

Resurrection People - Easter Sunday

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[0 : 0 0] Today's scripture is from the Gospel of John, chapter 20, verses 1 through 18. Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him.

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen, lying there, but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb.

He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.

[1 : 1 7] Finally, the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.

They still did not understand from scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to where they were staying. Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying.

As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, Woman, why are you crying? They have taken my Lord away, she said, and I don't know where they have put him.

At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, Woman, why are you crying?

[2 : 3 1] Who is it you are looking for? Thinking he was the gardener, she said, Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.

Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, Rabboni, which means teacher.

Jesus said, Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news. I have seen the Lord, and she told them that he had said these things to her.

This is the word of our Lord. Thanks be to God. Friends, please join me for a word of prayer. Almighty and gracious God, we give you thanks for what this morning means.

[3 : 4 0] We give you thanks for the beauty of this day, not only physically, but for what it means in our hearts and in our souls. And now, Lord, with those hearts and souls open to you, move among us afresh, pour into each of us anew, light a flame in us so bright that the world can't help but see it, and know that you are its source.

In Jesus' name we pray and ask. Amen. Amen. So what's your story today? I mean, stories are how we connect, right?

When you were greeting people outside, and folks came up to you, and they said, how's it going? What happened? What's new? You started your stories. So what's your story today?

Is it about some nasty lady in line at Wegmans? It happens. Is it about some crazy thing the dog has done?

Is it something your co-worker didn't get done on time, which people in this room will talk about with me? Because I'm the one who didn't get it done. But what's your story today?

[4 : 57] I hope that you recognize that today, there's at least another story that should be on your mind. Because if the world sees all those other stories from you, and you can share them so freely and so easily, where's that story in your heart?

Where's that story in your life? Because it's one of those things to know the story. I mean, most folk get the basic narrative that we are here to celebrate today.

That Jesus was crucified on Friday, and on Sunday, he rose from the dead. Pretty much anybody who lives in this nation can tell you at least that bare bones version of the story.

But there's a difference between understanding that, being able to recite that, and it being your story.

That's what we need to consider for a moment. How much of that truly is your story?

[6 : 18] See, because if the resurrection is not your story, if you are not a person of resurrection, well, then the implication is you must be a person of death.

Now, that sounds a bit harsh. But if resurrection is not your story, then your story must end with death.

I don't know that that's a club I want to sign up for. But what does it mean to move into that place where the resurrection is your story?

Because that's the challenge for some, because it's clear that even some people who claim Christ, even some people who are regularly in church, even some people who read their Bibles still struggle with this idea of the resurrection.

So how do we get to that place? Well, let's go to the story itself. Because the story itself shows that everybody who loved Jesus had to move to that place.

[7 : 40] So let's set the scene a bit. You heard Sandy read it for us today, but let's remember, it's been a heck of a few days for these folks.

The Thursday night they're gathered over Passover dinner. They're celebrating. They're celebrating. It's joyful. Then Jesus starts telling everybody what's going to happen.

That he's going to be betrayed. And then the room starts to change. The energy starts to change. And he teaches. And he helps them remember. And he does these things.

Then eventually they leave. And he needs to go to this place that they're familiar with. But then they spend some time in some pretty intense prayer. At least he does. The rest of them fall asleep. Then the soldiers show up.

Then he's taken into town. A group of people decide that he is guilty of blasphemy. And they try multiple times to get him convicted until they finally succeed.

[8 : 50] And then he's beaten multiple times. He's whipped and scourged. He's paraded through the streets.

And then he is crucified. And he dies. And let's be clear. He dies. Those who love him.

A small group of them. Hurry to get him buried. But they can't finish everything that they're supposed to do by the tenets of their faith.

So they leave in order to adhere to the Sabbath rules. And that's where we enter the story that you heard today.

So Mary and some other women who were disciples of Jesus came to the tomb to finish the burial rites.

[9 : 56] And the challenge here that I want you to connect to with being a person of death as opposed to being a person of resurrection is when they go, and this is one of those tricky pieces, right?

But I want you to hear this and hear this well. Nobody, including the people who loved him the most and those who believed he was the Messiah, nobody was expecting this.

