

Joshua Willadsen
Easter Sunday
Sermons
April 24, 2011

MATTHEW 28:1-10 - "HE WAS RAISED, JUST AS HE SAID"

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

All of us make promises and all of us have had promises made to us. We say that we are going to do something, we promise. Sometimes we keep our promises, but other times we don't. Broken promises can be very hurtful, if that which was promised was important. For instance husbands and wives make solemn promises to love and serve each other in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, for richer for poor, till death parts them. Sadly these promises today often are broken and cause much pain, not only to the married couple, but to other members of the family and society as a whole. Even in the best of marriages that last until death, husband and wife end up breaking their promises to each other; they have moments when they do not act and speak with love to their spouse, but act selfishly. But it is not only in marriage that humans have trouble keeping promises, but in every aspect of life. We have a problem in keeping our promises because of our sinfulness.

Jesus' first disciples had the same trouble keeping promises that we do today. Peter and the rest of the Twelve all made promises to Jesus that they would never leave Him or abandon Him. Peter went further than the rest, boldly promising that he would even die for the Lord. But neither Peter nor the rest of the disciples kept their solemn promises to Jesus. When Jesus was arrested all the disciples fled and abandoned Jesus; they did not speak up for Him at His trials. Peter did not die for the Lord, but instead denied the Lord three times, "I never knew Him."

We are all promises breakers. We say we will do one thing, but often do something else. We too have broken our promises to the Lord, our promises to fear, love, and trust in Him above all things and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

But thanks be to God that Jesus always keeps His promises. He was raised just as He said! Jesus the Crucified One was raised from the dead! Jesus told His disciples, "*See we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and He will be raised on the third day...the Son of Man came not to be served but to give His life as the ransom for many*" (Matthew 20:18-19, 28). This is the Good News of Easter, which is of first importance, "*...that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,*

and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve” (1 Corinthians 15:3-5). God has redeemed the sinful world through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus and forgiveness of sins is now given in His name, forgiveness even for our broken promises.

Cephas, better known as Peter and the Twelve were not the first people to see Jesus risen from the dead. The women, Mary and Mary, had the honor of being the first to whom the risen Lord revealed Himself as raised from the dead. But Peter and the Twelve were called, chosen, and sent by their crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ to be His official eye-witnesses, His ambassadors. Jesus charged them with announcing to all people what God had accomplished through His death and resurrection and with proclaiming the forgiveness of sins in His name. The Twelve and the other official eye-witnesses of the resurrection, better known as Apostles, have given their authentic and historical witness; their witness is written in the pages of the New Testament and their witness is one. Jesus was raised, just as He said.

Believe it or not, Jesus died and was raised on the third day; these are the historical facts, witnessed by more than five hundred people. Jesus' resurrection is not a myth or legend made up to convey the timeless truths of a people and unite them with a shared ethos and world-view, like the legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Jesus who was crucified for the sin of the world was raised to new and everlasting bodily life. He is the first to be resurrected, that is the first person to die and to be raised to new bodily life in which it is now impossible for Him to ever die again. Others have died and been brought back to life by God's almighty power only to die again, but Jesus was raised, just as He said, no longer will He die again.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead is not a mere faith-event, that is something that is true for a person or group of people, because they believe it. Rather Jesus' resurrection from the dead is true, a fact, a historical event. Jesus was dead due to severe beatings and crucifixion and laid in a tomb dead. But God raised Him from the dead to new life never to die again. God acted to save sinners through the death and resurrection of Jesus, that is why the resurrection of Jesus the Crucified One is the most important event in all human history. If people don't believe in the resurrection, if people deny it to be true, that in no way changes what happened nor its significance for humanity. Faith does not determine truth. Truth gives birth to faith; faith trusts in the truth. Faith always has an object, a person, a set of facts, a body of knowledge, or a thing. Truth just like falsehood can be trusted/believed or it is rejected denied.

Believe it or not, God created all things through His Word; He spoke all the universe into existence and ordered all things according to His will. God created all things good and made man in His image. People certainly do both. Some believe God created all things through His Word as the Scriptures give witness, while others deny God's creative power and look for other things to believe in. But my believing God created all things through His Word, my faith, did not cause or create the universe we live in. People can and do believe lies and fairy tales as well as truth.

People should take seriously the evidence and witnesses presented for any truth claims. Christianity is based upon a truth claim of which there is eye-witness testimony, that Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead, just as He said. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then the Good News is a lie, Christianity is false, and there is no forgiveness of sins or hope of resurrection. If Jesus only appeared to rise, if Jesus now only lives as a spirit without a body, if He was simply a man, then there really is no point in being here today nor any other Sunday, we are just waisting time. But in fact, Jesus was raised, just as He said, so let us listen again to one of the official written witnesses of the resurrection from one of the eye-witnesses, one of the Twelve himself, St. Matthew.

