

If Jesus Is Alive
Matthew 28:1-10

As Easter dawns, no one thinks Jesus is alive. Not the disciples, who had all run away in fear. Not the women who had come either to anoint a dead body or just to look once again at the tomb.

Not the guards, who had been placed there to make sure no one stole the dead body. Not Pilate, not Herod, not Caiaphas, who thought once and for all they had gotten rid of a troubling teacher. As Easter dawn, no one believes Jesus is alive. Everyone believes life is back to normal.

If Jesus is dead, then life in its own way isn't so very complicated. A little sad, especially if you loved Jesus, but not so complicated.

If Jesus is dead, then the Sadducees, who don't believe in the Resurrection of the dead, are proven correct. They can go back to presiding at the Temple, concerning themselves with ritual and scheduling the priests to preside, and how much to charge for pigeons and lambs at the festivals. And the Pharisees can go back to studying the minutiae of the law to figure out exactly how far God

will allow us to walk on the Sabbath and if in fact it is OK lift a cow out of ditch.

If Jesus is dead, then Herod and Pilate can rest easy in their palaces. Can continue to use their power to wrest every last penny in taxes they can. If Jesus is dead, then Peter can go back to fishing and Matthew back to tax collecting.

If Jesus is dead, then the women can go back to, well, being women. Anoint this one dead body, then go back to being subservient and servile.

If Jesus is dead, then his kind and sometimes kooky teaching can be placed back on the shelf. Love your enemies? Turn the other cheek? The intriguing, but ultimately innocuous, opinions of a wandering teacher from a backwater province called Galilee.

If Jesus is dead, then you had better give it all allegiance to Caesar, because Caesar is the only power that counts.

If Jesus is dead, then you don't need to take seriously his talking about justice and mercy, about feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. For at best, he's just another prophet, like an Amos or Hosea, perhaps, and they're dead too and no one listened to them either.

If Jesus is dead, then forget about forgiveness. All this talk about God's forgiving nature, about God wanting to find lost sheep and welcome sinful folk home, well all that talk died with Jesus on Friday on the cross.

If Jesus is dead, life might be stripped of its hope and promise and wonder, but at least it's simple and straightforward. You live, you die, and you do what's best for you and maybe your family, and leave it at that.

If Jesus is dead, then you feel a little embarrassed that you sort of got caught up in all the excitement, and all those dreams about what the Kingdom of God might look like if it ever became more than a fairy tale or pipe dream. But then again, if Jesus is dead, then you can go back to Galilee and get back to fishing.

But if Jesus is alive, then life gets really complicated. And maybe for the first time, really good.

For you see, if Jesus is alive, then he is who he said he is. Lord. Master. No longer are his teachings optional. Our lives now have a focus beyond ourselves: and the focus is Jesus' ministry.

When we think only of ourselves, or our family, or our future or what we want out of life, that's sometimes

difficult, but it is not complicated. But if Jesus is alive, then his words, his teaching, his ministry have authority. And that can get complicated, as we try to figure out into what directions Jesus might lead us, as we try to figure out how to live, not just to ourselves, but for the sake of the world.

If Jesus is alive, then we must have concern for AIDS orphans in Africa. If Jesus is alive, we don't just live on the earth, we wonder how to care for the earth. If Jesus is alive, then we have concern for the least of these and we seek to overcome not just personal sin, but societal sin such as racial intolerance and economic disparity. If Jesus is alive, Peter can no longer be just a fisherman; he must also fish for men, and do whatever else Jesus commands. And so must we.

If Jesus is alive, then our lives are complicated, by seeking his spirit, his will, as we make our way in the world.

And if Jesus is alive, then there is a brand-new goodness to our lives as well. Let me lift out two specific themes from our Scripture this morning.

First, the first words of the Risen Lord as recorded by Matthew. Rejoice. Or Greetings. However we translate it, these are good words. The angel had said, "Don't be afraid." Of what? Well, of everything. Don't be afraid of

death, if Jesus is alive. Don't be afraid that you might not measure up, because Jesus' ministry is one of forgiveness and reconciliation and mercy, and his Resurrection gives that ministry extra power. Peter, you denied Jesus three times, but don't be afraid, he loves you, he forgives you. If Jesus is alive, don't be afraid of earthquake or soldiers or anything else on earth. For he has conquered.

And, also, these words of the angel: He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. What's important about these words. Well, if Jesus is alive, it isn't just for Jesus to go to heaven. It's that his ministry continues and has something to do with us: we will, spiritually at least, see him.

And he goes on ahead of us... where. To Galilee. Galilee isn't so much a geographical place as it is a spiritual place. Let me explain. Most all the disciples were from Galilee. And now, with the earthly ministry of Jesus over, they are going back to their usual lives, their old lives, their everyday lives, if you will. But now a difference: Jesus will already be there, in the midst of them, in the midst of their everyday lives.

Today we have gathered on an extraordinary day: a full sanctuary. It's a different day, a day of celebration. But tomorrow, we go back to Galilee. To our everyday lives.

Back to work or back to our normal schedule. But folks, the good news is, if Jesus is alive, then wherever we are, our lives are filled with Resurrection power. There is hope and meaning and promise in the most ordinary of times, the most difficult of times, if Jesus is alive.

Now, that being said, for God to make himself known ultimately in death and resurrection means first that God is not a cosmic mommy, kissing our boobos and making them all better. Would that He were, but he's not.

The power of God is not that Jesus escapes suffering and death. It is that in the midst of death and darkness, God is still at work. Jesus' death is real, but so is the new life. Now this is truth in an ultimate way when we breath our last breath on earth and then celebrate our first glimpse of heaven.

Don't forget , not every Christian story is happy and optimistic. I think of my mother-in-law, a kind-hearted and generous Christian if ever one walked the earth. A massive stroke two and half years ago. And the experts said she would never walk again, perhaps never talk. But we refused to accept such a pessimistic prognosis. Now, however, the experts have been proven correct.

God didn't make it all go away. But if Jesus is alive, then her life continues to have blessing, even now, and not just when she goes from life to eternal life. If Jesus is alive,

then God breaks through the physical barriers and limitations, and she finds reason to smile and even to laugh. She's surrounded by a family that loves her, friends who reach out to her, and faith that sustains her. And how we celebrate that she has at least this much.

Her stroke was a little death, in profound ways. But God is at the work in death, to bring forth new life. No, not as we would have hoped, but new life, sustained life, nevertheless. In her warm smile when she sees us, and her really really big smile when she sees her grandson, we see again the Resurrection hope lived out.

The message of Easter isn't that Jesus never died. It is that he died and lives again. It is that he died and lives again in your life and my life. It is that he breaks again into the challenges and sorrows and questions of our lives, and dares to tell us again we can rejoice.

When bad stuff happens, naturally we ask, "why." But maybe God invites us to ask a different question which is this: now that the bad stuff has happened, where can I find resurrection hope in the midst of all this?

Because, if Jesus is alive, I promise you that you will find this hope, in every circumstance, until that time when heaven is not longer our future hope but our present reality.

If Jesus is alive, then we dare to believe that life continues to have meaning and promise. If Jesus is alive, then , we dare to continue to trust in God's promises of blessing.

And so Easter becomes not just a day of worship and celebration, but also a day of decision: Do we believe that Jesus is alive? And if we do, how will our lives reflect this reality we celebrate today, and how will our lives bear witness to this reality when we are back in our everydays, back in our Galilees, tomorrow? Amen