

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Mark 16:1-8

¹ When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" ⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." ⁸ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

"Bah, humbug," were the sentiments of Ebenezer Scrooge about Christmas in the beloved story, "A Christmas Carol". Ebenezer hated everything about Christmas and apparently lacked any sign of having the spirit of Christmas within him. Then when the spirit of Christmas yet to come showed him a grave; and he wiped away the snow covering the gravestone, revealing his name and the fact that he had died, Ebenezer wept with remorse for his negative attitude about Christmas and repented for his neglectful and foolish behavior toward others. He feared there was no hope for him and he was condemned to die. But, as the story goes, we know Ebenezer did get a second chance. You could take Christmas out of this story and replace it with Easter very easily.

"Bah, humbug," was the sentiment of those who condemned Jesus to die on the cross all those years ago when the word started to get out that Jesus' body was not in the grave where it was placed just three days earlier. "Bah, humbug," is the same sentiment people we may know express today about Easter and the resurrection of Christ that Christians celebrate.

A young man came to his boss and asked for the day off to attend his grandmother's funeral. His boss said, "Sure."

The next day the young man was talking to his boss. The boss said, "Do you believe in resurrection from the dead?"

The young man answered, "Yes."

To which his boss replied, "Interesting, because after you left work yesterday, your grandmother came to visit you!"

It is hard to fathom how someone could suffer such a cruel execution as Jesus did—die and then come back to life. I've heard descriptions of what happened to Jesus's body as he hung on that awful cross, and it doesn't paint a pretty picture. Listening to the torture his body endured—in great detail—made me squirm and want to cover my ears. Suffice it to say, his bones were pulled out of sockets and broken; he slowly bled and suffocated to death. It's easy to wonder how anyone could come back to life after enduring that. "It was impossible—completely unbelievable," and "prove it," people who do not believe in the resurrection of Christ would say today.

We could pull out our bibles and point to the four Gospel stories of the resurrection to try to convince them that it did happen. To those who might say, Jesus was only unconscious and

later revived; we could point to the story in Mark that records a Roman soldier told Pilate Jesus was dead.

Or we could turn to the Gospel of John where we are told a Roman soldier did not break Jesus' legs, which was done many times to hasten death, especially when the sabbath was close at hand and the Jewish authorities wanted the bodies disposed of before the sabbath arrived when they would not be able to do it. But the Roman soldier did pierce Jesus in the side to make certain he was dead. John also tells us that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus wrapped Jesus' body and placed it in the tomb. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw Jesus' body placed in the tomb.

To those who might argue that the women who went to the tomb made a mistake and went to the wrong tomb, we could turn to John who tells us that Peter and John also went to the same tomb.

Or some might suggest thieves stole Jesus' body, to which Matthew would argue that the tomb was sealed and guarded by Roman soldiers. Or maybe the disciples stole Jesus' body; but in Acts 12:2 we read that the disciples were ready to die for their faith. Stealing Jesus' body would have been admitting that their faith was meaningless.

Some might even argue that the religious leaders stole Jesus' body to produce it later. That idea has holes in it too. If the religious leaders, who lobbied for Jesus' death, had taken Jesus' body, they likely would have produced it to stop the rumors of his resurrection.

Perhaps the greatest evidence that Jesus arose from the grave—conquering death—is the church. Jesus predicted to his disciples his death and his resurrection which would occur three days later. Had that not happened, just as he said, do you think the church would have been born and survived this long.

When Jesus walked out of that tomb and revealed himself to the men and women who were his disciples and later to others, the church began coming to life. The Good news spread like wildfire as the disciples, having seen the risen Christ, took it to all who would listen, and people believed. The good news has been kept alive and spread all over the world, reaching our ears, our minds, and our hearts, so that we too have the opportunity to hear and believe. We are invited to believe, to have faith without ever having seen or touched the resurrected body of Christ.

We believe Jesus arose from the grave—Amen, church? Amen. The belief we have in the resurrection of Jesus is foundational to the church. It binds us together as one body—the actual living body of Christ. The church is more than lessons from the life of a good teacher—a great man who once lived; we have substance in our witness to the world because we know Jesus arose from the grave. We have substance on which to build our relationship with each other and with the world.

Jesus having kept his promise to rise from the dead, gives us reason to believe he will keep all of his other promises; like, whoever believes in him will have eternal life, he's preparing a place for us in heaven, he will answer our prayers (maybe not always the way we want them answered), he frees us from sin and shame; he will be with us always even when we are so distraught that we cannot feel his presence. These are just some of the promises Jesus made to us, and we can have assurance that he will keep all of his promises just as he kept the promise to rise from the dead.

The resurrection is vital to our faith, for other reasons too. The resurrection of Jesus ensures us that the ruler of God's eternal kingdom will be the Living Christ—not just some idea,

wish or dream. Those who worship idols can have their ideas and dreams, but idols are not living, therefore are not of substance and lasting worth.

Jesus' resurrection gives us the assurance that we also will be resurrected. Unlike the character, Ebenezer Scrooge, who feared death, we do not need to fear it. Jesus assures us, as he knows firsthand, that there is more to come after this lifetime. We do not need to fear death.

A little boy and his father were driving down a country road on a beautiful spring afternoon. Suddenly out of nowhere a bumblebee flew in the car window. Since the little boy was deathly allergic to bee stings, he became petrified. His father quickly reached out, grabbed the bee, squeezed it in his hand, and then released it. But as soon as he let it go, the young son became frantic once again as it buzzed by the little boy.

The father sensed his son's terror. Once again, he reached out his hand, but this time he pointed to this hand. There, stuck in his skin was the stinger of the bee. "You see this?" he asked. "You don't need to be afraid anymore. I've taken the sting for you."

The Christian does not need to be afraid of death because Christ has taken the sting out of death and sin. Paul reminds us of this truth in 1 Corinthians 15:55-56: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law."

We also learn from the resurrection that the power God had to bring Jesus back to life is the same power available to us to bring about new life to our morally and spiritually dead selves. We can experience new life here and now. We don't need to be hostages to our sinful past. We can change and grow and experience the Kingdom of God in the here and now! Hallelujah!

As you can see the resurrection is vitally important to us for many reasons. Without it, there would be little on which to base hope for a meaningful life now. Without the resurrection we would likely be contributors to the attitude of indifference and selfish individuality that is so very prevalent in our society today, creating hatred and division in home, cities, countries, and even churches. Without the resurrection we would be captives to our fear of death, without hope for a life after this one. We have wonderful reasons to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, to shout out, "Christ is risen!"

The British minister, W. E. Sangster, began to lose his voice and mobility in the mid-1950s. He had a disease that caused progressive muscular atrophy. He recognized the end was near, so he threw himself into writing and praying. In the midst of his suffering he pleaded, "Let me stay in the struggle, Lord. I don't mind if I can no longer be a general, but give me just a regiment to lead."

Sangster's voice eventually failed completely, and his legs became useless. On Easter morning just a few weeks before his death, he took a pen and shakily wrote his daughter a letter. In it he said, "It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice with which to shout, 'He is risen!'—but it would be still more terrible to have a voice and not want to shout."

We have reason to believe in the resurrection. Our faith is emboldened by the resurrection. Jesus arose! Jesus lives today in you and me! Brothers and sisters, shout with me again, Christ is risen!!!!