Nobody. Check it. You don't go to finish a burial rite for somebody you expect to be alive.

Nobody was expecting this. So they get there. He's not in the tomb.

Mary goes running back to get the others. And they too are like, what do you mean he isn't there? They go running off because he's supposed to be in there.

[11 : 00] In other words, they weren't expecting it. They get there. And it doesn't look like it was ransacked.

In fact, the details tell us that it was actually in order. Stuff was folded, in other words. Which just makes it that much more confusing.

And so Mary stays behind after the other two leave.

And she's crying. Because she's still in death mode. Listen to what she says to the supposed gardener.

If you've taken him away, tell me where he is and I'll go get him. In other words, my dead Lord needs to be respected. And if you moved him, just let me know.

[12 : 07] But then the story changes. Everything changes.

But here's where I want you to catch on to something. See, because if you are still trapped in death mode, if you are still struggling with this idea of a risen Lord, how do you live with death as the final word?

Because it makes a difference to be a person of the resurrection. And if you're wondering what that difference is, let me give you some examples. see, if you're a person of death, how do you believe anything Jesus said?

Because he said he was going to do this. And if he didn't do this, then why do you trust anything else he said? if you're a person who's caught in death mode, how do you love something?

Sounds like a strange question, but ponder that for a minute. If you're in death mode, how do you love something? The reason why I say that is this, is because if you're looking for evidence, if you're looking for facts, if you want the logic of the resurrection, if you want somebody to prove it to you, the challenge here is, how do you get the facts that show you that you love something?

[13 : 50] How do you get the logic of what it means to love? Where is your evidence that someone loves you? Friends, those things are not about logic, facts, and evidence.

They're what happen in our hearts. They're what happen in our spirits. And so, if you're looking for logic, facts, and evidence about love, you know you don't have them.

But you know love in your life. At least I pray you do. And if you know that you can love, and you know that you are loved, you know that's not about facts and evidence.

It's what happens in your spirit. But if your spirit can receive that, if your spirit can know that, if your spirit can own that, then maybe you can make space for some things that happen that aren't about facts and logic and evidence.

if you're a person who's caught in death mode, I'm curious about how you face the challenges of the world.

[15 : 12] Here's why I ask that. Because if you are a person who is caught in death mode, where this is all there is, death, and it ends with death, how do you then tap into something that makes you care about other people?

Not just in the love way that we were talking about, but makes you realize that maybe there's something greater than simply the law of the jungle, or might makes right, or I need to just get mine and we need to figure this out and survive.

But if you have a sense that there is something greater, that there might be something more, that, of course, there has to be something else, then maybe there's someone behind that idea, and you can make space for the idea of resurrection in your heart.

You see, that's the challenge that death thinking gets overcome by resurrection thinking.

Because when the resurrection is your story, when the resurrection is a fundamental part of who you are, you come at the world differently. For those of you who may not be there yet, let me show you what I mean.

[17 : 07] Because when we come here, or we are anywhere, and we need comfort, and we cry out to Jesus, I know a dead Jesus doesn't hear that prayer, but my risen Jesus does.

When I am in sick, and need healing, and I reach out and say, God, can you move in this moment? I know that there is somebody who hears, and responds, and touches, because he is alive, a dead Jesus, doesn't do that.

If you are wondering why, it's worth challenging some of the things we see in this world, the injustice that we see, the hunger that we see, genocide taking place in front of us right now, and you are looking for why it matters that the people of Jesus stand up, where does your why come from?

Mine comes from that says, love your neighbor as yourself. Mine comes from someone who sent the Holy Spirit to me, and says that your fuel is bigger than just your own selfishness.

When my particular challenges are great, when there's a mountain I need to climb, or a valley I need to traverse, and I need strength, strength I don't have on my own, where will I find that?

[18 : 49] I will find that in the one who carries me, who strengthens me, who pushes me, and a dead savior cannot do that, but a risen Jesus can.

man. And if that is not your story, I understand. It takes a while to get there, but if you're not there yet, how do you get there?

