

Easter Sunday 2025
A Sermon by Chris Hensley
Based on Isaiah 65:17 – 25 & Luke 24:1-12
Presented to Sardis Baptist Church
April 20, 2025

Easter holds a special place in the collective heart of the Christian Church because it – along with Christmas – is the day on which the Church collectively remembers the resurrection of Jesus the Christ from the dead. It is also a difficult day for persons of faith because the foundational teachings centered on this day call for belief in an event that makes no scientific, medical, or practical sense to the minds of humanity. Someone rising from the dead is a fantastical story. That is, of course, if you are to read the resurrection accounts as literal and historical fact. As we look to our Gospel reading in Luke we see that the idea of a literal and physical resurrection, despite the teachings of Jesus as recorded earlier in the account stating that this would happen, are difficult for the disciples to grasp and they too wrestle with this information, not taking seriously the reports of the women who went to the tomb and found it empty early that first Easter morning.

So difficult was this teaching that a sect of Christians early in the history of the Church – the first and second centuries in fact – was birthed and found much influence from Gnostic thinkers who believed that the physical world

was evil and that Jesus Christ was a divine being merely taking on the form of a human, rather than holding a dual nature, that of both Divine and human simultaneously. The early Church denounced this as a heresy and reinforced the idea that Jesus held a dual nature and did die a physical death and was resurrected to a new and physical life. At the risk of boring you all to tears on what should be a hope-filled day, the Church has held to an orthodoxy surrounding a physical death and a physical resurrection. All that to say, you figure this out on your own, I will not tell you what you ought believe necessarily, though we can chat over coffee individually, if you'd like.

Instead, I would like to focus on the idea from Isaiah of a newness and on the idea of what Jesus' resurrection as recorded in the Gospel accounts means to us as persons who have chosen to follow this Jesus' teachings and example in this world in which we live. The Hebrew prophet offers to the listeners words of comfort and hope that the God of Israel is doing something new and different. This new thing is going to bring about restoration of the intended order of creation. No longer is there curse, struggle, or strife with the arrival of this new thing. Creation, which has been shaken and disrupted, shall return to its intended order because of the Divine salvific work which has been, is being, and will be enacted by the God of Israel. This is the framework

of the theological thinking of the Church collectively as Isaiah is read and interpreted in light of the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

As we fast forward to our Gospel reading, we see that the message Messianic prophet in Isaiah is realized in the theological workings of the Gospel writers. Specifically in Luke we see that the new thing which God is doing, this salvific work is being done in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and the community which followed him is being invited into a place of deep faith in this salvific work. Chapter 24 of the Gospel of Luke may be divided into four parts, our reading is the first. Luke stands in contrast from the other two synoptic accounts in that there is no real mention of Galilee or a meeting there. All things in Luke's account of the resurrection of Jesus revolve around Jerusalem – a theological statement is being made here that there is a new focus in the religious life of the followers of Jesus who happen to be of Jewish spiritual roots.

Luke does a wonderful job of revealing that the account of the resurrection is a hard thing, even for the immediate followers of Jesus who had borne witness to his teachings and signs as recorded in the texts. Luke states that the women are afraid and that the eleven remaining named

apostles are flabbergasted and do not believe the women's statement. It is very important to understand the context of this lack of faith. It seems for Luke that it is more difficult to accept this in light of the crucifixion and grief felt by all rather than the gender of the messengers. For Luke these women have been equal partners in ministry and learning at Jesus' feet to the named male disciples and the men have heard the same predictions from Jesus' own mouth. Peter, though, has second thoughts and runs to the tomb to find the reports of the women to be accurate. Still, though, there are questions. Where is Jesus' body? Who were the two individuals? Some traditions tell us that they were angelic beings. Others make connection to the Transfiguration event where Jesus is accompanied by Moses and Elijah on the mountain. Who is to say?

As we celebrate Easter once again, the Church continues to wrestle with the story of the accounts within the Gospels. The texts tell us, tradition tells us that Jesus lives again. We may choose to accept that in our own way. What draws us, or at least me, is that within this account is a sense of hope, grace, and love which all stem from a Divine source which gives life and meaning, which provides love and acceptance, which offers guidance and direction. All of this leads to a transformative experience both in a spiritual

sense as well as a Kin-dom forming and earth shaking sense. May we who are Easter people – people informed by a story of Divine resurrection, renewal, and rebirth – be encouraged to bring this message of hope, grace, and love into a world which so longs for all of these things.

References:

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Reclaiming Resurrection Litany for Eastertide

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead has been recounted for two millennia. Across those eras, the Church has divided time and again.

What can be done in the face of generations of division?

The Church must look beyond our differences – our sacraments, modes of Baptism, the myriad cultural influences upon our theological ponderings. What is it that remains in the face of such differences?

The teachings of the Resurrection of the Christ remain.

Yes, and in resurrection there is the promise of renewed hope, grace, and love.

The teachings of hope in the face of eternal uncertainty remain.

Hope, despite all fear and the innumerable questions. Hope that we are loved by someone beyond ourselves.

The teachings of grace in a harsh world remain.

Grace, both given and received, gifts of wonder and bliss amidst the hurtful selfishness of collected humanity.

The teachings of love for all, freely given, remain.

Love, the greatest of all things. Love given to us without expectation of return. Love shown through us in hope that the intended order might be glimpsed in the here and now.

We reclaim all of these teachings in the unity of the Resurrection of the Christ, amen.