

Today we gather to celebrate the greatest event in the history of our world, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is central to the Christian faith. The resurrection is so important that we gather every Sunday to celebrate it. But the celebration is especially wonderful on Easter Sunday itself.

The resurrection is so important that 70 years ago, our ancestors in the faith here at St. Paul's gave it prominent placement in our stained-glass windows. Easter day is actually in 2 of these windows. One of them is more symbolic. But the other is based on scripture, on the Easter account in the Gospel according to Luke.

The first window is the highly symbolic one. It shows Jesus rising from the tomb, climbing out of a grave. He carries a symbolic flag, a banner of the resurrection. He comes out triumphant, with flags flying, literally.

But there's no account of the actual moment of Jesus' resurrection anywhere in scripture. Scripture tells of the discovery of the empty tomb. Scripture tells of appearances made by the risen Jesus. But scripture is absolutely silent about the actual moment of his resurrection.

So this morning I want to look at what scripture DOES tell us. And I especially want to look at what the Gospel of Luke has to say about the events of Easter day.

Luke talks about Easter day in 3 scenes. The first scene was our Gospel lesson which we read a few moments ago.

Luke says it's early in the morning on the first day of the week. Literally he says it is Day #1 of the week. But that's probably a hint that it's also Day #1 of a new reality, a new world, a post-resurrection era.

But the followers of Jesus don't know that this day marks the beginning of a new era. They're beginning the day as if it's a normal day. It's a sad day for them, because Jesus had been executed 3 days earlier. But a regular day, nonetheless.

A group of women, a group of at least 5 of Jesus' female followers goes to his tomb. They're going to anoint his corpse. They're going to do what family and friends do for a deceased loved one in their culture.

But they arrive there and discover that the stone is rolled away and the tomb is empty. And notice what they do NOT say. They do not say, "Oh. He's not here. I guess he's been raised from the dead. Let's go home." They do not say this because they don't expect to find that Jesus has risen from death. In their world, as in ours, you don't expect a dead friend or relative to be missing from their grave. And if you find they are missing, then you certainly don't expect that they have come back to life. You would look for some other explanation.

Thus the women are in for quite a surprise when 2 angels appear in front of them, dressed in clothes that gleam like flashing lightning. And the angels bring a dazzling message as well:

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."<sup>1</sup>

The angels then remind the women that Jesus predicted all of this, that he must be crucified and then raised on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. The empty tomb by itself was not enough to convince them that Jesus had risen. But the message of the angels coupled with the reminder that Jesus predicted all of this apparently is sufficient to convince them that something new and wonderful has taken place.

And so they hurry back and tell Jesus' male disciples the good news. But their testimony is apparently not enough to convince the guys. In fact, Luke says the guys consider the women's words an "idle tale" and blow them off. Literally, Luke uses a word that physicians used to describe delirious babbling caused by a high fever. In other words, the guys think the women's words are nothing but crazy talk, and they don't buy it.

That's the first of 3 scenes of Easter Day in Luke. The second scene is actually our 2<sup>nd</sup> Easter window here at St. Paul's. It could be a whole sermon by itself, but I'll summarize quickly.

Two of Jesus' followers are travelling from Jerusalem to Emmaus, about a 7-mile trip. They've definitely heard the account of the women who found the empty tomb and claimed to have seen angels. But these two don't buy it either. The resurrection is just not something any of them were expecting.

And yet, the risen Jesus himself appears to them and starts walking down the road with them. But they don't recognize him at this point. In the course of their conversation, they ironically tell Jesus all about Jesus' crucifixion, and about how they're bummed out that he was killed. They were hoping that he was the Messiah.

Jesus does not reveal his identity at this point. But he does start an impromptu Bible study with them. He tells them that the Old Testament pointed to a Messiah who would have to suffer and die and then be glorified. He's telling them that the crucifixion was all part of God's plan.

That night they invite Jesus to stay with them. And at supper, he takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them. It was the same thing he had done 3 nights before at the Last Supper. And at that moment they recognize Jesus, and he disappears from their sight. They recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread. And they decide to hurry back to Jerusalem that evening to tell the other disciples.

Which brings us to Luke's 3<sup>rd</sup> scene of Easter day. The two disciples from Emmaus arrive back in Jerusalem and tell the other disciples how they met Jesus on the road and how they recognized him in the breaking of the bread.

