

This Changes Everything!

As I was preparing this week for the Good Friday service and for Easter morning, I kept thinking about the disciples and the emotional roller-coaster of this weekend. They experienced the lowest lows and the highest highs of their lives, all in a span of 72 hours! Think with me.

The disciples arrived in Jerusalem along with Jesus to the shouts of “Hosanna” as the whirlwind of a week began. The city itself was crowded beyond belief with visitors coming from everywhere for the feast of Passover. Jesus was Jesus, teaching, healing the sick, ministering, being controversial, saying things they couldn’t quite understand. He kept talking about being betrayed and handed over to the authorities but the disciples couldn’t imagine who among them would betray Jesus.

Jesus shares the Passover seder with his disciples and then leads them out into the night to his regular place of prayer in an olive grove called Gethsemane. After a long day and a big meal, the disciples catch themselves drifting off to sleep as Jesus prays. Their rest is cut short by a detachment of soldiers and the sound of a familiar voice. Judas says “rabbi” and quickly kisses Jesus on the cheek. Betrayed with a kiss, Jesus is arrested and taken to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest. The disciples scattered from the garden but some came close to the fire in Caiaphas’ courtyard, hiding in plain sight in order to watch as Jesus is illegally tried and found guilty of blasphemy before the Sanhedrin. He is then taken to Pilate for sentencing. After being mercilessly beaten and whipped, Jesus is forced to carry his cross to Golgotha, the Place of the Skull where he is nailed to that cross and left to die this agonizing, lingering death.

The disciples watched in horror. There was to be no intervention from heaven. The voice that had thundered at his baptism “This is my beloved Son” appeared to be silent that day. The miracle was – there would be no miracle. “It is finished” they heard him say and they watched as the Son of God died. John wrote, “With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” John 19:30. But in case anyone would mistake that for being less than final, John states the soldiers were instructed to break the legs of the men being crucified in order to hasten their death but when they came to Jesus John reported “he was already dead.” It was finished and final.

Hurrying because the Jewish Sabbath was approaching, two righteous members of the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea and a Pharisee named Nicodemus claimed Jesus’ body, wrapped it according to Jewish burial customs and placed the body in a nearby tomb. Pilate had the tomb

sealed and later posted guards. The disciples gathered behind locked doors to try to wrap their minds around what had just happened!

Jesus is dead. This changes everything. Can you imagine what they were thinking? First of all, their friend, mentor, teacher, rabbi, master, the one they believed to be the promised Messiah, was dead and he wasn't coming back. After all, no one comes back from the dead. The disciples were dealing with a profound sense of grief and personal loss. They had never known anyone like him because there was no one like him and now he was gone.

They had to be dealing with a profound personal crisis of self-confidence. "I was so sure he was the Messiah. In fact, I thought he was the Son of God but obviously if he was, God wouldn't have allowed him to die. How could I have been so wrong? How could I have misjudged the whole situation so completely? What else have I misjudged in my life? Jesus is dead. This changes everything. All my hopes and dreams and plans." I think the crucifixion must have shaken them to their very core.

They had to be experiencing something of an identity crisis as well. "Well this changes everything. I mean, who am I now? Before I was a fisherman, a tax collector, but for the past three years I have been a follower of Jesus whom I thought to be the Messiah. I was a traveling evangelist talking about the coming of a kingdom that I guess isn't coming after all. So what am I now? A fool in need of a job and since Jesus has been crucified by the Romans and I was one of his followers, I probably need a new identity and a new place to live."

Jesus is dead. This changes everything. "What are we supposed to think? How are we supposed to feel? Where are we supposed to go?" Everything Jesus had said and promised must have been a lie or he must have been mistaken or misled himself. At the least it was a failed attempt at Messiahship. Jesus is dead and the disciples are hiding behind locked doors, fearful that they may be branded as co-conspirators of Jesus and themselves arrested and executed. "What do we do? What's our next move? Do we just go back home and act as if the whole thing never happened?" "We'll just write it off as that weird religious period we went through when we were young."

