

He Has Risen! He Is Now Here!

Luke 24:1–12 and Mathew 28:18-20

Dear Friends in Christ

May the Lord's Grace, peace and Joy be with on this special day.

A few years ago, in a conversation I had with one of our young boys, , I asked him what he would like to be and do when he would grow up, he was about 5 or six years old then... Among several choices he had his favorite was to be a mechanic. "I like cars and trucks" he said. Then I asked how about being a pastor, would you like being a pastor? "no" he said "too many words." Too many words indeed, especially for an introvert person like me.

So, on this glorious resurrection day, I would like to see if I can keep this meditation in fewer words. The news is short and very sweet "Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here, but has risen." (Luke 24:5-6) The news is short and sweet indeed, Alleluia Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Yes! Christ is risen. And guess what, he is here now. That is also good news. That Christ is alive and is here today. Just as he promised when he said "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Mat 28:20b)

Christ is Risen and he is here today. But how is Jesus with us so? He is with us through his word, he is with us through Communion, he is with us in the Spirit. Jesus is alive and is with us today, and that is good news for us today.

It was indeed good news for the women who went to the tomb that first Easter morning. Although at first, they were perplexed at not finding the body of Jesus, wondering what could have happened. Where was he? He was supposed to be there in the tomb, this is confusing, isn't it?

They come to the tomb expecting to care for a dead body. The spices they bring were for embalming the man who died on the cross. When they arrive, they get confused. The stone is rolled off to the side and tomb contains no body, it is empty. Where is Jesus? His body had disappeared. They are at a loss as to what had happened.

And then when the angels appear, they are afraid. These heavenly beings frighten the women. But then recognizing that they are angels, they bow to the ground in front of them.

Confused and scared! Have you been confused and scared at the same time?

These women were. But the angels aren't there to frighten the women. They have come to assure them, to remind them, to bring faith back to life in them. They do not do this with power and fear, but with a simple message. Jesus is not in the tomb. He has risen. He has kept his promise. He died at the hands of sinful, of evil men. Now, on the third day, he has risen from the dead, just as he said he would. He is not there, in that tomb. The women needed to hear that good news. And just a few words were necessary to be said by the angels. "Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you..." it was going to happen.

That's all they needed to hear, for faith to spark and believe to flourish. Even though Jesus wasn't standing there in front of them, even though all they've seen with their eyes is an empty grave and some angels, they believe. And in that faith they run to tell the disciples that wonderful news, Jesus is alive!

In that moment, their confusion and fear change to belief and hope. Soon they will see Jesus. They will know just exactly where he is. Not in the tomb. But with them. At that moment, though, Jesus is not there, but his promise, his words were, and soon they will see him face to face.

Confused and scared! Have you been confused and scared at the same time?

Scared? O not me! Then again, whom am I kidding.... Confused? Well, a little. But that's me, how about you? I wonder if perhaps we struggle with the same emotions as the women did back then. We're confused. We're frightened. Not at a stone rolled away. Or by encountering angels. But by what life simply throws at us that makes us ask, "Where is Jesus? He doesn't seem to be here. And what is here is frightening."

Have you tuned into the news in the last 24 months? A black man dies as a police officer kneels on his neck until he breathes no more. The country where it happened erupts with protests all over, and in the following months protesters were seen over 60 countries around the world. That day, many people gave a deeper thought to the racism embedded in so many institutions and systems in our way of life. But then

police forces where it happened, seemed to be demonized. Protests turn into riots and destruction. What could have been a moment for biblical justice to bring change and healing is lost, while anger, hate, and violence divide people into political camps. You can be left confused and afraid, wondering where Jesus is in this mess.

A pandemic sweeps across the nation and around the globe. At first, we lock down together to battle against this unseen enemy. We learn how to protect one another and ourselves and keep our health care system from being overwhelmed. But as the months drag on, fighting takes over. Something as simple as a mask divides people into camps, and we hear the battle lines drawn. Personal freedom—I don't need to wear one. The virus isn't that bad; 99 percent of those who get it survive. The media has overhyped the problem. We need to get people back to work. The loneliness and depression are worse than the virus. But wait, doctors and nurses are exhausted. We've run out of ICU beds for those who are sick. Other surgeries have to be postponed, and cancer treatments suspended. Protect your neighbor, your family members. Both sides claim political allies. Even in the church, the division rages on, with some not attending if they have to wear a mask, and others not coming if not everyone is wearing a mask.

