

“Raised With Christ”
Acts 10:34-43; Colossians 3:1-4;
Matthew 28:1-10

Easter Sunday, April 20, 2014
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It was an early morning as Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went towards the tomb. We can assume that they were probably not very happy. We can assume they were probably down in the dumps, thinking it was over—this wonderful experience with this prophet Jesus—but at least now they could finish it up. They could try to do what was right, make sure that his burial was appropriate.

So there’s always this huge moment of surprise. In Matthew, we get the angel coming bright and like lightning. It’s a wonderful description of the entry of God into their lives in a way that changes everything all at once.

They were walking down the road. They thought the veil of death had separated them once and for all from Jesus. And all of a sudden it was like that veil fell. It was no longer there. They experienced the angel’s words and so they turned to go. And what happened? It was a fairly mundane thing, in some ways. I was struck by it as I was reading it. Jesus said, “Greetings.” It’s like he said, “Hello,” and there he was. He entered back into the normal life they lived.

He hadn’t kept them waiting that long. He had only been in the grave from Friday night to early Sunday morning. He didn’t keep them waiting for a week to find out what had happened. They had experienced the empty tomb, and then he said hello and he was there, and he said do not be afraid. I think that’s one of our first cues from this passage. The first thing he does is say, “Do not be afraid.”

Now, these many years later, we’ve thought a lot about it. We’ve gone through many Easter mornings. It’s almost part of our culture. But greeting somebody who has risen from the grave is not something we do every day. I think I would be thankful to hear “Do not be afraid.” I’m still grateful that he says, “Do not be afraid,” because there is much in life to fear, and yet when we meet him we hear those words. Do not be afraid.

The next thing he says is, “I’ll see you in Galilee.” The angel has told them that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee, and he’s reiterating the message. It’s nice that we can know we need not be afraid, that he goes ahead, and we will meet him again.

Indeed, after all these years have gone by, I think we have a history of people meeting Jesus again and again. He goes before us, and I believe we will meet him again. It’s useful, I think, to think about those encounters in our own lives. Sometimes he comes in the most unexpected times, like in the middle of the most terrible grief of two women walking to a tomb to take care of his body. Sometimes he comes in the middle of our grief. Sometimes he comes in the middle of our struggles. Sometimes he comes in the middle of our fellowship. Sometimes he comes in a moment of grace in the most unexpected places.

Yes, Jesus goes before us and we will meet him again, and he invites us to follow him all these many years later. We know he's torn the veil of grief aside, torn the veil of death, and invited us to life. One of the ways he does that is what Peter says in Acts. He has gone through all of this so that we know God's love. In many ways it feels like the world rejected God's love in Christ, hung it on a cross, and tried to bury it away. But God's love doesn't stop. We can't stop it. It rises again, as Christ rises again, and in that love coming again is the opportunity for our forgiveness.

What Peter said in Acts is we get to receive forgiveness. Why do we need to receive forgiveness? One reason is that in any relationship, it's hard to go on with that relationship if we don't feel forgiven. If we know what we've done is wrong, if we know we have messed up in our relationship with God—it certainly is clear to me in my life—I need that. I need to know that I'm forgiven so that I can be a follower of Christ. It's an invitation into the relationship.

We see in Colossians a little bit of what that relationship looks like. We begin to see that we don't have to keep looking back. So often in life it's easy to keep looking over my shoulder, thinking about the things I've done in the past or what I might have done wrong. It's easy to get caught in the habits of my life. It's easy to get caught in a particular way of thinking. It's easy to get caught, but Jesus invites us to rise with him, and to recognize that even if we can't see what it's like to be free, he invites us to follow him and find out; to set our eyes on things above. I don't have to keep looking back. It's useful to learn from what I did in the past, but I don't have to be caught by it.

We are forgiven and invited to live into the resurrection. God's love is still present. God is here, and God wants our lives to be the best they can be. He invites us to follow. To look up, is what it says in Colossians, to keep our eyes on things from above. Look at how our lives can be great, wonderful. Try to move past, let go of the things that catch us.

Let Christ lead. I have a hard time with that sometimes. You see, I like to lead my own life. But Christ invited us to let him lead. When we do that, I think our lives become a little like the cross that once was bare, and now is beautiful.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.

Let's pray:

Lord, indeed you are risen and you call us out to follow you, to look up, to know that you are in our lives, that you go before us. We will meet you again and again, and each time your grace rules. How wonderful it is. Lord, let us come, know your grace—the grace we celebrate this day—know the wonder of a God that comes to us, brings love to us, and lets nothing stop that love, not even death on a cross. Thank you, Lord. Let us live into the resurrection by following Christ. Amen.