

Trinity Presbyterian Church – April 17, 2022

**To Exalt Christ;
To Equip, Encourage, Exhort, Edify God’s Elect
Preparing For Arrival: Called to Return
John 20:1-31**

We have spent several weeks going through the gospel of John concerning the **Upper Room Discourse** and Jesus preparing his disciples for his departure. They were *called to serve, called to trust, called to remain, called to work, called to prayer, called to praise, and called to die* on Good Friday as Christ was.

Flight attendants are told at the start of a flight to prepare for departure. As the flight nears its destination they are to prepare for arrival. The disciples over the course of three days, were unknowingly preparing for the arrival of Christ as he was *called to return*. The return was unexpected despite the many times Jesus spoke of his death and his resurrection. E.g. in John 2:19, Jesus said to the Jews, *“Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days”*, the temple being his body. Also in John 10:17 Jesus said, *“I lay down my life, only to take it up again.”*

Friday concluded with the death of Christ and his burial in a borrowed tomb by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Matthew, Mark and Luke record that the women, especially Mary of Magdala, saw Jesus being laid in the tomb. That was on Friday. Saturday was the Sabbath. No work was to be done. Then came Sunday morning. The four gospel writers all wrote, *“on the first day of the week.”*

In Genesis 1:3-5 we read, *“And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good and he separated the light from the darkness...And there was evening and there was morning – the first day.”* The first day of the week has been a good day to start new work. Light came into the world on the first day and overcame the darkness. Jesus, as the light who had come into the world, returned on the first day to begin a new work through his disciples. That work has continued for his glory and our eternal good to this very day.

The Runners John 20:1-9

It all began with three runners. We read in John 20:1 - 4, *“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple...So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running....”* What a great way to start the day with a good run. But this was not for exercise but of anxiousness, of fear and dread. What would they find? They found nothing. The tomb was empty. Jesus was gone, but how and where?

John was the faster runner. He reached the tomb first, but he did not go in. However, bold, impetuous, inquisitive Peter arrived and he went right in. He saw the strips of linen and the burial cloth folded neatly and separate from the linen. Then John went in. It was this John, our gospel writer, writing in the third person, wrote in verse 8, *“He saw and believed.”* What did John see and believe?

We must take this in the context of verse 9 where John recorded, *“They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.”* So, at this point John saw that the tomb was empty. Therefore what he believed was the report that Mary had given them. She had said, *“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”* In the Jewish culture of that day, the word of a woman was not considered valid unless verified. John verified her word, the testimony of Mary and he had Peter as a necessary second witness. Three runners found a bodiless tomb, empty. Why? Because he had risen.

The Resurrection – John 20:10-18

What is the central tenet or doctrine of the Christian faith? Upon what does it stand or fall? It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. No one except Christ ever died to take away the sins of the world. No one except Christ ever came back from the dead, permanently, to validate and actuate that purpose. The resurrection testifies to the uniqueness and sufficiency of Christ.

The first eyewitness of his resurrection was Mary. All it took was for Jesus to say her name – *“Mary.”* There was no trumpet blast or angels ascending and descending, singing, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests”* as happened at his birth. Luke 2:16. All of that would have been appropriate, given that this was a momentous historical event. Instead it was just Mary’s name spoken quietly by her resurrected Lord and Saviour.

She thought he was the gardener until then. It is interesting that Jesus’ tomb was in a garden. It was there that life returned to his body. It was also in a garden where all life first began as Genesis 1 and 2 record. What happened in Genesis 3, i.e. the fall of mankind into sin, brought death in the first garden. But that sin caused God to send his only Son that whoever he would bring to faith in him, shall not perish but shall have eternal - life. In Genesis 3:15 God first announced the gospel, the ***“protoevangelium”***, Christ crushing the head of Satan, defeating sin and death. He did both on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. A garden is new life.

God brings things full circle into a coherent and complete bundle. What he started in a garden, he finished in a garden. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead does not need to be defended, but instead it must be declared. To be declared with the certainty of its veracity but also of its value.

