

April 12, 2020 Portraits Pt. 6 Jesus Christ Is Lord! Luke
24:1-12

Good morning and a Happy Easter to each one of you reading this message. I cannot tell you how much I long for the time when we can exchange the right hand of fellowship without thinking about the consequences. I treasure the exchange of hugs that happens as we both gather for worship and leave the sanctuary for coffee or tea and something sweet to eat, in a time of extended fellowship.

As some are aware, I participated in a virtual communion service with my daughter, the Rev. Rebekah Mitchell on Thursday evening at 7:00 pm. I want to thank those who were able to participate via the internet, and sent such kind and encouraging messages. Some of you who are not participants in the net, took communion knowing that Barbara and I would be doing so at 7:00 pm. Thank you for taking part. I received kind messages from all over southern Ontario. And it goes without saying that without my daughter's technical ability, I would not have been able to do any of that. It is typical of her that she kindly thought of us at Stirling along with her own church and her contacts in the wider Church. So let's turn to the business of Easter (which comes from an anglo-Saxon word that simply means Spring. This for us is Resurrection Sunday.

And the place we begin in Luke 24 is that it was the first day of the week. Above my desk hangs a calendar. All the

dates on the outer left hand margin of the calendar are Sundays. You have heard me say this before: the calendar as it is printed in our time bears quiet testimony to the resurrection of Jesus! Sunday has become forever, the first day of the week for that one and simple and undeniable reason. Early Sunday morning Jesus rose from the dead. It was the first day of the week and it was also the 3rd day since the crucifixion. So here is another reminder.

The Jews understood the day to come to its end as the sun went down. Saturday was their Sabbath. Jesus was crucified on Friday. He was entombed in a cave with a carved circular stone as its doorway which literally ran in a stone track, which is why the women wondered how they would remove the stone. It was too heavy for any individual to deal with alone...a stone doorway...in a sloping track so that gravity would make it harder to remove. At sundown on Friday the Sabbath began, on the Sabbath no work could be done including entombing the dead. Jesus died on Friday. Day one. Sabbath or Saturday. Day 2. Sunday begins at sundown on Sabbath...Sunday is day 3. On the first day of the week, Sunday, the third day since the crucifixion, "very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb."

It is needful to remember that the disciples, including the women, and their combined number is estimated to be 120, were all Jews. The greatest single reason to understand that this was no dream, Jesus arose, is that

immediately (and by that I mean by Sunday evening) their time for gathering to worship has become not Sabbath Saturday, but Sunday. In verse 33 of Luke 24 they are assembled in the upper room where the Lord's supper had been celebrated and that becomes their tradition, and through them becomes our tradition. There is no question that believers could gather on any day of the week to worship our Lord and praise the name of God. But it is also true that the "main event" in the minds of most Christians happens on Sunday. We worship on the weekly anniversary of the resurrection of Jesus.

One of the most endearing features of the 4 Gospel accounts is the fact that they make it clear that understanding what had happened did not come easy to any of Jesus followers. Mary the mother of Jesus is one of those women who went to the tomb. They (the women, and notice they were there for a specific reason) they are trying to complete the hasty entombment by placing aromatic spices in the burial wraps. They are perfuming the body which will quickly begin to decay and rot. Luke tells us they found the stone rolled away. They found the tomb open and empty. They are wondering about this because they do not understand what has occurred in spite of Jesus telling them HE would rise from the dead on the 3rd day. Luke finds it really easy to confess to Theophilus to whom he has written this account in the form of a letter the women did not understand, and the men did not understand, and the men had no reason to go to the tomb, so they did not even make that effort...until.

