March 31, 2024 **NOW WHAT?**

May the peace and grace of our resurrected Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!

The Apostle Paul insists that the resurrection is central to Christianity. 1 Corinthians 15:14–19, we read “and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain, and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (NRSV).

Love carried Christ to the cross, but the moral influence of a mere model of love is of minimal value. The crucifixion without the resurrection grants no forgiveness. But the Bible insists that this Jesus – crucified, dead, and buried – rose from the dead! Furthermore, this is the best news anyone could ever hear. The resurrection of Jesus is that kind of news: life-changing truth, which demands at least three responses from us today.

According to the gospel passage for this Easter Sunday St. John 20:1-18, we must accept the “Resurrection” because it is true: (John 20.1-10) Peter and John run to the tomb after Mary’s report of a missing body. John arrives first and stops at the short doorway. Peter plunges into the cave, John then follows. They see something surprising: the burial cloth. God provides more evidence of the resurrection: the testimonies of Jesus’ apostles, the reports of hundreds of eyewitnesses, the changed character of the disciples, and the manuscripts which offer many proofs of their historicity and reliability. We could also study how these accounts have marks of first-hand truth to the evidence of the empty tomb.

Verse 5 says that John “saw the linen cloth.” In Greek there are several words for “seeing”; this is the most general one – John simply saw. Verse 6 tells us that Peter also “saw,” but here is a different word. More than mere observation, this includes comprehension or understanding. John saw the clothes; Peter somehow perceived they meant something. Then John enters the tomb, and (at the end of verse 8) “saw and believed.” This is a third word for “see,” and can include the idea of experiencing what is observed. What happened to John; he saw and believed – he got it, in other words! But what precisely did John see that made him believe in the resurrection?

First, John saw the “linen cloths.” Bodies were prepared for burial first by coating them with sticky spices (including myrrh) then wrapping them tightly in cloth. The result was a virtually glued wrapping, like the way golf balls used to be constructed. That is why, when Jesus resurrected people, the first thing friends would do is begin to remove the grave cloths. John sees that and realizes that no one stole the body. A thief would not spend an hour in the middle of the night unwrapping a decaying corpse so that he could carry it naked from the tomb! He would grab and run, like a purse-snatcher.

Second, John saw the face cloth folded in a place by itself. Unlike the body wrappings, covered as they were with a pitch-like glue, the face and head cloth were not treated with burial spices. That cloth was clean. So, after the resurrection, Christ (or an angel) carefully folded it up. Here is an act of deliberate, calm, and orderly behavior. Jesus is leaving clues that cannot be mistaken by any thoughtful observer. The body cloths, sticky and piled in one place, indicate that the body materialized outside of the wrappings.

And the head cloth announces that this was no hurried act of theft, but the careful actions of someone leaving a trail of breadcrumbs for the disciples to find and follow. And John walks down the path in his mind, putting the pieces together, and believes. He snaps his fingers and says, “I got it!” This is the resurrection Jesus spoke of; this is what the prophets meant.

For us to be an Easter people means that more than the day of celebration, it is the resurrection that counts. More than calendar observances, it is the daily realization that the very power of God, which raised Jesus from the dead, is also the very same power, which flows in and through us as followers of the Risen Lord. If you want to learn more about the resurrected power of Jesus, please join us in our worship on Sundays at 1100 AM.

Peace!

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