

IN LIGHT OF DAY: JESUS' WORDS ON THE CROSS IN LIGHT OF RESURRECTION

One of my favorite resurrection stories is the walk to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). 2 disciples are on the road and a fellow traveler joins them on the road (turns out to be Jesus)

My favorite line: "but we had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel"

But we had hoped.

Can any of you relate to that? A hope that gave way to disappointment? A dream that collapsed before it ever bore fruit? Maybe it was a new job or promotion that went to someone else? A relationship that didn't pan out.

Our youngest son definitely felt this last night, as all the kids helped make cookies only for him to find out that he had to wait until morning to eat it. It's actually a tradition we have - we make resurrection cookies on Holy Saturday. It's a kind of meringue cookie, and we read parts of the crucifixion and burial passages that roughly go along with the ingredients. And then at the end, we actually "seal" the cookies in the oven with tape to let them cool overnight.

Let's just say that Wilder did NOT get what was happening. All he knew is that he thought we were getting cookies, and all of a sudden we're telling him it's bedtime and no cookies.

There's a deep pain that comes from a desired future that collapses before our eyes.

These disciples had walked with Jesus, heard his teachings, seen his miracles, celebrated with the crowds as people welcomed him into Jerusalem with shouts of praise as if welcoming in a new king. They believed the pain of their people's bondage was coming to an end.

And then they watched it all get taken away from them before their eyes. Their own priests and rulers handed him over to be crucified, and they watched him die.

But we had hoped.

The good news for those 2 disciples was that their hope was walking right there next to them and they didn't even realize it.

This Easter Sunday I want to remind us of the hope we have in Jesus, specifically by revisiting some of the last words that Jesus spoke on the cross, but in light of the empty tomb.

Each of these is a meaningful statement in its own right, and I hope folks have gotten as much as I have out of our reflection on them individually these last several weeks. But one thing we haven't spent much time reflecting on is how they'd be remembered if Jesus hadn't overcome the grave. What if their hope really had died for good on that Friday?

But the REASON each of these sayings is meaningful is because JESUS is saying them: Jesus - the Son of God, 2nd person of the Trinity, God in human flesh... nailed to a tree... humbling himself unto death for our sake.

And it is only because of the resurrection that we know that Jesus is indeed Lord.

The resurrection of Jesus is the proof that he is indeed who he claimed to be - God in flesh - and that he has conquered all the power of sin and death by enduring the cross and rendering it's power futile in the face of his glory and love. As the apostle Paul once said:

I. WITHOUT THE RESURRECTION, JESUS' DEATH IS MEANINGLESS

If not for the resurrection, his words on the cross would have endured differently. Just look:

1. Enduring mockery and torture, Jesus offers a shocking prayer of mercy and intercession, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34) but if he remains the grave, apparently they DID know what they were doing. He was a fraud and a blasphemer, just as they accused.
2. Responding to the humble faith of the criminal at his side asking to be remembered, Jesus assures him, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:43) - but being *with Jesus* is little comfort if he remains in the grave.
3. Taking notice of his mother and his dear friend John near to him at the cross, he entrusts them to each others' care, "Woman, here is your son...Here is your mother" (Jn 19:26-27) - but if he's not the Messiah, his mother has been committed to the care of one of his crazy friends rather than her actual children.
4. Then, in a moment of anguished pain, Jesus cries out in lament, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46, Mk 15:34) - which, if not for the resurrection, seems an admission of God's abandonment.
5. He follows with a simple acknowledgement of his need, "I am thirsty" (Jn 19:28) and receives a drink of sour wine from a sponge on a stick. To all appearances, only further evidence of his helplessness and lack.
6. It says he then senses that the time has been fulfilled, and he announces, "It is finished" (Jn 19:30) -
7. and takes his last breath, while once more quoting the psalms, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46) -

If not for the resurrection, these would sound like the *ravings of a lunatic*, unable to come to grips with reality of his own messiah complex... or else so committed to the *blasphemous lie* that he is unable to give it up.

If his body remained in the grave, his words would stand condemned by the silence of death. Remember Emmaus: But we had hoped he was the one who was going to redeem Israel...

But here's the weird thing, they said, "It's 3 days since all that took place, and some of our women have amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning, but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus." (Luke 24:22-23) - Isn't that wild? Can you believe it?

They still haven't realized who they're talking to, but Jesus is like, "Yeah, I can believe it."

He actually says, "You all are so slow to believe everything the prophets have said. Didn't the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And he explained it all to them.

The suffering is an integral part of the story, ultimately fulfilled through the victory over death.

II. JESUS' RESURRECTION MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

It means that his suffering was not his condemnation but rather his path to victory. Because of the resurrection, every word spoken on the cross carries new meaning.

