

The Resurrection of Our Lord — Easter Sunday

April 1, 2018

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church

Farmington, NM

Luke 24:1-12 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. **2** They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, **3** but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. **4** While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. **5** In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? **6** He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: **7** ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ”

8 Then they remembered his words.

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. **10** It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. **11** But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. **12** Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

“Hope is Alive!”

Part 1: A hopeless situation

He had a bad feeling about this mission from the start. It was March 2005. Marcus Luttrell and the rest of his SEAL team were sent on a mission in the mountains of Afghanistan. Just about everything that could have gone wrong did go wrong. After navigating rugged mountains from their drop-off spot, none of them expected three Afghan goat herders to stumble upon their position. And none of them expected that after letting the innocent civilians go free, they would soon be hunted down by nearly 200 Taliban fighters.

When the Taliban poured over the mountain ridge above them, SEAL Team 10 had few options. They held off their enemy as long as they could and fell back down the sheer face of the mountain, risking head trauma, broken bones and damaged spines with each drop. A violent blast from an RPG eliminated his new position was discovered. It also sent him flying over another cliff into a steep ravine below. When he regained semiconsciousness, he realized his leg was seriously wounded.

He also came to the sobering conclusion that all his other team members were gone. He was left to fight alone. There were still at least 50 Taliban fighters hunting for him. He had no radio to communicate for a rescue. He had no medical kit. He was running out of ammunition. And he would have to travel many miles over brutal terrain just to get the slightest chance of getting to safety. Alone and outnumbered, facing impossible odds, hope was as good as dead.

Not too different from the situation greeting the women in Luke chapter 24. On that first Easter Sunday morning, they trudged toward the tomb of their friend. Silently they make their way to offer one last act of kindness for a man who meant so much to them. Everything had gone horribly wrong over the past 3 days. An innocent man was arrested and surrounded by scoundrels. Accusations like explosive grenades lobbed at this kind-hearted teacher. They had so many hopes attached to him, hopes for themselves and their people, hopes for true believers pinned to this one amazing master. Those hopes were nailed and pinned now with him on the brutal cross. Now his lifeless body is trapped in a tomb.

Surveying the situation, with profound grief in their hearts, the women feel like there is nothing left to do, nowhere they can go to get away from their despair. So they simply acknowledge it being going to the tomb to pay their last respects.

Part 2: Personal hopelessness based on hopeless situation

Hopelessness is a terrible feeling. You don't have to stand beside the grave of a loved one or be trapped behind enemy territory to know the feeling. Adversities and enemies outnumber you, preventing you from getting what you want out of life. You feel trapped by your past mistakes, pinned down by the life handed to you. You want to get out, but you face too many struggles, too many times your heart has been wounded, too much damage to your confidence to hope for the best. You feel like there is no one you can turn to, there is no where you can go, nothing you can do to get yourself out of the mess.

Your hopes for a better, healthier, happier life never seem to get on track. Every time you are able to pay off one bill, a major repair hits your credit card. Every time you are able to get off one medication, you pick up some random malady. Every time you start to recover from the wrongs perpetrated against you in the past, another old wound reopens and begins to fester. We hope students can be safe in schools. Yet arming every educator won't eliminate every threat. Getting rid of every weapon won't prevent all sorts of alternate attacks. You can't change all these situations. It feels like there is nothing you can do, nowhere you can go. It's impossible to find any real hope.

Part 3: Make your own hope?

The best you can do is settle for second best. Make the best of a bad situation. That must have been why the women went to the tomb at dawn's first light on Easter morning. That must have been the disciples' best solution to an impossible situation.

That's one option for anyone looking for hope. If Jesus is still in his tomb, then the best you can do is use Jesus to make the best of a bad situation. If hope dies with Jesus, then you have to be satisfied with Jesus rising in your heart to give you hope. You can find personal inspiration by believing in something, believing in anything. Just believing can give you the power to motivate yourself to find a better life. You can find your own meaning as a way to cope, create your own sense of meaning in this hopeless, meaningless world. Jesus could possibly fit that purpose.

How well would that approach work for a Navy SEAL trapped behind enemy lines? Just believe in yourself. Just create your own meaning. Do what you can to make the best of a bad situation. Just look on the bright side. None of that provides any real solution. Because none of that gives any real rescue. None of it offers real hope.