1 And after the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came and the other Mary to see the tomb. 2 And behold, a great earthquake happened; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and he was sitting upon it. 3 And his appearance was as lightening and his clothing white as snow. 4 And from the fear of him those who were keeping watch were shaken and became as dead. 5 But the angles replied and said to the women, “You, stop being afraid, for I know that you are seeking Jesus the Crucified One; 6 He is not here; for He was raised just as He said; come see the place where He was lying. 7 Now quickly go say to His disciples that, ‘He was raised from the dead, and behold, He is going before you into Galilee, there you shall see Him;’ behold, I said to you.” 8 And they quickly departed from the tomb with fear and great joy and they ran to announce to His disciples. 9 And behold Jesus met them saying, “Hail!” And they came and grasped His feet and they worshiped Him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, “Stop being afraid, depart and announce to My brothers that they go into Galilee, and there they shall see Me.”

In the midst of denial and grief Mary and Mary came back to the tomb on Sunday morning to see the tomb where their Lord Jesus was laid, to mourn and to grieve. Their denial and grief soon gave way to fear, shock, and joy. Something promised though unexpected had happened. Matthew tells us that a brilliant angle from heaven had come and rolled the stone away from the entrance of the tomb. His coming was accompanied by an earthquake that shook the guards to the ground and His presence caused them to be as dead, though they were alive.

God had sent His heavenly messenger to announce and proclaim Good News to Mary and Mary. Jesus the Crucified One whom they were seeking was raised from the dead, just as He said. The angel charged Mary and Mary to go and tell the Good News to the rest of the disciples, especially to the Eleven (for Judas was dead). And on their way in fear and joy to announce the Good News, Mary and Mary saw Jesus risen from the dead. He called to them and they grasped His feet and worshiped Him. Jesus was no ghost or phantom; He did not appear to be raised from the dead, but was raised from the dead just as He said.

Jesus was raised, just as He said! Why is this announcement Good News? What good is there for us in these words? The Good News announces and proclaims that Jesus is faithful to His promises, that His Word is certain and true. It means that Jesus’ death on the cross was not in vain, but was for us sinners, to ransom us from sin, death, and the devil. Before He died, Jesus taught that it was necessary for Him to be rejected, suffer, die, and be raised because this was God the Father’s will and plan to save sinners, to redeem humanity held captive to the devil, and to make all things in

new. God the Father was at work in the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ reconciling the fallen world to Himself! God accomplished in Jesus' death and resurrection what we can never accomplish.

Now there are many in this world, perhaps some here today that deny the necessity of Jesus' death and resurrection to be reconciled to God, to be forgiven, to be saved. To be honest this is the natural inclination of all our sinful hearts and minds; all people naturally think that forgiveness, life, and salvation must be earned, worked out, or bartered on ones' own. We all naturally think that our relationship with God, that any kind of eternal life, comes down to our being good people and doing the right sorts of things.

But where do all our efforts and striving get us before God? Can we really make up and cancel the guilt for the evil we have done to others, even if we could suddenly stop sinning today? Further do we really believe that good works done for others can cover our selfish and sinful acts and words, when if we are honest, we are not doing them for our neighbor, but for ourselves, to win our own salvation?

Can you prevent your own death or the death of those you love? Can you give new life? Humanity has tried hard for centuries to escape death and attain life, but humanity has failed. Sooner or later through war, violence, accidents, sickness, disease, or aging all sinners die. No one escapes.

But God had acted in His Son, Jesus the Crucified and Risen One to do what we cannot do for ourselves or others. All humanity all creation has been ransomed through Jesus' death and resurrection. Now God, promises forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. Now God promises to raise you as He has raised Jesus, the First-fruits of those raised from the dead.

Jesus was raised, just as He said! His Word and promise is to be trusted. In the water and Word of Baptism Jesus' promises to forgive your sins and unites you a sinner to His death and resurrection. In the words of absolution spoken by His called and ordained servant, Jesus promises to forgive your sins. In the eating and drinking of His body and blood, Jesus promises to forgive your sins. Jesus gives these words and promises to you so that you might trust in them and have life in His name; this includes life now as one in fellowship with God and a new life after death, a resurrected life as Jesus now lives. Jesus was raised, just as He said, Alleluia! Thanks be to God that He keeps His promises, Amen.