Jesus is dead and this changes everything. But then, early on Sunday morning, while the disciples are still trying to figure out their next step, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and some other ladies come bursting through the door shouting that Jesus has risen from the dead! "Calm down! Calm down! We can't understand if everyone speaks at once.

Now what are you saying?” “Jesus is alive!” “What do you mean he’s alive? “He’s alive!” “And what makes you think he’s alive?” “We took spices and things to the tomb this morning but when we got there the stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty and we thought maybe someone had stolen his body but while we were standing there talking and wondering what it all meant two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood right beside us and we almost fainted. The men said “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! They said ‘Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee, that he would be handed over to sinful men and be crucified and then on the third day he would rise again.’ Remember when he said all that? So we hurried as fast as we could to tell you.” Luke tells us, **“They did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.”**

Peter said, “Let’s all calm down. I’ll go look into it and see what is happening.” Peter and John ran to the tomb, found it empty as the women said, and Luke tells us Peter “went away wondering to himself what had happened.”

Later that night, while the disciples were together wondering what had happened, two men showed up and told a story about walking to Emmaus earlier that day with a stranger who told them what the Scripture had said about the Messiah and when he sat down to eat with them they recognized that it was Jesus and then he disappeared from their sight. And while they were still trying to process that story, suddenly, Jesus himself was standing right there in the room with them. Luke tells us they thought it must be a ghost they were seeing but Jesus said, **“Why are you troubled and why do doubts arise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have...and while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.” Luke 24:38-43**

They were convinced. Do you know what they realized? **Jesus is alive! This changes everything!** The resurrection of Jesus from the dead changed everything for the disciples and it changes everything for us. The disciples went from doubting, questioning whether they had misjudged Jesus and his claims to an absolute certainty he was who he said he was. Thomas, the disciple who was not present when Jesus appeared to them, said, “Unless I put my finger where the nails were I will not believe it.” But when Jesus appeared to him a week later, Thomas cried

out with a new certainty, **“My Lord and my God!” John 20:28**

Jesus is alive and it changed what they believed about who he was. All doubt was settled by the resurrection. He was everything he said he was and more. You see, he had made some outrageous claims for a man to make. In his book, *Why I Am A Christian* John Stott wrote, “By claiming to be the good shepherd who went out into the desert to seek his lost sheep, he was implying that the world was lost, that he wasn’t, and that he could seek and save it. In other words, he put himself in a moral category in which he was alone. Everybody else was in darkness; he was the light of the world. Everybody else was hungry; he was the bread of life. Everybody else was thirsty; he could quench their thirst. Everybody else was sinful; he could forgive their sins...Several of his parables implied that he expected to return at the end of history. On that day, he said, he would sit on his glorious throne. All nations would stand before him, and he would separate them from one another as a shepherd separates his sheep from his goats. In other words, he would settle their eternal destiny. Thus he made himself the central figure on the day of judgment. [Think about it.] These are breathtaking claims. [Realize] Jesus was by trade a carpenter. Nazareth was an obscure village on the edge of the Roman Empire. Nobody outside Palestine would even have heard of Nazareth. Yet here he was, claiming to be the savior and the judge of all humankind. He claimed to be the Christ of Scripture, the Son of God and the savior and judge of the world.” ...John Stott

Outrageous. Yet I believe his claims to be true because the one who made all of these claims; the one who said he could forgive my sins; the one who said he had come that I might have life and have it more abundantly; the one who said he had come to give his life as a ransom for my sins; the one who said he was the resurrection and the life and even if I died, if I believed in him, I would live; the one that made those claims was crucified, died, was buried, and on the third day he rose from the dead! Did you hear what I said? Talk about making a point. He rose from the dead! Listen, when a man is dead from Friday until Sunday and then gets up and walks out of the tomb, alive, seen by eye witnesses, by 500 people at one time, I’m going to pay attention to what that man has to say. He said he was light and life, master and lord over all including death itself and the grave and he proved it when he rose again. Jesus is alive and it changes everything.