In Romans 10:9 Paul already knew its veracity and therefore he declared its value – “That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” There is the supreme value of the resurrection. To believe it is to be saved. John Calvin wrote, **“Christ, by rising again, completed the whole work of our salvation...it bears witness to the efficacy and fruit of his death...victory over sin, death and Satan.”**

Mary’s first instinct was to declare it. Verse 18 – “Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” Did she merely walk or did she run with her Nike sandals kicking up the dust? Her news brought –

The Rejoicing – John 20:19-23

It was now evening of that first day. Peter and John had told the others of the empty tomb. They have sat all day with the doors locked out of fear. Luke 24:13-35 records that they did have two visitors. They too had encountered the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus, about 10km west of Jerusalem. Like Mary they did not recognize him at first. However, their despondency over what happened to Jesus prompted him to say, “How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” But, they still did not recognize him, despite his expert, detailed exegesis of Scripture.

Nevertheless they encouraged him to stay with them. At supper Luke said, Jesus “took bread, gave thanks and broke it.... Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” What a Bible study that must have been.

As a result of his resurrection appearance they returned immediately to Jerusalem. Perhaps they too ran a fast 10k. When they found the eleven and those with them, they said, as Luke recorded, “It is true! The Lord has risen....”

Then John records in John 20:19, as an eyewitness, “Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” In verse 20 he showed them his hands and side. That assured them it was him. That assurance caused them to rejoice, to be “overjoyed” as John said in verse 20. It suggests their joy was overflowing, gushing, bubbling like a fully open fire hydrant and why not? Jesus was alive.

Jesus may have given them the same Bible study he gave the two Emmaus Road disciples so they too would understand from Scripture that Jesus had to die and rise from the dead as John’s editorial note said in verse 9. His resurrection testified to the complete inerrancy, infallibility and authority of OT Scripture.

The disciples now had firsthand knowledge of the resurrection. It validated and affirmed everything they knew about Jesus. So in verse 21 Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” In Reform Theology’s *Five Doctrines of Grace*, also known as, the *Five Points of Calvinism*, numbers two and four are, **Unconditional Election** and **Irresistible Grace**. Here we see unconditional and irresistible gifting by Jesus of the Holy Spirit and with it the power to forgive anyone their sins.

This was all pre-Pentecost, pre Acts 2 and the official coming of the Holy Spirit as Jesus had promised in John 16. There Jesus detailed the work of the Holy Spirit which was to “convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment”, and guide them into all truth. The disciples, having seen the risen Christ, would be sent out in the certainty of the resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit with the gospel. But first John records the reaffirmation.

The Reaffirmation – John 20:24-31

In verses 24-31 we meet Thomas again from John 14. He was not there when Jesus came the first time. He did not believe the disciples testimony that Jesus was alive and would not unless he saw Jesus’ hands and side. About a week later Jesus appeared again. He showed him his nail pierced hands and side but also allowed him to touch the wounds. Jesus told him bluntly, “Stop doubting and believe.” And he did. That belief, in the resurrection of Christ caused him to go, along with the others, including Paul, and literally lose their lives testifying to the death and resurrection of Christ, preaching that gospel by which souls are saved.

Jesus told Thomas in verse 29, “Because you have seen me, you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Thomas believed by sight. We have believed by the gift of faith and thus are blessed This testifies to the power of the word of God as the gospel is read & preached & to the convicting/convincing power of the Holy Spirit as he brings us to faith in Christ.

In verses 30-31 John wrote – “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Jesus’ resurrection, the acme of miracles, reaffirmed that he is the Christ, the Messiah, that he is the Son of God, therefore divine. John Calvin says that by Christ being the Son of God, it allowed him to, **“Reconcile the Father to us, to atone for the sins of the world, to abolish death, to destroy the kingdom of Satan, to bring us to true righteousness and salvation.”**

Over three days they were prepared for his arrival as he was called by God to return, which he did. And now we, like them, are preparing for his re-arrival as he promised three times in Revelation 22 – “Yes, I am coming soon.” Are you prepared, are you ready for his third and final arrival? **Soli Deo Gloria.** Amen.