

Sermon Text for April 21, 2019 - EASTER SUNDAY

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Isaiah 65:17-25, Luke 24:1-12

“Brand spanking new”

Welcome to Easter Sunday. What a special Sunday this is. It is one of three Sundays throughout the year where we see the highest number of new faces than any other time of the year. The other two are Christmas Eve, which isn't always a Sunday, and preschool Sunday. So what brings you to church today to celebrate the resurrection, because that is why you are here today, right? Is this your church, is this your family? If it is, then you have been with us throughout our Lenten journey as we continued to look at Acts. If it is then you were with us during Holy Week as we broke bread together on Maundy Thursday and left the church in darkness and silence on Good Friday.

On Thursday we said that we really can't understand today, we really can't understand the resurrection unless we have traveled together in the suffering of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. You can't have the resurrection without the suffering and the death of our Savior. But we recognized that we are uncomfortable with suffering. On Thursday I preached my first sermon in 25 years on suffering and the presence of redemption in suffering. As a church, as a pastor, I like to celebrate resurrection, so today, I'm in my element.

Today we focus on resurrection. If the main point for Christmas Eve, for those of you new faces today, if the main point is that God became flesh and dwelt among us, for Easter it is that this same God is a victor over death. Jesus in his resurrection conquered death and because of that we can say: He is risen, He is risen indeed! Let's read the resurrection story.

READ SCRIPTURE

We've been in Isaiah a lot over lent, and now we find ourselves in Isaiah for our first Scripture for Easter. We looked at the suffering servant songs which portrayed our Messiah not as a victor, but as one who silently went to the slaughter. That happened. But now for Easter we have the culmination of what happens after the suffering servant suffers. Today we read about a promise of things that are brand spanking new. Our scripture today is a promise to a community in exile who needed to hear good news, because they had been forced out of their home country into a foreign land where they simply could not sing the Lord's songs.

As the famous Baptist preacher would say, the servant songs are Friday, it's Friday, but Sunday is coming. Isaiah 65 is Sunday. Listen to what will be and what will come. A new heaven and a new earth. Brand spanking new, our abuse of the earth will cease. Children will not die in infancy, that is a message close to many of our hearts. This is a promise of things

being brand new. The elderly will be respected and prioritized and they will live long lives. Children will be a joy and not the subject of terror at the hands of twisted people, even their own classmates. Columbine, do you hear Isaiah 65? All things new, including creation, the wolf and the lamb, the lion and the ox, the eagle and cowboy. Okay, some things you just can't fix.

On that day, Isaiah states. No one will hurt each other in God's kingdom. That's a promise. That day has not come yet, but the prophet says it will. It is a promise, so it will be fulfilled because it is a promise from God. All things will be brand spanking new.

That's the way we normally think it works in the Bible, right? We are given a promise and then we wait for it to be fulfilled. How many times have I told you to trust in and rely upon God's promises because they are reliable and they lead us to a faith in Jesus that is unshakeable. But what if it were the other way around. What if the fulfillment has already occurred and now we just need messengers, we just need witnesses to tell people that the promises have already been fulfilled? What if the fulfillment has been accomplished and now it is up to us to live out the promise? This is what we see in Luke.

Let's turn there and let's look at Luke's account of the resurrection, that is why you are here after all today, right? Luke does a great job depicting a post crucifixion early Christian community. Luke communicates well the atmosphere of confusion, disturbance, and doubt. The followers of Jesus don't know where to turn. They were still licking their wounds wondering why and how they all ran away. Peter was in disbelief that he had actually denied Jesus three times, and probably hoped that no one in the room had heard him. They wondered where Judas was, there was a rumor that he hung himself, but no one could confirm that yet. In that context, at early dawn, the crack of dawn, the women head to the grave to finish preparing Jesus' body since they had to cut it off early because of the Sabbath.

Every Gospel is different, Luke doesn't mention them being worried about the stone, but the tomb is empty and then all of a sudden two guys show up from a Tide commercial, in sparkling white clothes. Every single Gospel has the women go to the tomb, and every single Gospel has the women terrified. A common happening in the Gospels is someone saying to the women: do not be afraid...except Luke. Why are you looking for the dead among the living? Why are you looking for something old where God has created something brand spanking new.

