

Easter Day: Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-18

Today we celebrate the most significant event in history. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Jesus, during his time on earth had brought other people back to life from the dead, but none were given their eternal resurrected bodies. They died again. No one has yet received their imperishable resurrected physical body save for Jesus Christ. This is why Jesus is called the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Jesus refers to death as falling asleep. When we die, we are with the Lord in our spiritual bodies instantly, just as Jesus promised the criminal on the cross saying, "Today you will be with me in Paradise," but our physical bodies will be resurrected when Christ comes again and brings us with him. The Apostle Paul teaches us this saying to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. If we are absent from the body and present with the Lord, it means we are with the Lord in our spiritual bodies. Hence, it is our souls that are with the Lord. Jesus also refers to this dual nature that we have saying: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul," (Matthew 10:28). Jesus right there demonstrates that though the body die, the soul does not. It is when Jesus comes again that our perishable body will put on the imperishable. Paul explains this to the Thessalonians saying, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will be the first to rise." All of the dead will be raised when Jesus comes to judge the living and the dead, both those who believed in him and also those who do not, but scripture makes it clear to us that the dead in Christ will rise first. And I believe this is because we will reign with Jesus during the millennium before the Last Day when the New Heaven and the New Earth are brought about. But scripture is clear that our perishable bodies will put on the imperishable, and our mortal bodies will put on immortality (1 Cor 15:53), just as Jesus has already put on his imperishable resurrected body. And from that time on we will always be with the Lord, (1 Thess 4:17). And some may say to me, "But Heather, sometimes it is hard to truly believe that we will in fact live again after we die."

And it is hard to believe this. You know the saying, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is." Yet I would present to you that this is why the Gospel is called Good News. It's because it is actually Good News. And Jesus knew it was

in our nature to disbelieve. I mean look at doubting Thomas. After Jesus had died, even though Thomas had seen all Jesus' miracles and after Jesus' three days in the tomb had ten of the other disciples and all the women whom Jesus was close to telling him they had seen the risen Lord, Thomas does not believe in the resurrection, saying: "Unless I see the nail marks in His hands, and put my finger where the nails have been, and put my hand into His side, I will never believe." Wow. This is one of the twelve disciples who walked with Jesus and witnessed all the miracles to include the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and *he, Thomas*, had trouble believing in the resurrection of the dead. But it is so important to believe in the resurrection. Given scripture tells us "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." This is why Jesus took time to make certain that people believed in the resurrection by appearing post resurrection for a period of 40 days. I mean, seriously, who would know of or believe in the resurrection if Jesus had immediately returned to the right hand of the Father without anyone seeing him? Not even the disciples would have believed because they were in hiding behind closed doors afraid of dying; and so, they probably would have dropped the matter of any message spreading chalking it up to "That Jesus, he was a really great prophet," and then left it at that.

But so today we just read about a post-resurrection appearance. Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene. And then when it was still the day of the resurrection, Jesus appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and it is at that time Luke tells us that beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus explains to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself," (Luke 24:27). And then Jesus appears behind closed doors to the disciples who were hiding for fear of the Jews. And then a week later, Jesus appears again to the disciples behind closed doors and Thomas is with them this time, and Jesus says, all right Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." And Thomas' eyes were opened, and he exclaims, "My Lord and My God." Thomas had called Jesus "Lord" before as in a person who has authority, but it was at that moment, because of the resurrection that Thomas realizes that Jesus is also God. "My Lord and My God," Thomas exclaims and realizes. Because of the resurrection. And so, Jesus appeared to Thomas that Thomas might believe. And Jesus did not stop there.

During the course of the next month, Jesus appears to five hundred witnesses at one time. And he appears by the shore of Galilee to Peter, John, James, Thomas, Nathanael and two other disciples yet again. And on another occasion Jesus appeared also to his half-brother James. And then he appears to all the disciples on the Mount of Olives, and he gives them the great commission and two angels in white appear, and Jesus ascends into the clouds. These are all examples of post resurrection appearances. Jesus didn't appear just once but nine times over a period of 40 days in order to assure to many people that he had in fact risen that the Good News might spread. And the one that really gets my attention is when Jesus appears to 500 witnesses at once. The importance of this being that 500 people seeing Jesus at the same time made it difficult for people to not believe his resurrection was true. It wasn't just the eleven disciples claiming that Jesus had risen or Jesus's brother claiming he had risen, or the women he was so close to saying that he had risen. Jesus appeared to 500 witnesses all at the same time each one of whom could attest to the risen Lord. Which means nobody could accuse the testimony about the resurrection of being made up because there were too many witnesses. In Jewish Law, a person could be convicted of a crime based on the testimony of two witnesses. This is explained to us in Deuteronomy 19:15. Two witnesses were considered enough to testify to the truth. But we are given the account in 1 Corinthians 15:6 where the Apostle Paul says Jesus appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time.

