

“Death Does Not Have The Last Word”

Isaiah 65:17-25

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Acts 10:34-43

1 Corinthians 15:19-26

Luke 24:1-12

A new way of living is available to each one of us today. This is the promise made by God in Isaiah 65:17-18, “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.” Yes, this had meaning to the people of God in the 6th century BCE, but it was also a foreshadowing of Jesus being resurrected from the dead. Jesus said in John 2:19, “...Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

Because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead the way was made clear for the new Jerusalem to move forward, not in a literal new Temple being built, but the people of God being a movement inviting others to join in. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Pastor and author Tim Keller, who recently was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, writes,

I always say to my skeptical, secular friends that, even if they can't believe in the resurrection, they should want it to be true. Most of them care deeply about justice for the poor, alleviating hunger, and disease, and caring for the environment. Yet many of them believe that the material world was caused by accident and that the world and everything in it will eventually simply burn up in the death of the sun...Why sacrifice for the needs of others if in the end nothing we do will make any difference? If the resurrection of Jesus happened, however, that means there's infinite hope and reason to pour ourselves out for the needs of the world...N.T. Wright has written: the message of the resurrection is that this world matters! That the injustices and pains of this present world must now be addressed with the news that healing, justice, and love have won...Easter means that in a world where injustice, violence and degradation are endemic, God is not prepared to tolerate

such things—and that we will work and plan, with all the energy of God, to implement the victory of Jesus over them all.¹

The Psalmist declares in Psalm 118:21 “I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.” Salvation from injustices and the pains of this world can be yours today and forever.

Luke 24:1-3 reads, “But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body.” Why did Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James go to the tomb that dark early morning? Perhaps they would anoint Jesus’ body, a tradition of Jewish burial. Maybe they went to see whether Jesus had risen from the dead as he himself had promised. Immediately they ran to the disciples and told them what they saw. Only Peter ran back to the tomb. The linen cloths were all that remained. Peter returned to his home amazed at what he saw. There is speculation that the disciples that did not go with Peter to the tomb discussed possible explanations for the empty tomb. Had the Roman guards stolen the body to mock Jesus publicly in the streets? Had Jesus only fainted on the cross, later waking, and walking out of the tomb? Jesus being raised from the dead is the very content of the gospel...the major affirmation of the Christian faith...the great hope of all humanity that God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead...This is the courage, by which alone we live that God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead.²

The context of the reading in Acts is this: Peter ended up in a village on the Mediterranean Coast called Joppa, following the resurrection. He stayed at the home of

¹Tim Keller, *The Reason for God* (Penguin Books, 2009), 210.

²Some ideas in this paragraph adapted from James C. Goodloe “Why Seek the Living Among the Dead?” a sermon preached on January 15, 2006.

Simon, a new believer who was a tanner. An orthodox Jew was not permitted to have any dealings with anyone who worked with dead animals. Yet, while staying at Simon's home, Peter had a vision. A sheet was lowered from heaven with all kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds of which he was not permitted to consume. God spoke to Peter. Peter was made aware of a new way to live. The truth of Jesus' resurrection changed him. What God had made clean must not be called unclean. There is unity in difference and diversity through Jesus Christ.

Not only was death defeated at the resurrection, but also all of death's tentacles: the end of all life as we know it, the destroyer of all dreams, the breaker of all hopes, the crushing burden of all life, and the loss of all love was defeated. Without the empty tomb there would be no resurrection, no faith, and no Christianity.

What now? Well, we tell people that God has promised a new heaven and a new earth, where justice will rule. Timothy Keller in *Hope in Times of Fear* writes, "...the resurrection, the Great Reversal, brings us both the power and the pattern for living life now connected to God's future for a new creation...Justice is equal treatment for all. Justice is radical generosity. Justice is advocacy for those without power. Justice is corporate and individual responsibility."³ Yes, we live in difficult times and disease death, and the loss of vision for a shared common good has diminished our ability to see a bright and better future for everyone. However, we can survive this moment together and lean into the new heaven and earth that God is creating. It is happening now.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:19, "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." Bottom line my friends. Because of the

³Timothy Keller, *HOPE IN TIMES OF FEAR*, (New York City, New York: Viking, 2021), xxiii, 160-163.

resurrection of Jesus Christ, everyone who begins that journey with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, experiences a better way to live in this life, but also has eternal life with God.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ defeats death in all its forms today and forever.⁴

Death does not have the last word. If you are sensing that you are unconditionally loved by God, for the first time and have never said thank you and that you believe in Jesus, do that now. You have begun this new way of living with Jesus on the journey. If you have said thank you to God and have believed in Jesus, say thank you again and reaffirm your faith in Jesus which will invigorate you on the journey. You are loved by God. Jesus' life, in its totality, matters. In Jesus Christ there is new life. Amen!

This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations) on Sunday, 17 April 2022 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh in the Sanctuary at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California

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