Then Ukraine is invaded, we hear of war, even there we hear and see divisions. How about other countries where war has been for years, why don't we hear or care about them? You can be left confused and afraid, wondering where Jesus is in this mess.

The church suffers as well. Attendance goes down. Some left the church completely, arguing, if the church is not open during the pandemic, then why we have one? Pastors and church workers grow weary and are even attacked for whatever they decide to do. You can be left confused and afraid, wondering where Jesus is in this mess.

But confusion and fear don't need to come from the outside world or sources. Most of the time the infection of confusion comes from the really close-to-home moments. The death of a loved one for example, that reminds us that we too are going the same route, but the absence of loved one leaves a broken and sadden heart in the moment, can leave us perplexed and but even more so, frightened. Where is Jesus when all this happens?

The future can look bleak, the world state, our health, the future of our children, o man, this is hard, isn't it. I have a migraine just thinking about that. I know I shouldn't worry, but can help it, it is what it is. That can be frightening and confusing, wondering where Jesus is in this mess.

And in that mess the good news comes to us. Jesus is risen and he is here.

Here? Where? I don't see him, where is Jesus. Just before his ascension, he said: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." A wonderful promise, but still, where is he?

When he promised he will be with us, he said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Mat 28:18-20)

Did you catch that? Jesus is risen, and he is here with us. He is with us, through the waters of baptism. We know that but... As you see when a person, child or an elderly for that matter, is baptized, something happens, that person gets baptized in the name of Christ, that person in fact begins to bear the name of Christ. Where is Jesus at that moment of baptism? Right there. He is risen from the dead. He is alive and now lives in that child. That's how I'm with you Jesus says. "And behold I'm with you!"

Where is Jesus? Look at the altar. In a moment we are going to be invited at the Lord's table, and there we here, take it, this is my body, take and drink, this is my blood. Where is Jesus at that moment? Right there. He is risen from the dead. He is alive and lives in you. He renews your faith and hope once again. He is not in the tomb. He is here in our midst, in our church, in your life. Confusion and fear give way to a confident faith and hope.

Where is Jesus? Open a Bible, and you will find Jesus there! Go and make disciples, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." That's how I'm with you, through my word. And through my word I'll comfort you, I'll sustain you, I'll teach you how to live, I'll give and sustain faith and hope, through the Word I'll give you life!

Listen to what Isaiah promises in our Old Testament Reading. A day will come when Jesus will return. We will see him face-to-face. All of creation will be remade. No

more will old age take away our strength and breath. All creation will live in peaceful harmony. Only gladness, not more anger and hate. Grief will give way to rejoicing. “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create..”

Or listen to Paul in our Corinthians reading. The one great last enemy to be destroyed is death. Jesus is the firstfruits when he left the tomb empty, so many more will follow on that glorious Last Day of resurrection. When you read passages from God’s Word like these, Jesus is moving and working in you, building up your faith and renewing your hope by the power of his Holy Spirit.

The women at the tomb remembered Jesus words, they believed, and hope was restored, and then they ran and told the disciples. They didn’t stay at the tomb. They went back to their lives. They went back to their lives with the risen Jesus present with them.

So do we. We leave this worship service and we go back to our lives. We go back to injustice and anger. We go back to division and strife. We go back to sickness and aging muscles. But we do not go back alone. We go back with Jesus. We go back with a powerful message. He has risen; he is now here.

Come what may, Christ will be there. Remember that wherever misery is, Christ will be there too. Will life in Christ be easy? No. But where there’s misery, there Christ is. We go out from this Easter service with that confident faith and living hope. We go out with that simple message: Jesus has risen! He is now here!

The women staring at an empty tomb needed to hear the words, “He is not here, but has risen” (v 6a).

And we too, for a living faith and a confident hope, need to hear those words, those few words, once again, He has risen! He is now here!

In his name Amen.