women**. How does this indicate the story is true? If this story was made up, they would not have written in women as the ones discovering this amazing truth. The testimony of women was not valid in court.
- 3) Another indication that this story is not made up is that all who find that Christ is risen **did not initially expect or believe that he had**. Old Testament prophecies predicted the resurrection. Jesus himself predicted it. Wouldn't the leaders of the church have told the story of their faith and expectation of Christ's resurrection? But instead we have the story of their doubt!
- 4) Further, we note that **the tomb was well-secured**. It was sealed and professional guards were guarding it.
- 5) The number of **eye witnesses** of the resurrected Christ is amazing. We know specific instances of dozens seeing Jesus. Another passage speaks of 500 seeing him at one time. At the time the New Testament was written, many of these people would have still been alive to verify the story.
- 6) **The disciples were dramatically changed**. Before the resurrection they were cowards. After they were bold! Peter denied knowing Jesus to a servant girl. But after the resurrection, he told religious leaders that he would not obey their order to keep silent about Jesus. All of the disciples except John died as martyrs. They went to their deaths because they knew that Christ was risen. "You can't hurt me. If you want to kill me, that's fine. I'll be with Jesus, and this body will rise again on the last day."
- 7) **Jewish believers were willing to change their day of worship**. That's more important than it appears at first glance. The first commandment says, "You shall have no other gods." The third commandment says, "Remember the Sabbath day (Saturday) by keeping it holy. That Jewish believers worshiped Jesus AND changed their worship day to Sunday, the day of his resurrection, speaks volumes.
- 8) **Jesus tomb was never enshrined and is in fact unknown**. Sounds strange at first, but that fact that we don't know for sure where Jesus' tomb is testifies to the fact that he really rose. When martyrs die, their gravesite becomes a shrine. It becomes a holy place. Candles, flowers, cards, vigils, memorials, remembrances. But that never happened with Jesus' tomb... because his body was not there. His remains couldn't make it a holy place, because his remains didn't remain. He rose!
- 9) **The fact that we and well over a billion others are Christians, testifies to the power of the resurrection**. How did a group of Jewish followers of Jesus number about 120 at the time of Jesus' death turn into a worldwide phenomenon? Simple. Jesus really rose. This fact changes lives. And when your life is changed and your eternal future is secure, you want to share that good news with others.

The Jews consider Abraham their father. He was buried in Hebron. Jews still make a pilgrimage there to mourn at Abraham's tomb. Buddha is buried in India and his followers make pilgrimages there to mourn and weep... they wish he were alive. Muslims know that their great prophet Muhammad is buried in Medina, so they go there and mourn and weep, remembering him, wishing he were alive, but he is dead. Who is in Abraham's tomb? Abraham. Who is in Buddha's tomb? Buddha! Who in Muhammad's tomb? Muhammad! Who is in Jesus' tomb? Nobody! Nobody is in Jesus tomb because Christ is risen. His followers then knew, and we know it today as well. If you want to be near Jesus, you don't go to his grave in Palestine, you listen to the living Word of the Living Savior. You get baptized into his living, holy name. You go to his

supper and receive his living body and blood. Because he is risen, you don't leave cards or notes at his grave for him, you speak to him in prayer any time, anywhere, and he hears and he answers!

Jesus is the only one who rose from the dead, and he never died again. He still lives and that makes all the difference! That means that **things aren't always what they seem**. Jesus path that at first glance seemed to end in death and defeat actually ended in life and in victory with his resurrection. The women on the way to the tomb thought they were on a path of death, but they were actually on a path of life, for the tomb was empty and Christ was risen! And when you sometimes feel the burden and weight of living in a sinful world, and you experience the effects of sin, and you feel the burden of guilt, you may think you are on a path of death. But know this. Because Christ is risen, your path does not end in death. Christ's resurrection proves that **your sins are truly forgiven**, for he was who he said he was, and his payment of sin truly was complete. Christ's resurrection proves that just as he rose triumphant from the grave, our **dead bodies will one day rise** as well. We will live because he lives. And because Jesus lives, our lives now on this earth have extreme importance, purpose and meaning. Every minute of every day as long as God gives you time to keep breathing air, we live for Him. We glorify him. We give thanks to him. We praise him. We lead others to him.

The resurrection of Jesus is an absolute game changer. The fact of Jesus' resurrection is the lynch pin for the Christian faith!

The story is told of Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin, communist leader who took part in the Bolshevik revolution. They were, of course, anti-religion. In 1930 he traveled from Moscow to Kiev and addressed a crowd there on the subject of atheism. He talked for an hour and presented everything he could to dismantle Christianity. He hurled insults, arguments, proofs and personal reasons as to why it shouldn't be believed. When he was done, he asked the crowd, "Are there any questions?" Silence. One man, however, came up to the podium. He stood next to the communist leader. He looked to the left and to the right. And then he shouted this well-known ancient greeting: "Christ is risen!" The crowd got to their feet and their response was like thunder: "He is risen indeed!"

This ancient proclamation states the one simple fact makes all the difference in the world. It's is the truth that separates our Christian faith from every other. And we declare to God, "**You has made know to us the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.**"

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.