

## SCRIPTURE

**Luke 24:1-12**

### **The Resurrection of Jesus**

24 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in, they did not find the body. 4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." 8 Then they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

## MESSAGE

Hope. The message for today is hope. The message for every day is hope, but especially this morning the past speaks to the present about the future, and the message it conveys is hope.

That is the message that the women brought with them from the tomb. Early in the morning Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and some unnamed other women set out to do what women have been doing since the beginning of time. They were quietly taking care of what needed to be done.

There was a body that needed tending to; it needed washing, preserving, dressing, and caring. So in the dark these women ventured out to take care of those physical aspects of nurturing and of saying goodbye.

But they didn't find a body. The tomb was empty – empty until two otherworldly messengers appeared to tell them that Jesus' body would not be found laying on cold stone, but walking among those whom he loved. Instead of a body, these women found hope.

And for a time on that Easter morning, the whole church, the entirety of the Christian faith, consisted of these few women who bore this message of great hope burning within them.

Of course this news that Jesus was alive would be great news for those who travelled with him, learned from him, were healed by him, and who loved him. But is there any greater significance?

To paraphrase Jesus' response to Mary at the wedding feast in Cana 'What has that to do with me, woman?'

As it turns out, it has everything to do with us, because the resurrection is not just good news for one man who came back from the dead. It's not just the hope that since one man beat the grave the rest of us might have a chance too. It's much bigger than that.

Patriarch Athenagoras declared that "The Resurrection is not the resuscitation of a body; it is the beginning of the transfiguration of the world."

That is because the resurrection of Jesus is the response of God to our actions. Whether through ignorance or design, humankind killed the very best thing on the planet. We did the worst possible thing that we could do to our creator and father; we killed his son. I can think of no greater way to demonstrate our rejection of God than that.

So what should God's response be? To wipe us out – torture us as we tortured his son? It seems the best we could possibly hope for would be for God to simply leave us to our own devices – to withdraw his presence and just let us wallow in our Godless world and seek our own selfish ends at the expense of all those around us.

But amazingly that is not what happened. God's response was 'I will not let this evil stand. You acted in hatred and fear, but I answer with love. While you cry for death, I answer with life. You call for punishment, but I will answer with forgiveness.'

There is a great liberation in God's response to the murder of his son. This is why the message of Jesus' resurrection is our source of great hope. Not that we might cheat death, but that we might learn to truly live.

Most of us go through life carrying quite a bit of baggage. We've rejected God. We've rejected other people. We've rejected our dreams, our desires, and our principles. These actions accumulate and over time we become bound. We become trapped by the choices that we have made, and by the kind of people that we have become. And there doesn't seem to be any way out.

On Friday I had to drive in to London, and as I was turning on to the Queensway on the way out of town I saw a man in the rain with his backpack. While I waited for the light I watched him try to flag down a few passing cars. Nobody wanted to stop for this sketchy looking wet character.

So of course I did. I couldn't leave him out there. So I pulled alongside him, asked him where he was going. He said Windsor, and my heart sank a little. I was kind of hoping he was just headed to Delhi or somewhere close so that I could drop him off and get back to enjoying my drive – I had my music all picked out and everything– but I said 'Well, hop on in. I can get you as far as London.'

So in he climbed and off we went. Along the way I learned that he was travelling from New Liskeard, north of Algonquin, down to Windsor. He had a daughter in Windsor that he wanted to reconnect with.

Over the next hour and a quarter we talked about many things. We spoke of loss, broken relationships, people left behind. We spoke of things that have control over us – other people, habits, substances.

He shared with me a story about a young man whose death he was responsible for. It was not intentional - it was an accidental thing - but he carried that burden. For years he had been carrying it. And it was crushing him.

There is of course much more to him than just this one story, but this guilt along with all the other failures, and hurts, and abuses had left him a broken man. No stable relationships, no material wealth, and no real prospects for the future.

And yet, underneath all the pain that he revealed to me over the drive, together we found hope. Despite having nothing by our standards, he felt as though God was watching over him; despite what he had been through he knew that God was protecting him from even greater evils and was keeping him going.

And it was because of his knowledge that God had not given up on him that he held onto hope that his daughter also might give him another chance – allow him an opportunity for reconciliation and a new life.

That might seem like a slim hope – there is a lot of history that he and his girl will have to overcome, but hope is a powerful thing indeed.

Hope kept the light of literacy alive through centuries of barbarian invasions. Hope built incredible cathedrals in the depths of the dark ages. Hope created the great universities, hospitals, schools, orphanages, soup kitchens, health clinics, food pantries, and even the apartment building next door.

Hope is the conviction that we are not bound by the present or by the past – that the way things are now is not the way things always must be.

In those first few hours on that first Easter morning the church consisted of a few women with a message of hope.

Today, despite all that we have built up, and despite doing some damage along the way, the church is still the same thing – a few people bearing a message of hope.

And the hopeful message is simply this: God has not given up on you. God will not close the book on you, even when you are at your worst. You cannot push God away.

So the resurrection of Jesus is not new life for one man. The resurrection of Jesus – God’s yes to our no – means new life for every one of us. It is the assurance that we are not forever branded by our worst acts, but we are invited into a life of peace, love, honour, and forgiveness. A new life, lived in the image of God.

The promise is for us. The promise is for everybody. We are the few bearing a message of hope to the world; witnesses in Norfolk and the world to the transforming, life-giving love of Jesus, Son of God.

The Son has risen.

I speak to you this morning in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.