Here's the problem: our hopelessness is worse than we imagine. The hopelessness of souls marching in defeat to Easter's early morning tomb is real and devastating. It's not just the hopelessness of not being able to find a healthier, happier, more successful life. It's the reality of no hope beyond this life. If you are just a random collection of molecules assembled together by chance on this design-less rock put here by some cosmic accident, then you have to make your own meaning and find your own purpose. No hope for any meaningful relationships. No hope for a relationship with anything bigger than yourself. No hope except for whatever you can convince your gullible self you can invent for yourself. If Jesus is still in his grave today, that's the reality of your hopelessness.

Part 4: Hope is Alive!

When hopelessness is overcome by reality, there can be real hope. Marcus Luttrell was left for dead, yet survived. There was no way for anyone to reasonably expect him to make it out alive. No sign he could have done what needed to be done to overcome those odds. No reasonable hope for this lone member of his SEAL team. Beyond hope, he did survive. His real survival redefines and recreates hope in military scenarios.

When the hopelessness of Jesus' death is overcome, there can be real hope. The angelic messengers say it so clearly: "**Why do you look for the living among the dead?**" (Luke 24:5) His lifeless body is no longer in the tomb. The angels announce the reason why: "**He is not here; he has risen!**" (Luke 24:6) If Jesus is not longer dead, hopelessness is dead. If Jesus is alive, then hope is alive. Real hope lives with Jesus.

This had been the plan all along. The angels remind the women: "**Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'**" (Luke 24:6,7) That was enough to jog their memories. Jesus had predicted everything that happened. None of it was an accident. Jesus had promised the now-realized outcome to announce hope ahead of time.

Each gospel account records different details about the resurrection of Jesus. By they all clearly, unmistakably announce he rose from the dead. The excruciating execution made death undeniable. But in just the same way the countless eyewitness appearances of Jesus to his followers are recorded in detail. Each one shows Jesus came back with a body, not merely some ghostly appearance. Every other explanation for the absence of Jesus' body in that grave are more far-fetched than the one clearly announced by those angels. Jesus is alive. And hope is alive!

A dead Jesus could still be a great teacher and a miracle worker. Jesus could have stayed dead and been remembered fondly as a martyr. His words could have been retold like those

of an excellent philosopher or great moral example. But a living and resurrected Jesus gives a very different kind of hope. He gives hope of life. Real life. Life like his own. Hope is alive!

Part 5: Jesus is my hope

A living Jesus gives you hope. If Jesus mapped out his death and resurrection exactly the way it turned out to have happened, then you can take his words seriously. If Jesus is alive, then he is who he said he was: **“who through the power the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.”** (Romans 1:4) If Jesus is alive, then that means he accomplished what he set out to do. A living Jesus gives you a real relationship with your very real God. You don't have to create your own hope, Jesus gives you something better. You don't have to believe in yourself. Believe in what Jesus did for you: **“He was deliver over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”** (Romans 4:25) Jesus came to suffer and die for everything that separates you from God. Jesus came to tackle every offense and affront you have ever carried out against God's holiness. And just came back to life to give you an innocent record to stand guiltless before your God.

You have times when you feel hopeless. John Chrysostom, writing 300 years after the resurrection of Jesus says: *“Let no one weep for his iniquities, for pardon has shone forth from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Savior's death has set us free.”*¹ Christ is risen, you have have an entirely new standard of health and success and happiness. Christ is risen, and your greatest enemies in life are defeated. Christ is risen, your greatest fears are conquered. Christ is risen, nothing in life can rip you away from him. Christ is risen, and nothing in life can rob you of hope. Not even death can rob you of joy in Christ. Christ is risen, and you will rise to be with him for all eternity.

None of us will probably ever become Navy SEALs. That's good, because none of us would probably fare too well in the mountains of Afghanistan or any other hostile environment that special forces are most well suited for. You will probably never face the Taliban or anything quite so intimidating. But you and I are never alone. You are never abandoned and left without hope. Jesus is alive and promises to never abandon you. Jesus rose and gives you his victory. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! And that means hope is alive. Amen.

¹ The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 199, p. 11-12.