You need what Mary had. You need an encounter with Jesus.

Jesus. Now, you may not have an encounter like hers. The risen one may not physically be before you. However, if in your heart of hearts you reach out, if from the pit of your soul you seek him, trust him to move in your life, I can't promise you what it will look like.

I can't promise you what it will feel like. Because God will talk however God chooses to talk. God will reveal himself however God chooses to reveal himself.

[20 : 13] But I do trust this, is that if you seek him, he will respond. And when he does, it may be something simple.

Something as simple as simply moving from a place of not knowing to a place of knowing. It may be moving from a place of chaos in your spirit to a place of peace.

Maybe that problem you didn't know the answer to, now you know the answer to. Where it comes from, I will have no idea, but I do promise you, if you seek him, he will respond.

And let me remind you, a dead savior doesn't do that. But the risen Jesus will. However you choose to seek him, whatever you need today, here, and now, I invite you to become a person of the resurrection.

And for those who may still be seeking, for those who still may be confused, all you have to do is simply look around this room.

[21 : 40] Because there are those for whom this is our story. We say it from the very pit of who we are, because it is who we are.

There is no telling my story without telling the story of the one who died and rose with me on his mind. And if that may not be where you're at, you don't have to look far, you don't have to work hard, and you are not alone as you seek him.

so today, what will be your story? Friends, no matter who you are, whether you have walked with Jesus a long time or whether this is news to you, don't let the bunny have the day.

Let your story overcome come the bunny. Look, I love the bunny, especially when he's chocolate. But, there is a greater story to be told.

Amen? And so, let us leave this place today with that story front of mind, on our mouths, and in our hearts, because Christ is risen.

[23 : 11] He is risen. Amen. Almighty and gracious God, thank you for the ways in which you have moved in us today. Thank you for the gift that this day means.

And as we come celebrating what you have done for us in Jesus Christ, continue to touch each and every heart. Let it be either from our story or someone else's.

But, Lord, our prayer is that someone finds you anew today. That someone moves from the thinking of death, from the place of death, to becoming a person of resurrection.

Let your story indeed be our story. We are witnesses and we have a story to tell.

Amen. Indeed, you are loved far beyond your understanding. Indeed, you are certainly loved far beyond your actual deserving.

[24 : 12] And God has loved you to the point that he has not only sent Jesus for you, he has conquered everything. This is our story and we are witnesses to the ultimate victory we attain in Jesus Christ.

As you seek to go and tell your story with how you live your life this week, a couple of things I would highlight for you. We have our regular Bible study resuming on Thursday. So for those who didn't finish the last book, we're doing that Thursday night.

For those who are starting the new book, we're doing that on Thursday morning. So the new book is called Third Day by Tom Berlin. If you want to pick that up, please do. We will see you on Thursday.

That is of course explained on all our media. A couple of things I would also highlight. Feeding Hope is a ministry in which we feed some unhouse people in downtown Buffalo.

Sandy leads that ministry and the next one is scheduled for Wednesday. So if you are interested in helping in any way, it's explained in your bulletin. Please use that as a resource.

[25 : 18] Other thing I would highlight is the United Women in Faith rummage sale. Also explained on the back of your bulletin if you want to donate or if you want to help volunteer. Multiple things are happening. We have done such amazing things.

One more note of gratitude. gratitude. We have come to the end of this spring's fish fry season. And I have to just simply say thank you to the entire church family for the ways in which we have come together in this ministry.

We were able to touch so many people with this. Now every plate of fish, every handshake is a conversation and an opportunity for us.

That's how we see it. And so as we come from that place, know that this has been an exceptional year for us and for all of you who make that possible.

I am truly grateful. Now let's receive our benediction. Loving God, you have given us this story, the ultimate story of the ultimate victory.

[26 : 21] Lord, let it be our story. Let us tell it well. Let us tell it boldly. Let us tell it with love to all so that they may see and make it their story as well.

Our Lord has risen and victorious and we will share that with the world. Now in the name of God, our creator and king, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our savior, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, our comforter and our sustainer.

May God bless us now as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children and all God's people said amen.