

Year B Easter Sunday
Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
Mark 16:1-8

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Holy Spirit Lutheran Church

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – Amen.

Christ is risen - *Christ is risen indeed - Alleluia!*
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I know it might feel like we overdue this simple phrase on Easter - and maybe sometimes we do. It's just such an exciting thing to proclaim after spending the last forty days in the stillness of Lent, and coupled with our weather lately it simply feels good to let those celebratory spring alleluias loose once again.

But I can tell by the second or third time this phrase comes up within service you have all begun to wonder exactly how many more times these overly excited pastors are going to make you say this phrase over and over. In fact - I can already see a few faces cringing at the thought of having to say it again.

Can I get an amen?

The truth is we begin to feel a little silly saying "*Christ is risen*" each time the words leave our lips. We even come to say the words with a little less heart and enthusiasm each time we are called on to proclaim the phrase. Maybe it's our more introverted protestant nature - we are after all almost conditioned to not calling things out in church. Not that Pastor Trish, or I would ever want to stop you from shouting out a spirited "Amen" during one of our sermons.

But I do think it goes a little deeper than simply our reserved worship sensibilities. Maybe we feel silly or uncomfortable saying "*Christ is risen*" because we have been told it's such a crazy thing to claim in our day and age.

We want to run out and check the tomb for ourselves before we get caught up in some April fool's day prank.

We want to make sure the gospel's claim of resurrection is true on this day of all days - because there is some part of us, that has still come to wonder if that stone was ever rolled away in the first place.

After all, many of us have had a lot more experience in tombs and with death, then we ever have with true resurrection in our lives. In fact, it's one thing we have come to expect - that the dead will stay dead because that has been our experience.

All too often death has called us to stand at the edges of hospital beds and at grave sides to say goodbye - leaving us with more questions than answers as we contemplate the days we have left in our own life.

In fact, when people do come back from the shadow of the grave there is usually a front page headline waiting for them and a captive audience that wants to hear every detail of their experience. Yet, it seems tales of physical resurrection are as few and far between as they were in Jesus' day - Lazarus after all gained the permanent title "the one who was raised" after being brought back to life by Christ - and there aren't many others who have claimed that title since.

And so it should come as little surprise that in the midst of our own doubts and fears we come to find ourselves in the company of Mary and the women at the tomb who simply couldn't believe their eyes at the sight of that rolled away stone.

Who could blame them after seeing Jesus betrayal, trial, and brutal death - the Jesus they had known and loved was likely unrecognizable by his end. They had seen his body taken down off the cross and placed within the grave. They had already been confronted with the harsh reality of his death - which would have easily erased any hope of the promise that he would ever rise again.

In the midst of the doubts, fears, and grief of our lives and world it can be hard for us to remember these same promises as well. Just this past week we saw time and time again how death and despair can come to tear apart the hope we are so desperately trying to hang on to.

On Good Friday, as we gathered here to reflect on Christ's crucifixion and death - thousands of Palestinians gathered marching to Gaza's boarder with Israel in desperation to protest a decade long border closure. A closure that has come to leave their people's lives precariously hanging in the balance as unemployment reaches new heights, forcing many into impoverished conditions, as sweeping blackouts wreak havoc along their coastal communities. As we worshiped, they marched, leading to the deadliest confrontation the Holy Land has seen in years - leaving 15 Palestinians dead and wounding more than 750 others, with numbers likely to rise as waves of senseless violence, and destruction continue to rock already struggling communities - leaving

many to wonder if there will ever be justice and peace in the midst of such great disappointment and grief.

Yet – this pain and death isn't just confined to peoples and places many of us may never come to see. It's also held here, close to the hearts of many of our neighbors and friends within Treaty 6 Territory - where the damaging effects of colonialism, and racism continue to ring out across our community.

Most of us have become aware of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls for justice for the systemic oppression of Indigenous lives and culture through residential schools. Many of these schools were located just kilometers away from some of our own charter Lutheran congregations and settlements here in Alberta – communities of believers whom stood by silently – knowingly and unknowingly - as horrific abuse went on in their backyards under Christ's name, a tragic and horrifying reality we are just starting to realize today.

