

Easter Day
April 16, 2017, Year A
St. Dunstan's Anglican Church, Largo, FL

Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Colossians 3:1-4
Matthew 28:1-10

Alleluia! Christ is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

The angel of the Lord said to the women, "He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. ... Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead."

[pause]

What would you think if you were going out to a tomb where someone you knew and loved had been laid to rest and the body was gone? [pause] And they didn't just look in to see an empty tomb and wonder where the body was and who took it. As they approached the tomb, the ground shook like an earthquake and a very unusual being greeted them. The reading tells us that "his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow."

Pretty scary. In fact it was so scary that the soldiers guarding the tomb "became like dead men." They passed out from fear of some being seemingly from another world. The reading describes this being as an angel of the Lord. And the angel of the Lord said to the women, "He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come see the place where he lay."

[pause]

He has risen. He has returned to life. He has conquered death by returning to life. How that could be possible to believe, understand, and therefore amend one's total way of life as a result is something of such magnitude and importance that it overshadows everything else known to man.

[pause]

Who could do such a thing? How is it possible for a person to become alive again after having been dead? And why do Christians make such a big deal about it?

It would take incredible power to raise someone from death back to life. So the first thing to notice is that God claims to have such power over life and death, and Jesus rising from the dead on that first Easter proves it. Easter tells Christians that their God has the power to make all the promises he makes in the Bible come true. One of those promises is that those who believe in Jesus will go to heaven.

So we must ask the question, what does it mean to believe in Jesus so that I can be sure of going to heaven? In this context, believing in Jesus is much more than just acknowledging that he may have lived a long time ago and said and done things worthy of remembering. Believing in Jesus means that I believe that Jesus is God himself, that I accept him as the one who calls all the shots in my life, and that I have accepted his offer to save me from my sins.

Let's unpack that some more. If we are honest with ourselves, we all know that we have done bad things from time to time. Doing bad things like lying, cheating or taking things that are not

ours to take, or worse, are called sin in church parlance, and sin separates us from God and going to heaven. Sinners do not go to heaven when they die. It doesn't matter how many good things we may have done to try to make up for the bad things. One sin cancels our ticket to heaven.

That would mean that none of us would ever go to heaven. But God himself made a way out, a way to cancel the effect of sin, a way to return to God's good graces and be absolutely certain that when we leave this physical world, we will go to heaven. And that way is Jesus. The punishment for sin is death, and there is no bending the rules with God.

So Jesus, God himself, came among us as a human to pay the penalty for us, for you and me personally, by giving up his life in our place. He suffered the pain of death for you and me because he loves us that much and wants us to live with him forever.

But while Jesus has offered to take the punishment for our sins upon himself, our part is to honestly accept his leadership in our lives. When we ask Jesus to come into our lives, he will gladly come, and our lives will be changed forever.

When Jesus rose from the dead on that first Easter, it was as though he abolished death forever. He died, yet he overcame death and returned to life. And if we accept him as our Lord as well as our Savior, then he will see to it that we never die. Our bodies still die at some point, but our spirits live on forever.

Easter is about hope. It is about knowing for certain that Jesus has made a way for us to have our sins erased, blotted out forever, so that we may come into the presence of God in heaven. But salvation is about this physical life we now lead as well. Knowing Jesus and being known by him assures us that the going gets tough, we have a powerful friend who will see us through the darkest hours.

So give your life to Jesus. Acknowledge your sin and ask for his forgiveness. He is waiting for you. So what's taking you so long?

Alleluia! Christ is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

And now unto you, O Lord, be ascribed all might, majesty, power and dominion. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.