

March 27, 2016

Jesus!

*Jesus Lives!*

Matthew 28:1-10

**Opening words:** There are 52 weeks every year. Each one is important and not a single one should be wasted. What have you done this week? Have you ever stopped to consider how many weeks have occurred in the history of the world? However, there is one week that changed our world forever: Holy Week! On the Christian calendar Holy Week is the last week of Lent, beginning on Palm Sunday and ending at dawn on Easter. It is the week the church remembers the final days of Jesus's earthly ministry. This is Easter, and the only thing on our minds is the resurrection of Jesus. All four Gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, tell us about the resurrection. This morning we will hear Matthew's account. Our Gospel reading is Matthew 28:1-10. Let me call this message *Jesus Lives!*

**Matthew 28:1-10** After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

<sup>2</sup> There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. <sup>4</sup> The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

<sup>5</sup> The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

<sup>8</sup> So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

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You know it is true. Jesus had a wild week. Let me remind you one last time.

One week ago, Palm Sunday, he rode into Jerusalem, the Golden City, on a donkey. He was fulfilling prophecy and announcing to his generation he was the Messiah. He had reached the point of no return.

On Monday, Jesus cleansed the temple. It has nothing to do with the youth fundraising in the hallway. It has nothing to do with selling dinner tickets to aid the budget. However, it was about the religious leaders of his day abusing their position for personal gain.

On Tuesday, Jesus cursed the fig tree. It was the only thing that Jesus ever cursed. It was dead the next day. The fig tree symbolized Israel itself. It is like anti-American protesters burning an American flag. Without uttering a single word, we get the message and so did they.

On Wednesday, Jesus taught in the temple courts about the Kingdom of God. They are some of Jesus' most memorable words. I would encourage you to read them. Mary anointed Jesus, preparing him for burial, while Judas Iscariot agreed to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

On Thursday, Jesus washed the disciples' feet, observed his last Seder, went to the garden to pray, was arrested and was tried by his own people, the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court.

On Friday, Jesus stood before the Roman governor Pilate, was rejected by the crowd and died on the cross. To his generation of believers, things looked bad. That was Friday; thank God for Sunday. This is Sunday. It isn't just any Sunday. It is Easter Sunday!

On Easter Sunday we must remember two things. First, we remember the resurrection of Jesus. How important is the resurrection? It is one thing that separates us from the rest of the world. We serve a risen Savior. Second, we remember that there is always hope. The Easter story is one of taking complete defeat and turning it into absolute victory. It is the story of turning victims into victors. Easter is our annual reminder that with God there is always hope. That is the Good News for today. Can I state the obvious? Our world needs a good dose of hope.

This morning I want to be practical. The ripple effect of the resurrection of Jesus has changed our world in a positive way. The resurrection is still offering our world hope. If God can bring a dead man back to life, then God can handle any manmade situation. On this Easter morning let me remind you that we have hope from three sources. Let me list them for you. First, we have hope because of **Christian influence**. Second, we have hope because we have the **church**. Third and finally, we have hope because we have the **resurrected Jesus**. Pope John Paul II said, *"Do not abandon yourself to despair, because we are Easter people."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"** I will be quick because we have ham to eat.

### **The Christian Influence**

This morning my wife Kathryn is not here because she is in Russia. To be more exact, she is in Moscow. She will be in Russia until April 18<sup>th</sup> teaching English. Don't feel bad for her, because she is having the time of her life. She has always been drawn to the mission field and longed for this experience. She is passionate about Russia. I have no doubt in my mind it is part of her calling and purpose. There is more to Russia than politics. There is Russian history and culture. This is her 24<sup>th</sup> trip to Russia. I have been

with her about half of those times. I have seen and learned many things while in the "Evil Empire." We have seen Russia change over the past twenty years. Let me give you one example.

Several years ago, I was in a Russian grocery store in St. Petersburg. There was nothing archaic about it. It was very modern. I was walking toward the checkout. I was walking down the aisle with the fish chips and the vodka. I was just about ready to buy my item when I saw something new. It was a square clear box with a slit on the top. Inside of that box were rubles. It was the Russian version of the United Way. I stared at that collection box because it would not have been there twenty years ago. This is why: after seventy years of Communism, there was no sense of community. As a matter of fact, people learned to trust no one. People learned to care about no one but themselves. That box told me the times were changing. That box told me the church was beginning to influence that society again. One of the core lessons of the church is to love and care for your neighbors.

