

Christ Community Covenant Church
Easter Sunday: 'For the Love of God!'
Pastor Dave Scherrer - April 20, 2014

This is quite a day isn't it! The day that we gather to celebrate the end of death. Scientists from Romania's Astronomic Observatory Institute say Jesus Christ died at 3 p.m. on the Good Friday, April 3, 33AD and rose again at 4 a.m. on April 5. I'm not sure about that date – perhaps. I've also read research that says with equal confidence that it was a week later on April 12th 33AD. Far as I know no one who lived then is still around to verify these dates. But of one thing I am sure – Jesus Christ did indeed resurrect from the dead and tipped history once and for all toward life. I am surer of this truth than any other so called 'truths' I have learned in my almost 140 hours of psychology and theology graduate school education. And this solid truth is far less costly! You probably remember the account:

Luke 24:1

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb,³ but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.⁵ And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?⁶ He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee,⁷ that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."⁸ And they remembered his words,⁹ and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles,¹¹ but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.¹² But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

Let's take stock of this narrative and try to plumb it for its depths. The first thing we want to acknowledge is that the resurrection is the foundational truth on which all other Christian doctrine hinges.

The Resurrection is the foundational truth on which all others Christian doctrine hinges

Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian in NYC said it well:

"If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead."

— Timothy Keller, The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism

You see if Christ is risen from the dead then that accounts for so much. It accounts for the change in lifestyle and behavior of the disciples. At the crucifixion, the disciples fled. They were dismayed and defeated fearing for their lives. They thought they were following a political leader who would claim an earthly throne. Turns out they were following very God of Very God. And the resurrection proved it. 60 days after the resurrection and the hundreds that reported that they had seen him over dozens of occasions resulted in disciples willing to die for their Savior. In Acts we find about a totally changed Peter, who had so tragically betrayed his friend now standing toe to toe with the religious police of his day:

Acts 4:1-12

4 And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them,² greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.³ And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.⁴ But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

⁵ On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem,⁶ with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family.⁷ And

when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?”
⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

You see the first preaching about Jesus wasn't about his mesmerizing teaching or even his walking on water or stilling storms. It was about Him risen from the dead. Because at the core of Christian doctrine is the risen Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:12-20 NLT

¹² But tell me this—since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. ¹⁵ And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. ¹⁶ And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. ¹⁸ In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! ¹⁹ And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. ²⁰ But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

The point of this passage is simple: if archeologists digging in Jerusalem someday find and confirm an ossuary with the bones of Jesus Christ, then our faith is finished. However, they will never find those bones! All that is kind of a given I think but it does not answer the question, “Why did He do it?”

Why did he do it?

I think it was for two reasons - For the love of His friends and for the love of God.

For the love of His friends and for the love of God.

We know of the old illustration about the reason Christ was willing to die on the cross:
ILL: “Because he loves us this much”

John 10:10-11, 15:13

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

All this is true - Jesus suffered this terrible beating and mocking and torture because He loved us and wanted to make a way for us back to God. But there is another compelling reason He did it. He did it for the Love of God, His Father.

John 14:31

³¹ but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.

John 14:23-24

²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

John 10:17-18

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

The Love of Jesus Christ to the Father manifested itself in His doing as the Father gave Him commandment. His obedience to the Father's will did not falter at forsaking the glory of heaven for the shame of earth. His obedience to his Father's will faltered not at death, even the death of the cross. His death was in the highest sense voluntary. It was the goal toward which Jesus deliberately walked.

Remember when Lazarus died and the Jews stood beside the tomb of Lazarus and saw Jesus weeping? They saw His compassion and broken heart and said, "Behold how He loved Him" (John 11:36)—how He loved Lazarus. Well today we stand beside the cross and behold Jesus bleeding and we cry "Behold how He loved Him"—Behold how He love God! ***He did it for the love of God!***

One last thought for this morning. I have heard it said, even by some who go to church all the time - "If he appeared to me too, then I would be convinced."

If He appeared to me, then I would be convinced!

Well that sentiment has been expressed before. We can read about it in John 20:19-22. It is the account of the first time the disciples saw the risen Lord. Up to this time they were still wondering what happened. They were thinking back to the times when Jesus said, "On the third day I will rise from the dead" - but even with the mysteriously missing body from the tomb as told by the women - all that seemed too fantastic to really believe. Then Jesus burst on the scene:

John 20:19-21

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

The doors were locked.

They were afraid.

Jesus stands in their midst.

1. The doors were locked.

Jesus did not have to knock. He did not even have to open the door. He simply was there. And he wasn't a ghost. Look at verse 20: "He showed them his hands and his side." In another place he said, "Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24:39). So he has a physical body. But not exactly like ours: the same, yet different. He was simply there, in spite of the closed doors. Which means that today in your life, Jesus can go where no one else can go. He can go where no counselor can go. He can go where no doctor can go. He can go where no lover can go. He can reach you, and reach into you, anywhere and anytime. There is no place *where* you are, and no depths of personhood *who* you are which Jesus can't penetrate. Jesus' resurrection from the dead fits him to do what no one else can do. There is no one else like him in the entire universe. He is alive, and he is the one and only God-Man. What he is capable of you cannot imagine. And it is a healing wonder to contemplate that all the complex layers of your life, which neither you nor anyone else can understand, are familiar territory to him.

2. They were afraid.

“The doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews . . .” Their leader had just been crucified as a threat to Caesar. Their fear is totally understandable. And into that fear Jesus comes. I suppose I want to draw your attention to this because this is the way I feel the need of the risen, living Jesus most often. Fear. Fear that I won’t be prepared for what I’m expected to do. Fear that the church won’t prosper, that I won’t be able to comfort you or have the right words to say when you too are afraid. Afraid that I won’t have the faith to die well. Fear that I might drift into worldliness and uselessness. And what Jesus is saying in this action is: *I come to my own when they are afraid. I don’t wait for them to get their act together. I don’t wait for them to have enough faith to overcome fear. In fact, I come to help them have enough faith to overcome fear.* And I testify after 45 years of being a Christian, this is still true. The risen, living Jesus is still doing this. He comes when we cry out to him in our fear. He helps us. I have called to him a thousand times: “Jesus, please help me.” And he has come near with the promise: “Fear not I am with you, be not dismayed, I am your God, I will help you” (Isaiah 41:10). He will do this for you too, if you receive him into your life for who he really is.

3. Jesus comes to them and stands in their midst.

Verse 19: “. . . the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them.” The point here is that he came right into the middle of their meeting. He did not come to the edge and call out through the wall and deal with them as a distant deity. He wasn’t playing games with them. He wasn’t toying with their faith. He wanted them to see him and know him and believe in him and love him.

That’s what he wants for you today. And that’s what I want for you today. I want you to experience the living Jesus. To know him. To have him draw near into your life where no one else can go. To have him help you in your fear the way no one else can help you. And to have him come to you — close to you, not calling to you from a distance, but coming right into your midst. That’s what I pray happens in this service.

Death is defeated – Life and Light and Love have come into our lives. Peace is ours! The Risen Christ longs to appear to you. Open the eyes of your heart. He is right in front of you!

It is as we have already sung!

<p><i>Christ the Lord is risen today, sons of men and angels say. Raise your joys and triumphs high; Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply. Hallelujah!</i></p>
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