

Living Hope

Because God raised Jesus from the dead, we have hope

.....**Luke 24: 1 – 12**.....

“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. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵In 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? ⁶He 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 into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ⁸Then they remembered his words. ⁹When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹²Peter, 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.”.....

I have a friend who is Greek, and she taught me how to say ‘*Christos Anesti!*’ which means, ‘Christ is Risen’ in Greek. Every time we run into each other, whether it’s at the grocery store or at the gym, she shouts out to me, ‘*Christos Anesti!*’ and she waits for me to respond back to her, ‘*Alethos Anesti!*’ which means ‘*Truly, He is Risen!*’

Now, it doesn’t matter to my friend that it might not even be Easter when she shouts it out, because she knows that at any time of the year it is a blessing to be reminded that ‘*Christ is Risen!*’

Why is this news not just for Easter? Because if Christ is truly Risen from the dead, we can have hope that is real and alive in us each and every day.

No doubt our hope has waivered this past year. Never would we have expected to still be in the midst of a global pandemic, nor would we ever have believed that it could have impacted our lives so drastically. I’m sure for you too, holding onto hope has felt like a roller coaster ride. We have had to reground our lives to the foundations of our faith over and over again.

The hope that we have in Jesus is more than a wishful ‘*cross your fingers*’ type of hope. The author of Hebrews is right in calling Christian hope ‘***an anchor for our souls, firm and secure***’ (*Hebrews 6:19*). Even when our lives get rough and bumpy, deep down, our faith is held secure by our trust in him.

Our hope is rooted in the fact that Jesus did not stay dead in his tomb. Our hope is grounded in the truth that God raised him from the dead and he became alive again, and that he is still alive today.

Some might call us Christian because we follow the teachings of Jesus. And others might say that we are called Christian because Jesus is our role model for ethical living. But truly, we call ourselves Christian, not because of what Jesus taught us, or showed us, but because of what *he did for us*. God sent His Son Jesus to earth to be born for us, to live for us, and then die for us, so that he could give us hope and a future with God.

Consider with me for a moment about events that have impacted human lives since the beginning of recorded time. Our lives have been radically changed by the invention of electricity and indoor plumbing. And society has been transformed by the engine, by automobiles and airplanes. Add to that medical advances, with the discovery of penicillin, x-rays, ultrasounds and laparoscopic surgery. And of course, vaccines, something we are very grateful for right now.

But none of these things, - none, have impacted our lives like the event that took place in the early dawn on the first day of an otherwise ordinary week. The gospel of Matthew tells us that the world literally shook when Jesus' tomb was opened.

On the 3rd day after a man who claimed to be the long-awaited Messiah had been crucified and buried, life was eternally changed. His resurrection caused a seismic quake that would continue to be felt in human hearts for 2000 years. (*Matthew 28:2*)

Despite the precautions the Religious Leaders took to seal off the tomb, even though there were round-the-clock guards posted there, God orchestrated nature and angels to prove Jesus' divinity.

For the second time in three days, the earth shook, just as it had at the cross when Jesus took his last breath (*Matthew 27:51*). The huge stone had been rolled away. The strips of linen that had covered Jesus' head and body were still on the rock where he had lain.

The stone that had covered the tomb was massive, perhaps 800 pounds. One man could not have moved it; it took a whole squad of Roman soldiers just to put it there. If grave robbers would have taken the body, would they have unwrapped it, and left all those expensive spices behind? Not likely.

Peter confirmed what the women had told them. Jesus' body was gone.

Since that first day, many have wondered, and invented stories about the reason the tomb was empty. Some have imagined that Jesus was not really dead when they put him in the grave and that he somehow revived and pushed the stone away. But John tells us that a Roman soldier made sure that he was, by plunging a spear into Jesus' side (*John 20:34*).

Because it was cut out of rock, in the side of a hill, there was only one way out of the tomb. Guards had been placed at the tomb to make sure that no one stole the body. A seal had been put on the stone to make sure of that. (*Matthew 27:65-66*)

Matthew tells us that the guards fainted when the angels rolled away the stone. After they revived, they were certain enough about what had happened to go to into the city and make a report. (*Matthew 28: 4, 11-12*)

It was all true. Jesus was **'no longer among the dead'**. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we have hope in God's PROMISES. We find PURPOSE for our lives and we find POWER to live our lives.

Because Christ is Risen, we can trust his PROMISES.

