

Jesus is alive | Col 3:1-4 | John 20:1-18 | LUMC | April 9, 2023

Dear Church family and friends: last week we entered the passion of Christ with a bang! Christ entered Jerusalem and was offered a welcome befitting a person of great secular mandate! Jesus taught us to stand for the mission he was inaugurating, a new reign of God through Christ. A reign the Holy Spirit would come to shepherd on the 50th day when the resurrected Christ would return to God.

Please recall that over the years people have debated on Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. The debate is now settled because of the existence of undeniable evidence: Jesus' genealogy (and his earthly parents) is proof of his birth. Where Jesus lived, where Jesus went, and the work he did is fully known and recorded. This weekend we were treated with circumstantial evidence of his death. And this morning the two Marys' and the two disciples visit at the tomb is proof Jesus is not lying dead. He is risen.

Friends, the tomb is empty; there are only "linen wrappings lying there, a linen where the head was and the body wrapping rolled up in a place by itself." The two disciples who saw this evidence believed Jesus was risen! These disciples left the tomb hurriedly to report to the other disciples (and for their safety). Mary was left at the tomb keeping vigil. Soon Jesus appeared behind her and spoke to her saying, "Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?" She replied, "Sir, if you have carried him—Jesus—away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus revealed himself to her saying, "Let others know that I am going to report to God. I am alive and will come back." Mary Magdalene then went to tell the disciples that Jesus had risen and will come back as he promised!

Jesus is obviously risen. This is proof beyond any doubt. We join Mary and believers of all ages to shout—Halleluia! HE IS RISEN INDEED! Alleluia!

Therefore, Jesus resurrected, and this was witnessed by Mary, Peter, and other disciples. In fact, during the time he spent on earth after his resurrection, over 500 people witnessed it at one time (1 Cor 15:1-15). After resurrection he stayed on earth 40 days and appeared 12 times to various people and in different places; he talked to many people including the disciples, and especially Thomas who wanted to "touch the nail marks and the scar on his ribcage so to believe.¹ And later he appeared to St Paul on road to Emmaus to kill Christians! Jesus continues to appear to believers of all time.

¹ Recorded appearances of Jesus:

1: The appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene Sunday 17th or 21st of Nisan: Matt. 28:1, Mk 16:9-11, John 20:11-18

2: The appearance of Jesus to the other women, Matthew 28:1

3: Jesus appears to the disciples Cleopas & another on the Emmaus Road: Mk 16:12-13, Lk 24:13-32, Jn: 24:33-35, 1 Cor 15:5

4: The news of the appearance of Jesus to Simon Peter: Luke 24:33-35, 1 Corinthians 15:5

5: The appearance to the astonished disciples (Thomas absent) with a commission: Mk 16:14, Lk 24:36-43, 1 Cor.15:

6: The appearance of Jesus to the disciples the next Sunday night: John 20:26-31

7: The appearance of Jesus to seven disciples beside the Sea of Galilee: John 21:1-25

8: Jesus appears to the eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee: Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:15-18

9: Jesus appears to about 500 hundred people on a mountain in Galilee: 1 Corinthians 15:6

10: Jesus appears to James his brother: 1 Corinthians 15:7, Galatians 1:9

When Mary in her deep mourning and grief encountered Jesus at the tomb, she did not want him to go. She wanted to hug him and stay up and close, but Jesus excused himself because he was in his glorified (purely divine) body enroute to God. Jesus promised Mary that he would return to earth the same way he was going to heaven. Indeed, Jesus returned as he promised. This is a lesson for us to be truthful in what we say and do. We ought to be people who live our faith daily even to point of death.

Another mystery Jesus revealed to us this past week is a deep courage to face his enemies. We moved with Jesus, singing and waving branches and leaves from the Jerusalem gate to the temple, back to the mount of olives, and back to the city again. We heard him crying and anguished by the evils of the stubborn city dwellers. Thereafter, Jesus enjoyed a Passover meal and established the mystery of the “Lord’s Supper.” He finally went to pray with disciples in the garden at Gethsemane where the Jews found him and arrested him and brought him to face a painful death.

Jesus was unlawfully judged and brought to the gallows—the stone pavement called Gabbatha in Hebrew. Pilate, the Roman governor disregarded his wife’s pleading. He went against natural law, Roman law, and the Jewish laws that required two witnesses to give evidence in a case. He judged Jesus without evidence and sentenced him to die a shameful death on the cross.

Why would Jesus agree to take this humiliation, this pain, this harassment, and this ridicule? Was it worth it? Could he not change his mind and let sinful humanity face the consequences of their own sins?

Jesus bore every twist and turn until the last walk to the cross. *He did this to save us.* Jesus knew we were unable to get ourselves out of our own mess (is it not true?). We often blunder and blame others for it; or become defensive and fail to identify our contribution to the chaos. Often, we wear blinders and move on as if all is okay! We not only hurt others but also hurt ourselves when we maliciously plan evils and practice hatred rather than loving even “the least of these.” This week, Jesus’ death and resurrection is a stark reminder that love is stronger than death. Jesus loved humanity unreservedly and bore the pain of death without sedatives to teach love and how to persevere when others try to force or wreck our lives.

Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection influence genuine Christians to defend others almost to the death. Some faithful Christians standing on teachings of Christ’s resurrection have been minimized, humiliated, and often isolated, but they vowed to stay the course like Christ. Their courage helps to overcome injustice and their stand made true justice to prevail.

I have an example of a dad who drowned saving his son from an underwater current a few years ago. I know of a mother who discovered the house on fire. She ran inside to save her baby. She managed to bring the baby out of the burning house but with third degree burns, leaving her entire body scarred. When her son grew older, he

11: Jesus appears to the disciples with another commission: Luke 24:44-49 & Acts 1:3-8

was ashamed of his mum's ugly body until one day he learned the scars saved his life. This is what the death of Christ teaches us—to single-handedly stand up for kindness, the truth, justice for everyone, and fairness for all. Christ's teaching inspires us to move out of our comfort zone, and if it may, suffer for sake of others.

Jesus came to us and to all humanity to have life and have it in abundance. Jesus' resurrection teaches us to practice living within the guidelines of the cross. The story of Mary encountering Jesus at the tomb at her time of need also reminds us that, when in despair or in pain Jesus can appear unexpectedly, including odd times to provide solutions or support. Jesus' words of comfort to Mary strengthened her resolve to love the Lord and continue her witnessing mission to the disciples.

No one among us has died so we can't understand what death is and what it means. But some of us have witnessed others dying and can agree that Jesus assented to a very painful decision to save us from our evil thoughts, and to reform and make us claim him as our Lord and personal savior. Christ continues this week to righteously teach us to overcome painful events brought about by our lack of commitment to the salvation he died for. Despite what we perceive to be an inability to proclaim the Good News and live righteously, Christ does not disown us until the last day—that day of judgement. We have room for repentance and a mandate to love as Christ loved us to the point of dying for us.

St Paul pleaded with us to set our minds on our spiritual journey, and not allow ourselves to be crippled by what is around us; to always remember that being in Christ means we died and resurrected with him; and that our lives find peaceful coexistence with others through Christ. This is why we set our bar high and our thoughts beyond what we see and perceive. We are raised from evil living to spiritual practical living despite being physically on this earth which can often deceive us with its enticements.

May we never forget that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ made us a new creation, people born of spirit and water to live in truth and in spirit.

Amen.