

Rejoice in the Resurrection! ~ Luke 24:1-12

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ March 31, 2013

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. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 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? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” Then they remembered his words. When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 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.



This is the day the Lord has risen, let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Unexpected surprises are great, aren't they? Maybe someone has thrown you a surprise birthday party. Perhaps you received an unexpected promotion at work. Or perhaps a loved one is coming back from deployment early. I can remember an unexpected surprise that my wife Kristin had. For her birthday I planned out an extravagant scavenger hunt. This hunt led her around the city of La Crosse, WI, to all the memorable spots. At each stop there was a small present with a clue to the next destination. I think Kristin was all giddy and excited, because it was her birthday and she was having fun. It was at the final destination where the unexpected surprise came in. On one of the bluffs overlooking the city, I got down on one knee and asked her to marry me. The rest is history.

I'm sure that my wife was excited when she got engaged, like many girls would be. But as excited as she was, I don't think it comes close to the excitement that the women who went to the tomb on that first Easter Sunday morning had. When they arrived at the tomb, they had an unexpected surprise. A surprise like no other. The women had come in preparation to bury Jesus properly, but instead they were greeted by two angels who said, “**Why do you look for the living among the dead?**” Oh, how their emotions quickly changed. And what caused that? Their emotions changed because they could REJOICE IN THE RESURRECTION and its message.

1. Come and see
2. Go and tell

(1)

“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.” Jesus had been crucified on Good Friday, but because of the coming Sabbath they didn't have time to properly prepare his body for burial. So the women, some of Jesus'

disciples, went to the tomb in mournful sorrow. I can only imagine the thoughts that were going through their minds. Thoughts of sadness, for the greatest man, teacher, miracle-worker they had ever known was killed. Their hope was gone, their spirit shattered, they didn't know what to believe any more.

Their already fragile state was further disoriented when they reached the tomb of Jesus. Or at least they thought this was the place. But it wasn't what they expected. They surely knew a large stone was rolled in front of the tomb to keep outsiders out, and insiders in, perhaps they even heard about the guards that were stationed there. But in the cool spring morning, dew still heavy on the grass and the plants, they approached the tomb, and through the disappearing mist saw something unexpected. The stone had been rolled away. There were no guards to be seen.

Curious as to what happened, and not a little afraid, the women entered the tomb and the surprises continued. They could not find the body they were looking for. They could not find the body of Jesus. "Who would do such a thing?" They may have wondered. They were puzzled. When all of a sudden they realized they were not alone in the tomb. A light shone forth from two men, angels sent from heaven, their clothes glistened like lightning. This was all too much – the women were sad, they were afraid, they were confused. What had happened to their Lord?

"The men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!'" If not for the angels, the women would have stayed in wondering confusion. An empty tomb is not proof of the resurrection, but the angel's message is. The angel's message from God was to go inside and look in the empty tomb, and realize he isn't there. But he has not been stolen, he has risen. There is no need to look for him in a place you lay dead people, he is risen.

The women were invited to come and see. To come and see an empty tomb, to come and see that Jesus' body was no longer there. They were reminded of the words that Jesus spoke to them before he died, words that explained everything. **"The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again."** This was all necessary, it had to happen. But why? Because the Scriptures said it would happen, Isaiah wrote, **"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him."** Jesus not only did this to fulfill the Scriptures, but for us as well.

The resurrection of Jesus proved that our sins are paid for. When Jesus died on the cross, he shouted out the words, **"It is finished."** Those three words were stamped onto bills that had been paid in ancient times. The bill for sin had been paid in full. Another way of looking at it is when you write a big check, the bank sometimes puts a hold on the money to make sure it's valid. After a few days the check clears. After three days, the check Jesus wrote for our sins in his blood cleared the Father's bank. Our sins were paid for. **"He was delivered over to death for our sins, and was raised to life for our justification."**

The resurrection of Jesus also proves that he is who is said he is. When he was here on this earth he gave many proofs that he was more than just a man. He also claimed equality with God. When he stood before the Jewish leaders who would condemn him, they asked the question: **"Are you the son of the living God?"** The answer Jesus gave stunned them: **"I AM."** Maybe this doesn't mean much to us, but to the Jews it was everything, it was the very name of God, he was claiming equality with God. But there have been many who have talked the talk, but Jesus walked the walk. Sure he could have shown his

power and come down off that cross on Good Friday if he wanted, but his love kept him there. An even greater display of his power and love was not in coming down from the cross but it was rising from the dead. Jesus, our Messiah, our Savior, our protector is true God.