All of the claims that Jesus made about God and about God's Kingdom were proved to be true. We can know for sure that he truly is the Son of God; the Messiah, whom God sent from Heaven to open the Kingdom of God for us.

We can trust that Jesus is our **'Good Shepherd'** (*John 10:11*) in the good days as well as in the dark valley days, and that **'no one can snatch us out of his hand'** (*John 10:28*). We can trust that he is the **'Way'** into God's Kingdom, and **'the Truth'** about God, and the only true source of **'Life'**. (*John 14:6*).

We can be confident that Jesus provides us the **'Bread of eternal life'** (*John 14:51*) and that he has accomplished our salvation by his sacrifice (*1 Corinthians 11:25*). We can know that he considers us brothers and sisters who will someday share in his Father's eternal inheritance (*Colossians 1:11; Hebrews 9:15*)

Jesus promises that we who belong to him will someday receive our own resurrection bodies just as he did. (*John 6:54*)

We can be certain that he will **'never leave us nor forsake us.'** (*Hebrews 13:5; Deuteronomy 31:6*) We can take comfort in being sure that **'nothing can separate us from his love.'** (*Romans 8:38*).

Because Christ is Risen, we find PURPOSE for our lives.

In the Bible we learn that we are known by God since before we were born, and that God has loved us with **'an everlasting love.'** (*Psalms 139; Jeremiah 31:3*)

God says in Isaiah, **'See, I have engraved your name in the palm of my hand.'** (*Isaiah 49:16*) He says, **'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.'** **...You are precious and honored in my sight, and ... I love you; ... Do not be afraid, I am with you.'** (*Isaiah 43:1 - 5*)

But God doesn't force us to belong to Him. He gives us the chance to choose to be a part of His life or not. We are born into this life to decide how we want to spend eternity.

Once we decide for Jesus, our lives take on eternal meaning. In the Bible, we also realize that each of us were born into this world for a reason that fits like a puzzle piece into God's eternal plan. (*Jeremiah 29:11*) Paul affirms that **'we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do God's good works.'** (*Ephesians 2:10*)

We find joy in becoming the person God created us to be and fulfillment in joining God in His mission wherever He leads.

Because Christ is risen, we find POWER to live our lives.

Through the same Power that raised Jesus from the dead, we also find strength to face our most difficult days. Just as God had said through the voices of prophets and angels, He promises us: **'Do not be afraid... for I am with you.'** (*Matthew 28: 20*).

To everyone who trusts in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sin, Jesus gives another gift, his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God who comes to live in our hearts to bring the Power of God into our own lives.

The Holy Spirit guides us and encourages us and anchors us to God's Truth. Jesus also calls his Holy Spirit our **'Comforter'** and our **'Advocate.'** (*John 14: 23- 27*) Even though Jesus returned to Heaven to rule with His Father, he still lives with us and in us by this gift of the Spirit.

God's Holy Spirit prays with us and prays for us and teaches us how God wants us to live.

Before Jesus left heaven to be born as a human baby, he chose to experience the emotions and hurts that we all do. Even though he remained fully divine, and God's Son, he chose to live every day through his human strength and by relying on the power of God's Spirit.

That's why Jesus went off by himself so often, to pray and to be refilled with God's Power. The same Power that filled Jesus and equipped him to do life on earth and to live out God's plan for him on earth, is also ours if we receive it.

We need only to ask Jesus to forgive our sins and then be the Lord over our life. Then Jesus **'pours out'** the gift of the Holy Spirit into our lives (*Romans 5:5*), and the Holy Spirit begins to transform us into the person God created us to be.

When life seems to drag us under and we wonder how we will ever find hope, the Holy Spirit will remind us. Every single time, He will fill us once again with the hope that His Power brings.

My life's motto is borrowed from the apostle Paul when he encouraged the Ephesian church with these words: **'Glory be to God, who by His Power at work in us is able to do far more abundantly than all we could dare to dream or imagine!'** (*Ephesians 3:2*)

When life seems too hard, we just need to call out Jesus' name and reach for his hand, and follow, trusting, where he leads.

Peter knew first-hand the gift Jesus' resurrection brings to our lives. He said, **'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven for you who are shielded by God's power.'** (*1 Peter 1:3-4*)

Today we celebrate the **'inexpressible and glorious joy'** (*1 Peter 1:8*) that fills our soul, made possible only by the certainty of Jesus' resurrection.

'Christ is Risen!' and all God's people respond.... **'He has risen indeed!'**

Thanks be to God!