

McCabe United Methodist Church

April 4, 2010

“Christ Arose”

John 20:1-9

Pastor Art Scanson

Did you hear the good news? Did you hear that he’s not there no more? Did you hear that his back fishing for men? It is easy to say, “Yes we have heard the news!” But do we truly believe what we hear?

I’m pretty sure that the women who came to the tomb that first Easter morning were shocked and surprised. They had to have run on shaky legs back to the disciples, their hearts pounding with both shock and excitement.

What happened that first Easter is an amazing story. A man risen from the dead. Never before and never since has this happened in human history.

Presidential candidate Mike Huckabee was once asked if he believed in the resurrection. “Of course I do,” said Huckabee. *“Dead people vote in every election we have in Arkansas. Resurrection is very real to us.”*

Huckabee was being humorous. However there was one woman who took the question more seriously. She was sitting in church during Advent season at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. In the course of the sermon the priest asked this question, “What do you really want for Christmas this year?”

This woman says she nearly rose from her pew to answer the priest like this, “[What] I would really like [for Christmas is] to believe in the resurrection.” (Nora Gallagher, *Practicing Resurrection*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing)

How many of us are in the same boat? Otherwise how do we explain our anemic expression of our Christian faith? If we really believe in the resurrection, if we really believed that Christ lives and that his Spirit is in the world today, would we not live more confidently, more courageous, more committed lives?

Did you hear the good news - **Jesus Christ rose from the dead**? Yes, that may be too much for some to accept. From the very beginning both dedicated disciples as well as cynical critics have struggled with the story of the resurrection. We can read it in the biblical testimony. Read today’s scripture lesson John 20:1-9. Notice *“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”* Some said his disciples stole his body.

Others contended he was not really dead when he was laid in the empty tomb—he only swooned, or passed out, on the cross—that he only seemed to be dead.

Then there are those who believe that the resurrection is simply too good to be true. There must be some rational explanation—anything but a resurrection. And yet my friends, it is true! Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He is alive today. How can I say that with such confidence? Let me share with you a couple of reasons.

First of all, those who experienced his resurrection are credible witnesses. You don’t have to take my word for it. Go back and read the record for yourself. That’s what Lee Strobel an attorney and journalist did. For a time, Strobel says he was too intellectual to accept the resurrection of Jesus as established fact. In his book God’s Outrageous Claims he writes: *I used to consider the Resurrection to be a laughable fairy tale. After all, Yale Law School had trained me to be coldly rational, and my years of sniffing for news at the Chicago Tribune had*

only toughened my naturally cynical personality. But intrigued by changes in my wife after she became a Christian, I spent nearly two years systematically using my journalistic and legal experience to study the evidence for the Resurrection and the credibility of Jesus' claims to being God. I emerged totally convinced and gave my life to Christ. . ." (Cited by Dr. James L. Wilson, <http://www.freshministry.org/alameda/10.htm>.)

My challenge to you is that if you have doubts, go back and read the story for yourself. As you read, notice that it does not read as something that was made up. It is too chaotic. Just notice the initial reaction of the disciples to the resurrection. They had trouble believing themselves.

Even after the risen Christ had made himself known to many witnesses, Thomas one of Christ's disciples, would not believe it could be so - not until he saw for himself. And when he did, it says he believed.

This is not a story fabricated to deceive. These witnesses to Christ's resurrection recorded their testimony with all the doubts of their friends and the accusations of their enemies left intact. Thus, the first reason I believe in the resurrection - those who experienced the resurrection are credible witnesses.

But what is most impressive, **is how the resurrection affected their lives.** These disciples were absolutely transformed. They moved from doubting and fearful to dynamic and ferocious in their witness to the resurrection. Before Christ was crucified Simon Peter denied he even knew Christ and yet, a mere seven weeks later on the day of Pentecost Peter told the story of Christ's death and resurrection with such conviction and power that three thousand people became believers. (Acts 2:41) So how do you explain such a change?

Even more impressively, none of those who claimed to have met Christ after his resurrection ever recanted (renounced their faith). Rather, they were persecuted, tortured, even martyred, and right to the very end they stayed true to their testimony. He is alive!

The amazing thing is that every one of Jesus' disciples passed the test. Their lives were dramatically turned upside down by their encounter with Christ. How would you ever make something like this up and stick to it when stones were piercing your body as did Stephen, the first Christian martyr? Or as you were being crucified upside down like Simon Peter? It is rather hard to dispute the testimony of someone who is so convinced of what they have experienced that they are willing to suffer and die to tell the story. Can that be said of us?

A day after the terrible tragedy at Columbine High, CNN journalist Larry King did a live interview with a teenage girl named Mickie Cain, a student who had witnessed the massacre. Mickie was having a difficult time maintaining her composure and was able to blurt out only a few words before lapsing into uncontrollable sobs. Larry King was patient and gave her plenty of time to regain her composure. Mickie recounted the chilling story: "Let me tell you about my friend Cassie," she said. "[Cassie] was amazing. . . She completely stood up for God when the killers asked her if there was anyone [in the classroom] who had faith in Christ. She spoke up [and said she did] and they shot her for it." (Franklin Graham, *The Name* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc. 2002))

What a testimony as Cassie made that day that makes our witness look pretty pathetic, doesn't it? The critical question is, would we make such a sacrifice for something that we knew was patently untrue? Of course not! And neither would those early disciples of Christ. You don't have to just take my word for it. Read the record - these were not wild-eyed fanatics. They were intelligent men and women, responsible, sensible, but something dramatic had happened in their life, something so dramatic, so extraordinary that it could not be

denied. They had met the Christ risen from the grave and they would not testify otherwise even while being tortured.

My friends, the resurrection is real. Christ is alive. Lee Strobel is only one among many intelligent and scientifically trained men and women who have studied the record carefully and come to the conclusion that the evidence is overwhelming: Christ rose from the dead. He is alive and he is available in our world today.

Rosemary is a woman who works in the Alzheimer's Unit of a nursing home. She and a colleague named Arlene brought the residents of the home together one Good Friday afternoon to view the acclaimed movie, *Jesus of Nazareth*. They were not sure whether these elderly Alzheimer's patients would even know what was going on, but they thought it might be worth the effort.

Once they were able to get everyone in place they started the video. Rosemary was pleasantly surprised at the quiet attention being paid to the movie on the screen.

When it came to the scene where Mary Magdalene comes upon the empty tomb and sees Jesus' body missing. Where the unknown man, who is actually Jesus, asks Mary why she is looking for the living among the dead. Mary runs as fast as she can back to the disciples and tells Peter and the rest with breathless excitement, "*He's alive! I saw Him, I tell you! He's alive.*" But as she looks at them she sees the doubt in their eyes which causes Mary to pull back. "*You don't believe me. . . You don't believe me.*"

At that point somewhere in the crowd of Alzheimer's patients came the clear, resolute voice of Esther, one of the patients. "I believe you, she said, "I believe you!" There with the bare functions of life comes a profound truth, deeply ingrained in the soul of Esther.

Well, Esther, I believe it too. The evidence is overwhelming, and life makes no sense without it. Jesus Christ rose from the dead!

So what impact will this have on the way you live and serve this Jesus? May the ministries of McCabe continue to increase because we believe - He is alive!

So how is it with you - Did you hear the good news?

Did you that he's not there no more?

Did you hear that he's liv - in' a - gain, -

did you hear he's back fishin' for men?

If you haven't heard then I'm passing the word -

that he's liv - in' a - gain!

May God grant each of us a Blessed Easter! And everyone said, "Amen!"