It changed not only what they believed but how they lived. No longer living in fear, they boldly began to proclaim the truth of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension. They told the

world that salvation could be found only in Jesus Christ, God's Son and our Savior and Lord. They found their purpose in life because he rose from the dead. They found meaning and an eternal destiny that motivated and inspired them, that kept them going in spite of persecution and opposition. They lived and overcame every challenge through the power of the resurrected Savior. His resurrection changed everything for his disciples and almost 2,000 years later the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is still changing us.

Jesus is alive and this changes everything. You see the limits are off. If the dead are raised to life then what used to be impossible is now possible. If Jesus is really who he says he is, and his resurrection proves he is, then I believe he can do all things. Hope was restored when Jesus rose from the dead. Miracles are still possible because Jesus rose from the dead. Everything that Satan has taken from us can be restored because Jesus is alive and that changes everything. His resurrection is the ultimate game changer! He arose. He plundered hell. He gave us the victory!

Jesus is alive and all things are possible. Jesus is alive and we don't have to live in fear anymore. He has conquered and risen in triumph and that means even in the face of death, we don't have to be afraid. From the cross Jesus said, "It is finished" and he died. But his resurrection means it may have been finished, but it wasn't over. Not even death could stop Him and the grave couldn't hold him. And because we are in Christ, when it comes our time to die, we can say with Jesus, "It may be finished, but it isn't over." I'm going to rise to live for ever with Jesus and with the saints of God in that place he has prepared for me.

It isn't just how we face death. It's how we face life. It's how we face every obstacle, every challenge or defeat. It may be finished, but it isn't over. It may look like your marriage is dead. It may be finished, but it isn't over. The doctor may say there is nothing else she can do. It may be finished, but it isn't over. It looks like your hopes and dreams and plans have all been dashed to the ground and shattered. It looks like it's all finished, but it isn't over. I know a God who brings the dead back to life! I know a God who turns night into day, weeping into rejoicing. I know a God who turns defeat into triumph and victory. It may be finished, but it isn't over! Jesus is alive and that changes everything!

After Jesus showed up, the disciples walked out of that upper room where they had locked themselves away with a new outlook. Jesus is alive and everything is different – everything is possible. Fifty days later they are baptized in the Holy Spirit and the church found

its voice. Instead of hiding in fear they stood on the public street and in the temple courtyard and proclaimed the Jesus who had been crucified was in fact the risen Savior, Messiah and the coming King. They faced death willingly because they knew Jesus was alive. Just weeks ago when the 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians were martyred by ISIS, reports indicated the last word on their lips was the name of Jesus. They weren't facing death by calling on a dead and lifeless memory of a great teacher, they were calling upon a risen and living Savior.

Jesus is alive and that changes how we face life and death. Jesus is alive and that means every one of his promises are true. Jesus is alive and that same power that raised Him from the dead dwells in us by the Holy Spirit. That power enables us to live for Him and to serve him and to live a holy and obedient life, a life that is pleasing to Christ.

Jesus died and that changed everything because he died for us as the sacrifice that atoned for our sins. Jesus rose from the dead and is alive now and this changes everything for us. All things are possible through Christ. And you know what else? Jesus is coming back and that changes everything for us as well. Jesus is coming, we learned from the apostles' creed, to judge the living and the dead. Jesus is coming back and we want to be ready when he returns.

Jesus is alive and coming back and this changes everything! Are you ready to meet him? On this Easter Sunday morning, if this should be your last Easter, are you ready to meet the Lord? If Jesus should return or if you should die today, do you know where you will spend eternity? Jesus is alive and that changes everything, including your eternal destiny. Let the risen Savior change you today. If you've not made Jesus the Savior and Lord of your life, I invite you to open your heart to him today. Acknowledge that he died to atone for your sins. Repent and ask his forgiveness, then receive his pardon, placing your life in His hands.

I think I've quoted from St. John Chrysostom's Easter Homily every Easter for the past few years. Let me quote again this morning. **"Christ is risen and hell is overthrown. Christ is risen and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen and life reigns. Christ is risen and not one dead remains in the grave."** ...St. John Chrysostom

And I would simply add, **Christ is risen and this changes everything!** Hallelujah. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!