Who is it that explains what has happened? Angels as messengers of God play a prominent role in Luke's account. An angel visits Mary to announce she will bear Jesus even though she is a virgin. An angel tells Zachariah that Elizabeth will bear John the Baptist even though they are senior citizens, and she is beyond the years of child bearing. Angels announce the birth of the Christ child to the shepherds. An angel choir sings above the hills that surround Bethlehem. An angel changed Joseph's mind when he had concluded that Mary had been with someone else, and therefore he was not going to marry her. And when Herod meant to kill the baby that was born to be king, an angel spoke to Joseph before the first blow was struck and sent he and his new family to Egypt. An angel told the wisemen to go home by another route. And an angel now asks the question, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, where the dead would lie, He is risen, remember what he told you in Galilee. Must have seemed an age ago. But Jesus had told them, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again."

These women hear that explanation as they bow before the messenger. They all know Mary's story. And she knows angels. From the mouth of God's own dispatch rider they hear the news that makes us rejoice even in the midst of this pandemic, this plague of Covid-19. HE is risen. Just as HE said. Here is the seed of hope for the world. Here is the seed of hope that springs from faith. Here is the seed of the hope that touches us all anew each and ever Easter season. Jesus Christ is

risen. Today is the anniversary of that event. Celebrating the reality we find ourselves saying Jesus Christ is Lord, even in this terrible time when so many are dying around the whole world. Even as millions fall ill. Even as business and economies have ground to a halt. Even at a moment when we cannot see the light at the end of this tunnel of plague. Be sure, we are surrounded by darkness. And yet we have the light that pierces every kind of darkness when and where all other lights fail. Jesus Christ is Lord. Lord of life. Lord in the midst of death and failing breath. "He is Lord. He is Lord. He is risen from the dead and He is Lord!" (252 The Presbyterian Book of Praise)

Luke tells us that when the women came back from the tomb they told all these things to the Eleven (Judas is gone) and all the others. As I mentioned they are estimated at 120. "But they did not believe the women." Believers are sometimes amazed that people find it hard to believe. Let's cut the rest of the population a little slack. St. Andrew found it hard to believe. John found it hard to believe. James, Jesus younger brother and author of that marvelous letter that declares "faith that is not made visible in works is dead" (James 2:17) found it hard to believe.

Peter however got up and ran to the tomb. And John ran with him. And what Peter walked away from the tomb believing was not that Jesus had risen from the dead but that the tomb was indeed empty. He tried to figure out what had happened. Faith becomes real in a singular vessel. When God touches us. When Jesus encounters us. When the Holy Spirit enflames us, with the reality of... the first day of the week. It is

in a truly holy moment that we arrive at the conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord. That is what happened in the upper room when Jesus was suddenly with them all. That is what happened on the Road to Emmaus when Jesus encountered two of the 11, and they ran back to Jerusalem to tell the gathering in the upper room, that Jesus is alive.

I am going to end by saying something you might not expect me to say. We are privileged to be alive and as healthy as we are, in this time of plague. They prefer the word pandemic. Fancy word for plague. I say we are privileged for this reason. It is when it is really dark that we see the light so very clearly. One of your sisters in the faith once told me, it is always the right time to sing, "Jesus Loves me." (Hymn # 373) You would do well to sing the chorus of that classic hymn in your kitchen, or your living room or where ever you are looking at this. I will lead the way. "Yes Jesus loves me/ Yes Jesus loves me/ Yes Jesus loves me/ The Bible (the word of God and the ultimate authority in these things) tells me so."

In my mind, because I do not really know how the risen Christ looked on that first day of the week, this 6th portrait is of an open and empty tomb. But it bears the title, Jesus Christ Is Lord!

Let us pray;

Lord Jesus be with us. Be with us in this time of grave and terrible sickness. We see the number of cases rising. We see the number of deaths in Ontario and Canada and across

the world rising. We remember nurses and doctors and nursing home staffs that are on the front lines of the war to save lives from disease. Remind us on this first day of the week that YOU and no other thing including this Covid-19 virus, only YOU are the Lord who has power. Touch us with the light of YOUR presence as we self isolate, as we wash our hands, as we seek patient peace in the midst of this day in life's journey. Be with us. In moments when we are able, use us in the service of others. Grant us safety in the midst of eternal life through faith. Amen