1. In light of the resurrection, we see Jesus showing empathy for those acting on what they thought was right. He has forgiven us while we were yet sinners and intercedes for us
2. We see that Christ gives assurance to those of us who confess our sin and his lordship, endeavoring to honor him with whatever little time and ability we have just like the criminal at his side.
3. We see that Jesus cares tenderly for those in need and creates bonds of family beyond even our broken relationships, even in our grief and loss.
4. We see that Jesus has been vindicated and exalted. The Father has not forsaken the Son but glorified him in resurrection (Acts 2:29-36; Php 2:6-11).
 - a. In his first famous sermon, Peter makes this point explicitly - that while we condemned Jesus to death, he has been resurrected and exalted as Lord and Messiah.
 - b. Paul likewise makes the same point in his letter to the Philippians, that because Jesus humbled himself to the point of death, he has been exalted to the highest place - that every knee shall bow and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.
5. But let's keep going. Because He lives, we see His thirst was proved a fulfillment of scripture - just as the Psalmist in psalm 69 speaks of receiving gall and vinegar from his enemies but God's provision and salvation. "The poor will see and be glad - you who seek God, may your hearts live! The LORD hears the needy and does not despise his captive people" (69:32-33). And as Jesus emptied himself in thirst, he has yet poured out his Spirit - the living water that refreshes our souls.

6. Because He lives, we see that “It is finished” is not the hour of his demise but the hour of his victory. As his time has come, what he has done will not be undone. Jesus has accomplished his purposes in the cross and will bring it to completion.
7. Because He lives, we see that the Son has committed his spirit not unto judgment but exaltation. He did not pass with a moan of defeat but a sigh of trust and relinquishment.

It brings into focus what he told the disciples the night before the cross in John 16:32-33. He was trying to explain to them what was about to happen and he says, “A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

He has overcome all the troubles of the world. OUR troubles. The trouble we caused. He has been exalted and glorified as King.

When Peter first shared this in his famous sermon at Pentecost, people were cut to the heart and said, “What do we do?”

He said, “Repent and be baptized. Receive forgiveness from Jesus and receive His Holy Spirit.”

When Paul reminded the church of this in Philippians, he said “So work out this salvation given to you with fear and trembling - for God will work in you to fulfill his purpose. Don’t grumble, but love one another with tender compassion, be humble and value others above yourselves.”

Resurrection means that Jesus truly is who he claimed to be, that he has conquered death, and putting our hope will work its way out through us in humility and compassion.

III. JESUS’ RESURRECTION MEANS THAT ALL THE POWER OF DEATH HAS BEEN DEFEATED

Look back through the significance of all those sayings to see just a glimpse of the hope and promise we receive in Jesus:

1. When we constantly fall short, we know we have pardon for our sin,
2. When we are racked with guilt, we have assurance of his acceptance,
3. When we are grieving and alone, we have adoption into a new family,
4. When we feel abandoned, Jesus is interceding for us in our pain,
5. When we are in need, Jesus gives us care as our Bread of Life and Living Water,
6. When we are struggling to the finish, he is our hope for endurance,
7. and When the world feels overwhelming and broken, we have peace in the knowledge that there is a God who is both Creator and King, who has not abandoned us to the consequences of our broken condition. He has confronted it, humbling himself unto death and rendering it powerless.

He. Is. Our. Hope!

Let all people be assured of this: that Jesus whom we crucified is both Lord and Messiah.
For He is Risen. He is risen indeed. And that makes all the difference.

I'm still fairly young as a pastor, but I've been doing this church thing for quite a while now.

I know what it's like to forget.
I know what it's like to lose hope.

My most recent big crisis occurred during that first year of the pandemic. Maybe you remember the early days when it seemed like everyone was in it together. Everything was uncertain, but people were patient with one another.

That didn't last long, right? Don't get me wrong, there were still lots of people out there doing a lot of good. But if your experience was anything like mine, you probably got dinged a bit as well.

The worst for me as a pastor was seeing fellow Christians that I had really looked up to just completely let me down and act in some incredibly un-Christlike ways.

I had hoped that Christ in us would have made us a different kind of people.

But I was making the same error that those Emmaus disciples made. Because I didn't realize that in my disappointment, Jesus was walking right there beside me.

And guess what? As I continued to love others when they disappointed me, and they loved me when I disappointed them, I found we both changed. We both became a little more like Jesus. A little more humble. A little stronger in our faith and love, BECAUSE of the disappointment.

That's just one in a long line of examples of the ways Jesus has shown up in my life when my hope ran short. And yet I'm so prone to forget, I keep finding myself asking how he could possibly bring anything like life or goodness out of this situation...

And every single time... He does.

Because He's good.

And His love endures forever.

The grave is empty.

So once again this morning, let us come to the Risen Lord.

Let us join those disciples in their burning hope, as they asked one another:

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road?"

Let us repent and turn to Jesus in humility and trust.

Let us be renewed by the power of His Spirit.

And let us sing His praise.

Pray with me this morning.