

Happy Easter everyone! He is Risen! The response to that would be He is Risen indeed. This day in history changed the world. This is the day that changed the lives of people forever and for people of the Christian faith this is one of the two most important days of the Christian calendar, the other Christmas when our Lord and Savior was born. Over the last few weeks, I have talked about being selfless, understanding how far we're willing to go for our faith and where our allegiances lie. Now I want to take you back a little bit before the resurrection story with some scripture.

Mark 14: 43-50

Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

43 And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. 44 Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard." 45 And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" And he kissed him. 46 And they laid hands on him and seized him. 47 But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. 48 And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? 49 Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled." 50 And they all left him and fled.

Jesus Before the Council

53 And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. 54 And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire.

Peter Denies Jesus

66 And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, 67 and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." 68 But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. 69 And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to

the bystanders, "This man is one of them." 70 But again he denied it. And after a little while, the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." 71 But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." 72 And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

Matthew 27: 55-56

55 There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, 56 among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

John 19: 25-30

25 but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

The Death of Jesus

28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." 29 A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Just imagine what these disciples were feeling and what must have been going through their heads. They have devoted almost three years of their lives to this person who has just been put to death. Maybe the first thing they felt was shame and remorse at the realization that many of them had abandoned their Messiah. But that's not the only thing. Now what were they going to do? They knew they were at risk also. What were they going to do in terms of making a living? Could they go back to their old way

of life would that even be possible. Considering the experience they shared with these twelve others for such a long duration it had to have changed them in some way. Let's try to imagine what they must have been feeling first: they're grieving the loss of a loved one aside from a very small group of people there is little other support for their financial situation has changed and there is no certainty that they can return to their old locations before they had met Jesus. And if we were to consider the political system in place then, would they even be able to meet with the other disciples and followers or would that have put them at even greater risk. They had concerns for their freedom, and for the welfare of their friends and families.

.

Today though is Easter. Easter and the resurrection represents hope solidified. Faith proven. This is the day that gave eternal hope and faith to Jesus's followers and that eternal hope and faith made history and continues to make history even two thousand years later. What happened on this day changed Jesus's followers so fundamentally they were changed at the core and their lives became a witness for Jesus's message, what we now know as the gospel.

Luke 24: 1-48

The Resurrection

24 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. 2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men, stood by them in dazzling apparel. 5 And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6 He is not here but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." 8 And they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the

apostles, 11 but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

On the Road to Emmaus

13 That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. 16 But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" 19 And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. 22 Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." 25 And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

28 So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, 29 but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. 31 And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he

opened to us the Scriptures?” 33 And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, 34 saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

36 As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” 37 But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. 38 And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate before them.

44 Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

Now let's fast forward to present-day aren't we experiencing similar things? Financially and economically our whole nation is at risk and so are many other nations around the world. As the days go on sometime the risk seems greater and then sometimes it lessens however uncertainty remains the constant. We really don't know what is going to happen next. One thing that is certain is that we all want this to go away. Not just Americans and not just North Americans but everyone around the world wants this to

go away and to end as soon as possible. This new normal feels quite unnatural and it is hard to imagine this becoming a way of life

For many of us perhaps what we miss most of all is the daily interactions with people beyond the ones we cohabitate with. We miss seeing people walk down the street. We miss bad drivers who never signal, we miss the sounds of children playing. I miss seeing all the bikers that come with a changing of the seasons. I am not driving much of anywhere these days but when I have driven, it is like going through ghost towns. You eerily start to wonder what happened to all the people. Makes a great backdrop for a story doesn't it? And the reality is it even if we are able to leave this place the next place would be no different. Some of us have lost loved ones during this time and whether it be COVID-19 related or not we are unable to have traditional closer no last visits no shoulder to cry on no hugs of reassurance and no communal grieving because of social distancing. Social distancing has left many of us feeling as though we don't have the support we need. There have been births and grandparents and other loved ones can't share in this moment together. there are people with family members in assisted living facilities and other care facilities where family members aren't allowed to visit there were people trying to celebrate weddings birthdays graduation on either they need to be postponed completely canceled or we just have to have patience until this is all over we are all under a great deal of stress and we are all hoping for a reprieve.