First, we have hope because we have the Christian influence. In America, it is second nature to care for the needy. It is part of our DNA. It comes out of our Christian heritage. Even non-believers see value in caring for those who are less fortunate. It is the Christian influence. How much food and money have you given to Second Harvest? How many meals have you cooked for an ailing neighbor? How many benefit dinner tickets have you purchased but never attended? We have hope because we have the Christian influence. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

### **The Church**

There is an old preaching story about King Xerxes. You may have heard me tell this story in the past. (After twenty-two years, it is hard to be original.) According to the story, he came back to life and wanted to see something new. His guide took him to a bar, a casino and a brothel. Xerxes was not impressed. He said, "We had these things in my time. I want to see something new!" This time his guide took him to hospitals, schools and soup kitchens. This time Xerxes was impressed. He said, "This is new! Who made all this possible?" His guide simply said, "The church!"

Second, we have hope because we have the church. In the history of the world, no organization has responded to human need more than the church. It is not just true in the past; it is true in the present. Did you know, one of the strongest arms of the United Methodist Church is UMCOR, the United Methodist Committee on Relief. UMCOR provides humanitarian relief in the United States and internationally. Their efforts are targeted in places where natural disasters, war, or conflict have done so much damage that communities are unable to recover on their own. It is your apportionment dollars at work. You can be proud to be part of a church that is responding to human need. We have hope because we have the church. And all God's people said, "**Amen!**"

## **The Resurrected Jesus**

According to the Gospel lesson, the Sabbath is over. It is dawn on the first day of the week, Sunday! Two women go to the tomb of Jesus; Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. The crowd that had cheered for Jesus one week earlier had melted down to these two. Their task is an unhappy one. They are going to treat the body of Jesus. It was the first century form of embalming. They think it will be the last thing they will do for him. After all, Jesus was dead! They are grief-stricken; they have no hope. When they woke up that morning they had a mountain of questions. In a short time, all those questions melt away and are replaced by the most challenging question: How do you bring a dead man back to life? I can't explain how you bring a dead man back to life, but I do know his resurrection changed everything.

Third and finally, we have hope because we have the resurrected Jesus. Your belief in the resurrection is not optional. It is indispensable. As a matter of fact, the salvation of your souls depends on it. The Apostle Paul understood the significance of the resurrection. In Romans 10:9, he gives us the very first creed of the church. It says:

**That is, if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead you will be saved.**

In other words, the resurrected Jesus gives us hope even in the face of death itself. Let me ask you these two questions. The salvation of your soul depends on them. Do you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord? Do you believe in your heart God raised him from the dead? If you answered those two questions with a yes, say, **"Amen!"**

How many of you remember Chic Baber? He has been gone for years but I still think of him often. He loved this church and served at this church in a variety of ways. I always remember Chic as an optimist. Our world has a shortage of optimists. It was a sad day when he told me he had a disease he wouldn't defeat. We saw him fail over a period of twelve months. There came a point when he could no longer leave his home, so I visited him there. I was there on the night before he died. I will never forget it. The family had moved a hospital bed into the family room. Chic lay in that bed wearing bright red flannel pajamas. His face was washed, his hair was combed and a smile was on his face. We visited for some time, but the time came for me to go. I looked at Chic and said, "Chic, is there anything I can do for you before I go?" He responded, "Just pray for me." I held hands with him and his wife and prayed. When I finished, I looked at Chic. He had an odd combination, a tear in his eye and a smile on his face. He looked at me and said, "Russ, I am going to miss you, but we will see each other again." I know that when I get to heaven Chic will be waiting for me. Without the resurrected Jesus, there is no chance of heaven and no hope of that great reunion. No, you can't work your way into heaven. Who are you longing to see again? Rick Warren once said, *"The Bible tells us Jesus came to do three things. He came so we can experience forgiveness. He came to give us a purpose for living. He came to show us the way home."* May God bless you on this glorious Easter day. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**