A reality that has led many within the United, Anglican, Methodist, and Lutheran churches to take steps towards reconciliation. Steps that sadly were not taken by Pope Francis this last week as he refused to formally recognize the Churches role in the abuse, neglect, and harm done through Catholic residential schools across our region. Reopening painful wounds for many of our indigenous neighbors and friends who thought words of healing might have come instead.

Even within our own lives and homes we can lose hope in the midst of our own brokenness and grief. When the pain of losing a loved one strikes us to the core and we wonder how we will ever go on. Our homes once filled with life and love begin to feel like a tomb – sealing us in as neighbors and friends struggle to understand our grief – and we are left feeling utterly alone.

Perhaps for you it's a living grief you are struggling to bear in the midst of life's changing blows – when downsizing has left you searching for not only employment but also for meaning as you piece your life back together once more. It can be hard to find the courage to get up and try again and again each morning.

Or when the stresses of this life cause you to lash out on those you love, we begin to fear that our relationships may bear cuts that have simply gone too deep to ever heal. And so we relent over the pain we have caused those we love, fearing the sin of our words and actions may never truly find reconciliation.

And just like the women that first Easter morning we bow our heads in grief and fear wondering what hope could possibly come out of these moments of death, and destruction.

However, in the middle of these stifling moments we hear the heavenly messenger's words breaking through into our midst from this morning's gospel.

Jesus is not here, He - has – risen!

Where we expect to find the sting of sin and death in our world of pain we find the resurrected Christ.

The living breathing love of God.

Coming to envelop not only us, but our whole life and world once again.

But this is so hard for us to accept and believe.

We simply can't fathom what this kind of resurrection means for our life.

It's the same fact that was so hard for the women to accept and know that Easter morning so long ago - that even after betrayal, pain, and death, that Jesus would choose love time and time again, for all creation.

Because, in the end, resurrection is not only the promise of life after death, that in itself would be enough for us all – but it is also the promise that the love of God will always act to roll the stones away from the tombs threatening us with death. Tombs that would have us believe that corruption, rejection, marginalization, judgment, and grief are all we are to expect from this life.

Yet, God continues to come to us - calling us to truly remember the depth of love Christ has for us all – not in some distant future, but right here and right now. A love that invites us to join in sharing the good news we have received that death, grief, fear, and destruction will not have the last breath within creation.

And as we do - the tombs of our lives will be opened up, allowing our sins decay to meet God's life giving breath of love - reminding us once and for all that we are not people of death - but people of Christ's resurrected love.

We are invited to remember Christ's promise of new life not only in the life to come - but in this life - here and now. A life that gives witness to the fact that there is another way of being in the world - a way of being that is shaped by the light of resurrection, that embodies anything and everything that is life-giving, a way of being that is so counter-cultural, so filled with God's love and grace that the marks of hate and death within our world can begin to be healed in a new and powerful way.

Marks that I saw soften this past week as children and youth from around the world joined in the *March for our Lives* – a movement aimed to end the threat of gun violence and terror in schools across North America. A call that saw thousands upon thousands of youth rising up to have their voices heard. Reclaiming their schools and communities as safe places of learning for everyone. Proving time and time again through their messages of support, love, and challenge that fear would never have the final word.

Marks of death that have been erased here in our own community with opening of a supervised consumption site here in our city. A project Mom's Stop the Harm and other advocacy groups have been working alongside for over 6 years. Allowing those often forced to the margins of our society due to substance use and the stigma it can carry. Supporting them to find the care they need to live safely within our community. A sign of hope for many individuals and families working hard to support their siblings, parents, and friends in the midst of recovery.

Marks of pain that I have felt soften and heal in the midst of my own life - when long distant family members can be reconciled to one another, healing the wounds that have long kept them apart in in this life.

This is what the resurrection calls us to in this life - to be renewed in the grace of God that insists that love will win over the ways of hate.

That life will triumph over death.

And that nothing in this life or the next will ever be able separate us from the Love of God.

Just like Mary and the women who first went to the tomb - we are called to remember and embrace the true resurrection of Christ that is happening all around us. To be changed and renewed here in this life - bringing the light of Christ into the dark places of our lives - trusting that the God who raised his son from death to new life will also breathe within us new life too.

Not only for the life yet to come - but for us here and now - by the grace and love of Christ.

So declare this love to everyone you meet.

Bring life and hope to a world in need.

And as you do you will proclaim:

Christ is risen - *Christ is risen indeed* - Alleluia!

May this be so among us - Amen.