And so, we praise God for the resurrection, but we praise God also for his post resurrection appearances. Jesus appeared to people so that they would believe.

And believe they did. The Apostles went from hiding behind locked doors to preaching it in the streets. They stopped caring about what might happen to them; they stopped fearing persecution; and they spoke the Good News boldly and openly just as we see Peter doing today in the account from Acts to the Gentiles. And they all end up being killed for what they believed. With the exception of John who got boiled in oil. And so, I don't know about you, but if I were going to be boiled in oil and I had been making something up, spreading a message that I knew to be untrue, I'd be like, "JK, LOL, just kidding – I take it back." Because *some people* might die for the truth, but *I don't know anyone* who will die for a lie. Peter said, crucify me upside down because I am not

worthy to die like Jesus. All this suffering was endured by Christ and his Apostles in order to strengthen our faith. To save the people who would come after. By spreading Good News.

The Apostles stopped caring about their own lives and they lived for others. The Apostle Paul writes to the Philippians about being torn about living or dying and he writes to them: "For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to remain in the flesh is more needful for you." Paul, having been caught up into the third heaven and having seen the risen Lord, was so convinced of what comes after this lifetime that he flat says it is far better to die and be with Christ, but I know I need to remain for you. To build you up and strengthen you.

I'll tell you something that should strengthen you. There are easily three hundred prophecies that come true in the person of Jesus Christ. And one notable scientist calculated that the odds of even 8 of them coming true in the same person is "one in one hundred quadrillion." But so, I'm not a mathematician, but if you spend time in scripture, you will see it. Beginning with the prophecy in Genesis saying Messiah will be born of the seed of the woman. Well, the only way to be born of the seed of a woman and not the seed of both a man and a woman is a virgin birth. On to the foreshadowing prophecies like Abraham being called to sacrifice Isaac and the deliverance from Egypt foreshadowing the deliverance from slavery to sin and death, to the sacrifice of the unblemished Passover Lamb, to the serpent being lifted up on a pole in the desert which all you had to do was believe and look to in order to be saved, Jonah 3 days in the belly of the whale, to the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant where the presence of God would abide between two seraphim on either side foretelling the empty tomb that we read about today where Mary looks in and sees two angels, one at the head and one at the feet on either side of where Jesus had been lain having died in order to grant us mercy. And furthermore, taking only just one of the prophets for all the prophets prophesy about Jesus, but taking just Isaiah for example who wrote some 700 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah through the power of the Holy Spirit predicted Messiah would be born of a Davidic virgin, would have a Galilean ministry, will have his way prepared, will be spat on and struck, will be disfigured by suffering, will be widely rejected, will bear our sins and sorrows, God's Spirit will rest on

Him, Gentiles will seek him, his blood will make atonement, he would voluntarily accept our guilt and punishment for sin without opening His mouth like a lamb led to the slaughter, he will be our substitute, he will bear the sins of many for the sake of their salvation, he will die with transgressors, he will heal the blind, lame, deaf, diseased, brokenhearted and raise the dead, he will be buried in a rich man's tomb, and last but not least because this one has not been fulfilled yet, he will judge the earth with righteousness.

Because Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead. And though there be some 300 scriptures that predict the first coming of Jesus there are more than 900 that predict Christ's second coming.

And I close with reminding you of one more prophecy. And this is from the book of Job. Some scholars believe the book of Job to be the oldest book in the Bible, and Job, suffered unbelievable hardship. And I cannot tell you all the purposes of God as to why God permits hardship, but I do know that God is Good and that Jesus promises us that if we suffer with him, we will also reign with him. And so, this is important to remember during the short course of our temporal trying lives, because everything we experience, God has orchestrated for our good so that we may come to know him and believe and have hope, given life after life is Good News. And so, Job, after suffering unbelievable heartache, losing his children and his livelihood and his health, Job struggles, and he questions God, and he sits. Job sits. None of us sit enough. Because if we sat still and spent more time with God, we would have more hope. Especially if we had a Bible in our hand. But Job was pre-Bible and so Job worked with what he had and what Job had was an ash heap. And Job spent time sitting and reflecting on God. And God gave to Job the most beautiful words of hope you will ever hear because Job sitting in ash heap was lit on fire by the Holy Spirit and he utters the following prophecy saying:

"I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (Job 19:25-27).

Job knew of his redeemer and of the reality of the resurrection. And so, if you do not believe in Jesus Christ and in the resurrection, it is because you have not spent enough time in scripture. I counsel you to dust off the family Bible and spend some time with God, because as a result of the miracle of scripture, the hundreds of prophecies in God's written Holy Word, The Bible, and as a result of God's resurrected Holy Word, Jesus Christ, I am able to stand up here and assure to each of you today that I know beyond a shadow of a doubt and can die defending that *the Lord is Risen indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia!*