The resurrection of Jesus also proves one more thing. Just as his physical body rose from the dead, we are promised that those who die in him, those who believe in him will also rise physically. Yes, one day, we will die, we will be buried in the ground. But that is not the end. We too will rise! Job says, **“I know that my Redeemer lives...and after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.”** And that is the power, that is the truth that the resurrection holds for us today. The Easter story is not just about a fresh start, a new beginning, rebirth spiritually, it is that because Jesus rose, we will too.

In our second reading for this morning, the great missionary, Paul wrote about what the resurrection means for us. In that same chapter Paul quotes from the Old Testament, **“Where O death is your victory, where O death is your sting?”** Death has been knocking people out since the beginning. That is one proof that we are sinners. But when death and Jesus faced off against one another, Jesus delivered the knockout blow.

And we too, just like the women at the tomb, are invited to come and see, and REJOICE IN THE RESURRECTION. The resurrection was Jesus’ greatest miracle. Not only because it was so powerful, but because it was so important to you and to me. Without the resurrection we would have no hope. If the resurrection is not true, there is no point in believing anything in the Bible. The resurrection of Jesus is what our faith rests on. And it is the resurrection of Jesus that the inspired writers of Holy Scripture took such care to document for us. All so that we can come and see and REJOICE IN THE RESURRECTION.

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But the Easter story didn’t end with just come and see and REJOICE IN THE RESURRECTION. It was also to go and tell others to REJOICE IN THE RESURRECTION. And that is precisely what the women did. After the angels reminded them of Jesus’ words, that he must suffer and die and then rise again, they remembered everything Jesus said. They rushed back from the tomb, their hearts burning with the news they carried. **“They told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.”** Remember, this was a group of believers who were heartbroken, they were scared, they were saddened, just like the women were when they were going to the tomb.

“But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.” This just seemed like a cruel joke to the disciples. I’m sure the women meant well to try and cheer them up, but it wasn’t working. Maybe they were hallucinating. But it didn’t seem logical. And quite frankly it wasn’t logical, but that did not make it untrue. How sad it was that so many of them didn’t believe the plain and simple words of the women, how sad that most did not remember the words of Jesus who said that he would not only die, but would also rise again.

“Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb.” Impulsive Peter had to check this out for himself. He didn’t believe the words of the women, but he wanted to verify what the women were saying. He ran to the tomb, and he found the same thing the women did. He found the stone rolled away, he found the tomb empty, and he saw the very strips they had wrapped Jesus in only days before, lying there in the tomb. All the evidence suggested against grave robbery and force, but it still didn’t make sense. **“Peter**

went away, wondering to himself what had happened.” Even after the women’s words, even after seeing for himself, the resurrection didn’t make sense.

And that’s because the resurrection doesn’t make sense. It is contrary to nature, it is an offense to human reason. To say that God became man to die on a cross for me, that’s foolishness. But it could only be a supernatural message that broke the cycle of sin and death. And it was this message that Peter did come to believe by God’s grace, and he did come to share fearlessly.

We may not have angels shining in bright clothes to convince us that the message is true, but we have the testimony of 2,000 years of history. Believers who did what the angels said, they went and told about what they had seen. They went and told in spite of the persecution they faced, in spite of how foolish the message may sound. And you know what? Even though that message defies logic, it defies the laws of nature, it is also the only message that defies sin and death. It is a message that is powerful, it is a message that millions have believed and shared.

It truly was an unexpected surprise that awaited the first women who went to the tomb on that first Easter Sunday morning. Since we know the ending, Jesus rising from the dead is not as much of a surprise for us, but don’t let that take away your excitement of the resurrection. The resurrection was something real, something tangible. It was exactly what those first disciples needed. It is exactly what we needed. REJOICE IN THE RESURRECTION. Come and see! Go and tell! Amen!