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<sup>1</sup> Lk 24:5

And at that moment, Jesus appears to all of them. At first, they're startled and think they're seeing a ghost. But Jesus tells them to look at his hands and his feet still bearing the wounds of crucifixion. He invites them to touch him, to prove that he's real and not some sort of apparition. And Jesus takes a piece of fish and eats it in their presence.

And again, he tells them that the crucifixion and the resurrection were necessary, and that they were predicted in the scriptures.

And Jesus' presence makes all the difference. They had been in a state of fear, hiding out, wondering if they were going to be arrested like Jesus was. They had been in a state of depression and grief, mourning the loss of their teacher. They had probably been beating themselves up for abandoning Jesus at his arrest and running away to save their own hides. And they had written off the news of the women returning from the empty tomb as an idle tale and delirious babbling.

But now... but now, they are in a different state of mind. Luke describes their state with two words: great joy. Literally "mega" joy.

That's how Luke describes the events of Easter day. That's how Luke describes the events of Day #1 of the new era, the post-Resurrection era. But Luke doesn't stop with Day #1. Luke continues to talk about the events through Day #40 and Day #50 after the Resurrection.

That's one of the reasons Easter is a season and not just a day. Easter is not a one-day celebration. It is a great 50-day celebration every year. For 7 weeks and 8 Sundays we celebrate Easter every year. This year, our Easter celebration will continue through June 9.

50 days. Think about that time period for a minute. 50 days. Where were you 50 days ago? Can you remember the first weekend of March, 50 days ago? I do. It's easy to remember because I was at a concert on March 2.

50 days. Have you changed much in the past 50 days? I know I haven't changed all that much. Yes, I got to see Metallica 50 days ago. It was a great show. It had been 26 years since I had seen them while I was in seminary. But did that concert 50 days ago change my life? Not hardly. Yes, I hope I've grown a little better as a human being over the past 7 weeks. But I haven't had any huge changes in the past 50 days.

But the disciples of Jesus on Day #50 Easter were VERY different than they were on Day #1 of Easter.

In fact, we have a 3<sup>rd</sup> Easter window here at St. Paul's. These first 2 windows are from Day #1 of Easter. But the 3<sup>rd</sup> window shows Day #50, the day of Pentecost. On Pentecost we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples.

But more importantly, on the Day of Pentecost, on Day #50 of Easter, the disciples pick up the baton from Jesus. They begin to do what Jesus did. They begin to preach and teach. Soon they would begin to do healings. And soon, they too would be arrested, and eventually, they would also begin to be executed just as their Lord was. And yet, in spite of persecution, on Day #50 and moving forward, the disciples are now acting fearlessly.

They began Day #1 of Easter in fear and grief. They were mourning Jesus' death. They were afraid that they might be next. And they were feeling guilty for abandoning him.

And yet, by Day #50 of Easter, they are standing up publicly in the same city where he was executed. They are proclaiming not only his death but his resurrection as well. They are proclaiming that this is sign of God's love and forgiveness for his people. And they are inviting people to be baptized, to share in the new life Jesus offers.

And they do all these things even though there will be opposition, and later arrests, and later executions. And they stick with this story and this mission for the rest of their lives. And they go to their own deaths rather than giving up on this mission to share God's message of love and new life.

What happened in between? What made the disciples change so much?

In between they encountered the presence and the love and the forgiveness of their risen Lord. Their experience of the resurrection changed these disciples forever.

And here we are. It's no longer Day #1 or even Day #50 of Easter. For us it's somewhere in the neighborhood of Day #725,000. We are living in the Christian Era. We are living in the centuries that have followed the Resurrection.

Are you going to live your life as if tomorrow is a normal day?  
Or will you live in the light of the Resurrection?

We have so many fears in life. Uncertainty about the future. Violence in our world. Plenty of hatred, plenty of division. We are often afraid for ourselves and for our loved ones. We are often afraid of death.

But we don't have to be. Because we live on this side of Easter, Day #725,000 and counting.

Jesus Christ is still alive and active. He offers us his love. He offers us his presence in the same way he offered it on Day #1. We can find him still in the words of scripture, and in the breaking of the bread.

He is also present in our midst whenever 2 or 3 are gathered in his name. And his Holy Spirit still empowers us to carry forth his message to the world.

That means we are free to love God and love others, and not be afraid of anything else. Nothing is more powerful than God's love. Even death itself will not separate us from the love of God. God promises the gift of eternal life to all who put their trust in him.

With that promise, with that assurance, there's nothing to be afraid of.

So I ask again...

Are you going to live your life as if tomorrow is a normal day?  
Or will you live in the light of the Resurrection?

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.