The experience the disciples and other followers had was of such great magnitude that their life was transformed. The disciples devoted their whole lives to one purpose, sharing the gospel of Christ, the anointed one. They took their commission to the greatest possible extent and to the greatest personal cost, their own lives. Here is just a brief summary of how those 11 remaining disciples died:

Simon Peter - crucified upside down in Rome 64AD

Andrew - crucified on an X shaped cross in Greece

Matthew - impaled and beheaded in Ethiopia

Bartholomew/Nathaniel - flayed to death in Armenia

Thomas - Killed by a spear in India

Philip - cruelly put to death, impaled through ankles, possibly in Greece

James (son of Zebedee) - Beheaded by King Herod

Jude - crucified by the Magi in Persia

Judas Iscariot - took his own life

John (son of Zebedee) - exiled to Patmos

James the Less - thrown from the pinnacle of the Temple and beaten to death

Simon the Zealot - crucified

James (1/2 brother of Jesus) - thrown from Temple and killed like James the Less.

From that information, we can see how far their faith took them and how far they were willing to go.

Now for many of us, it is hard to imagine having that level of faith. Considering all of the information and knowledge that we have now that they didn't have that we have. We put trust and faith in science and science has revealed a lot to us but our faith in something greater is unexplainable but we know that having faith in that is real. We have felt it or experienced it somehow and it is a very personal thing.

So how do we, in this time and in this place, connect with our faith and its meaning to both reach out but also to comfort within.

How do we become a witness to our faith in a time like this? Well, first and probably the most obvious is that we can lend our efforts and use our gifts wherever possible but

doing so safely and not bring risk to others or to ourselves. There's a lot of people in our families that are depending on us and they want us to be around for a long time. We may have the urge to just run out and try to help people or do things for an organization but we have to make sure that we're staying safe otherwise we are just adding a burden to the shoulders of our loved ones. The other thing is that we can do is just look for those little signs of victory that we hear on the news or that we read in the newspaper. Celebrating victories in other places where rates are plateauing. If somebody has recovered and is willing to contribute and be part of the process in developing a vaccine. We need to look at those things and take that as evidence of proof of god's existence and proof that God cares about his creation. We need to look to each little victory that we can find in the news. For those who have recovered from the virus, we have much to be thankful for. All of the little acts of kindness that are being performed are witness to God's steadfast presence, Businesses trying to help out however they can, landlords being understanding with tenants who are now unemployed, people running errands for the elderly all. The compassion and understanding we are seeing should strengthen our faith in God. Although we are Christian, I do want to acknowledge that God is at work in all kinds of people, even people who don't share the same faith as us. Easter may not have meaning to them but for us, it is a call to share the Good News and be a witness to our faith by loving God and loving others as ourselves.

The time ahead may be a difficult one and what I am about to say may be disturbing but it is meant to reassure. We may be heading into a time of immense grief. In fact I believe that many of us are grieving our old way of life. Some of us may suffer a loss or know of others that have suffered a loss, but the hope that our faith in Jesus offers is that we know that those who have been taken from us are at peace. We need to rest assured that they are in the company of our Risen Lord and Savior. They are no longer in a place of pain, in a place of fear or in a place of loneliness. For those of us left behind, let's remember our faith, let's look activey to God's work on earth and take

comfort in those small and large victories. Let's be sure in our resolve that better things are to come and His grace and mercy will show us there is a light at the end of the tunnel. I would like to close off with one of my favorite Psalms that gives me great comfort.

Psalm 73:23-24 (NLT)

23 Yet I still belong to you; you hold my right hand. 24 You guide me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny.

Announcements

Birthdays April 12-18, 2020

Slater

Christopher Moore

Duane Heeren

Lindon Bowen

Riley Fleener

Darla Hornbuckle

Darren Long

William Geisler

Sheldahl

Carole Harmon

LaJean Gaulke

Paul Sobotka