Vs. 5 we find ourselves in the central message of these verses and the central message of the Gospel. Can you say it with me. He is not here, because, he is risen! He is risen indeed. Then vs.6 we read about the already happened fulfillment of the promise. The angels give the women not a promise, but a message, and announcement, a witness to the fulfillment of the

promise which has already taken place. Remember, he told you he was going to do this. The women remembered. They are the first to believe in the resurrection simply because they saw and they experienced God's message to them about Jesus conquering death.

They go back and tell everyone. Vs.11 is a crucial verse which we will get to later, but let's look at Peter, we find him in vs.12. Peter is lifted out of the story and focused upon, simply because he is the one who had almost lost the most. Yes, everyone had abandoned Jesus, but Peter had denied him. I have to go and see if what they are saying is true. I know everyone else thinks it is fake news, but there might be more to it.

Vs.12 is interpreted and written about in so many different formats. Our translation says that Peter went and saw and was amazed at what had happened. What did Peter see at the tomb that made him amazed? We aren't told, but when you read later on in chapter 24 in vs.34 we read "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon." If you read also in I Corinthians 15:5 you also see Paul say the same thing, that Jesus appeared to Peter. Something happened at the tomb when Peter went because he left amazed and later accounts say that he saw Jesus.

You can't blame the other disciples for thinking that what the women were saying was only wishful thinking. Logically, think of what we believe. God became one of us, in the flesh. The one who created us became a creature. This same God died and then rose again in the person of Jesus. We believe that we will never die as a result of this. The resurrection is our Christian battle cry because we have conquered death as a result of the resurrection. But an empty tomb doesn't prove the resurrection. The women learned this.

Our burden of belief rests on the experience of the risen Jesus Christ that we have. This experience that we have together in this community, in other sacred spaces. In our lives as we live out the promise that we know has been fulfilled as we reach out to the least of these. Our faith doesn't prove our faith, it doesn't prove that we are right, that Jesus did rise from the dead, but our faith does build our faith. Faith moves from fulfillment to promise and not the other way around as Isaiah tells the promise hoping for a future new heaven and earth.

In Jesus, listen to me now, that promise is fulfilled. It has already happened. We can be living that life if we would only believe that it has been fulfilled. This is why it is so important to tell the story because it has already happened, it has been fulfilled. He has risen! He has risen indeed!! You see, the women would tell, do you remember what he told you? You can't remember if you weren't told. The disciples back at the confused home did not believe because they did not experience it, they needed a confirming experience like the women had, like maybe

Peter had. For Isaiah, that day was promised, it had not yet come. In Jesus, it has been fulfilled and we now live out the promise. The old school of thought is that it was an idle tale, the new school of thought is that it leaves us amazed at what happened.

So what happened? Jesus was raised from the dead. We have 11 passages in Scripture that say that God raised Jesus from the dead. Acts 3:15, 4:10, 5:30, 10:40, 13:30,37, I Thessalonians 1:10, Romans 4:24, 8:11, 10:9, I Corinthians 6:14. This is the primary purpose of the Scripture, to tell us that Jesus conquered death.

And where does that leave us? Our faith cannot be built and developed without a witness and an experience to the resurrection. You need to know, I love to play golf, I love to stay home and eat chips and watch sports, or cut wood and do my lawn, I love to walk with my wife in the woods. You can find God on the golf course, you can find him at home or chopping wood, you can find God in forest. God is absolutely there. But here, in this place, this is where your faith is honed, strengthened, and prepared for the kingdom of God which makes you brand spanking new. It is here where it has to be developed, not anywhere else.

Within a community you become a different person. You hear the witness of the faith community as God works in all of our lives and as we share our stories and as we leave each other amazed at what God can do because then we have encountered the risen Christ ourselves. Jesus has won over death and tells people to share it with others so that we can all be brand spanking new.

As the victor over death, Jesus has indeed come into his kingdom. A share in it awaits the faithful disciple who recognizes him now as risen Lord. Won't you be that disciple? Amen.