

✠ Alleluia! Christ is Risen! ✠ The Lord is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

This phrase, one which we will share so much today and the days to come, bears much significance. Why? Because it recognizes the thing that changed everything. The moment history was made different. The Resurrection of the Son of God.

Crucifixion was a most cruel punishment reserved by the Roman authorities to make examples of enemies of the state. How many people did the Roman Empire crucify? Countless. Less than 40 years after Jesus' death, in A.D. 70, the Jewish historian Josephus reports that the Roman authorities laid siege upon the city of Jerusalem to crush a forming rebellion. He reports 1.1 million were killed, and another 97,000 were sold into slavery. Of those million inhabitants of Jerusalem slaughtered, "many" were crucified. Over the course of the Empire's rule, the Romans crucified thousands – but one name has survived these two thousand years. Why?

Because only one man came back from the dead. One man, who was killed as an example to others, who was surely dead, was alive once more. The Resurrection, and the news thereof, struck awe into Jesus' followers, fear into his opponents, and he would have become the talk of the town, surely. It is *this* news that *this* man who claimed to be God's Son was alive again that cemented his reputation among believers and non-believers alike for the rest of time. Jesus of Nazareth, the so-called "King of the Jews", was alive and had the holes in his hands and feet to prove it!

We know that this news changed the world. We live in a world that has been changed by this Good News, and continues to be changed by it. But what if we place ourselves in the shoes of those women who found Jesus that Easter morning – how shocked they must have been! The giant rock has been moved, and he's gone. There's no police to call, there's no CSI. Their devastation amounts to utter anguish because the body is missing. What would they say? Would they get blamed?

The crucifixion of Jesus evaporated all hope. For Jesus' followers, they had believed that he was the Messiah – the chosen one. The Messiah was to come to the world with a great army and wipe out the oppressive force of the Roman Empire and restore peace to the region. That's what they were taught by the generation that came before them. But here, this man – in whom they placed all their hope – was now dead. He was publicly executed in the most humiliating way imaginable – he was forced to carry his heavy cross through the streets of Jerusalem, was whipped and beaten – and finally he was nailed to the top of the tree along with two other common criminals. For Jesus' followers, this was utter devastation. How could they be so stupid to follow this man and believe what he said. He's dead now – so will they all be dead soon enough for associating with him?

These were likely some of the questions going through his followers' minds. So, why were the women going to the tomb on that Easter morning? It certainly wasn't because they thought they were going to find the Risen Lord. No. They were going because it was their duty to tend to a dead body. Joseph and Nicodemus didn't go through the process of finding Jesus a burial place if they thought he was going to be alive again. Mary Magdalene and the two other women weren't going to the tomb to tend to a body they expected to be alive again. No. Jesus was *dead*. All of their hopes had been dashed. All of the incredible things he told them while he was alive meant nothing. He was just another crazy guy who got in trouble for all the crazy things he said, and he was executed for it, like all the rest. If this was truly the story, and Jesus didn't come back to life, then there is not a chance we'd be here in this church. Christianity would be a nonsense religion if it wasn't for the resurrection. For, indeed, the resurrection is what changed everything.

We have heard the story year after year for our whole lives, so for us and our parents and grandparents it's old news. It doesn't come as much of a surprise. When it's Good Friday, and we think about the crucifixion, we know what's coming in two days' time. But Jesus' followers didn't know. Sure, he had talked about the resurrection to them before, but they thought he was just speaking in parables. They didn't *really* expect this to happen. They watched him die. They watched his spirit leave him on the cross. They saw the centurion's spear pierce his side, and saw the water and blood that came out. Jesus was dead. They saw his lifeless body just a few days ago. All hope was dead. Yet, the ladies tended to their duties because they loved him.

And when they arrived, what they found startled them. Each of the four Gospels accounts for this a little differently, but the commonality is that women were going to the tomb to tend the body. The number of women tends to be three, and Mary Magdalene was with them. But when they arrived, they found the tomb empty. They found the spot where they had seen their Lord lying dead empty. In the case of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there is somebody there to greet them, and tell them that Jesus is gone. In the case of John's Gospel, which we read this morning, Mary ran to get Peter and John to come and see what she saw. They saw that the tomb was, indeed, empty, but the scripture tells us they did not yet know the Scripture that he must rise again from the dead. They were surprised. They were shocked. They were scared. Who stole Jesus' body?

Mary then saw two angels in white while she was weeping, and they were sitting where Jesus' body had lain. They said to her "why are you weeping?", she turns around and the risen Lord asks her the same question, though she doesn't recognize him. Here to John's Gospel, the risen Jesus first appears to Mary Magdalene in the garden to console her. This is a very significant thing, especially considering the context it was written in. The Jewish custom at the time was to only accept evidence when presented by no less than two people, so there would be ample witnesses, but that rule also did not count a woman. And how many times in Scripture do we simply gloss over the identity of women? Especially in the Old Testament, but also in the New, we see lots of women essentially labelled as *the wife* of some great man. But here, Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, appears first to a *named* woman. Mary Magdalene was *THE* witness to the resurrection. A woman! And Jesus called her by name, and she knew who he was.

The news that changed the world, that this criminal who was executed and was truly dead was alive. Despite experiencing that lack of hope after his death, he was alive where no hope was found.

This is that hope that the resurrection gives us: that even where all hope seems to have disappeared, God has promised us new life in his Son. That most excellent free gift of grace was given to us all so that we may no longer experience the hopelessness of sin and death. And St. Paul tells the Colossians in our Epistle reading that this knowledge of the new life of Christ should *change* the behaviour of those who follow him. Christ's resurrection is so significant, that it has changed even the way we are to interact with the world. Paul encourages the Colossians to cast away their old life of sin and focus on heavenly things, to throw out all the things that take us away from Christ because membership in him is our only identity that matters.

This change in identity is one of the reasons that Easter is such an important season for baptisms. In the Early Church, Easter was the *only* time in the year for baptisms. We rejoice in the risen Lord, we acknowledge our new life ushered by his bursting through the gates of death, and we put on Christ as our new identity. And so, it is my great joy that we will be able this morning to welcome Devin as a new member of Christ's flock. The fellowship of Christians around the whole world and across the whole of time, both living and dead, whose identity is founded in our Risen Lord Jesus Christ, whom Saint Paul says is the head of the Church, while we are the body.

Just as God delivered the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea, Jesus has delivered all of humanity from the slavery of Sin and Death through the waters of Baptism.

And this is all possible only through the Resurrection. Without the resurrection, the hope, promise, and following is nonsensical. Without the Resurrection, none of us would be here. Without the Resurrection, Jesus might have been just another man killed on a cross. But he didn't just die, he rose.

This is the news that changed the world. The Christ, the Son of God had died, and through his death destroyed the power of sin and death, for he arose again on the third day. Because Jesus lives, people learn his name. Because Jesus lives, we know that God can breathe new life into what is seemingly dead. Because Jesus lives, we have been given that new life in him.

Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia. Amen.