

## Jesus is Risen! Jesus is Savior and Lord!

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on Easter Sunday, March 31, 1991. Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 25:6-9; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8; Psalm 118:14-29.

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.**

Does the thought that Jesus is alive; that Jesus is savior and Lord - frighten you? Let's talk about it.

We're so used to thinking of the joy of the disciples when they discovered that Jesus was alive again, we forget how terrifying the first news of such a miracle must have been.

In the earliest Gospel account of the events of that first Easter morning, St. Mark tells us that three women came early in the morning to the tomb of Jesus. They found the heavy stone rolled away and the tomb stood gaping open. A young man dressed in a white robe, seeing the alarm in their faces said, "Don't be alarmed; you're looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He's been raised; he's not here. Look, there's the place they laid him." (And he points to the empty cold stone slab where the body of Jesus was laid).

"But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he's going ahead of you to Galilee; there you'll see him, just as he told you. So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Why the fear and terror?

Seven times the Gospels tell us that Jesus said, "They're going to kill me. The third day I'll rise from the dead." So maybe you can imagine why those women were filled with terror. They must have been thinking. "O man! How could we have been so dense? Jesus is alive, just as he said over and over again. And we didn't believe. We didn't follow. We abandoned him in his

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, we greet you, risen from the dead. We thought that your way of love was a dead end, leading only to a cross: now we see that it's the way to life. We thought that your whole life was wasted: now we know that it was gloriously worthwhile. We thought that your suffering was pointless: now we can see God's purpose in it. We thought that death was the end of you: now we know that your life was too great to be ended by death. Lord Jesus, we adore you, risen from the dead.

darkest hour. We kept telling him there was another way than the way of the cross. But he was right. What will he say to us when we see him? What will he do?"

Fear and terror isn't the first thing I think of when I think of Easter. When I think of Easter the first thing that comes to my mind is that Easter gives me the hope of eternal life.

Jesus lives and so shall I  
Death, thy sting is gone forever.

But the primary message of Easter is not the promise of eternal life. That's certainly a big part of the Easter message. The primary message of Easter is that Jesus was right... absolutely right. The resurrection is God's verdict on the life and ministry and death of Jesus.

They said Jesus was crazy. The Resurrection is God's verdict that Jesus was absolutely in his right mind. They said Jesus broke God's law. The resurrection is God's verdict on the sinless life of Jesus. They said Jesus was leading the people astray. The resurrection is God's verdict that Jesus is the only way to God. They blamed Jesus for eating and drinking with sinners. The resurrection is God's verdict that God loves sinners and longs to have fellowship with them. Jesus chose a path that led inevitably to the cross. The devil kept tempting him to take another path. His disciples kept telling him that the Kingdom of God could come painlessly and without effort. The resurrection is God's verdict that true life is found only through the Cross. Jesus was tried and found guilty. But the resurrection is God's verdict that Jesus was innocent. The resurrection is God's vindication of all that Jesus said and did.

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Easter is God's way of telling us that what Jesus said about turning the other cheek and forgiving others is true. And that frightens me.

I think of a quiet, thoughtful man who came to church late every Sunday, during the opening hymn; he sat in the back, and would always leave during the last hymn. He was there every Sunday but I didn't know who he was or where he lived.

I asked others. "Who is that guy?" No one knew.

One Easter Sunday, though, he stayed to talk. He came into the office while I was putting my gown away and getting ready to go home. Something he said, I'll never forget.

He said, "You know what I fear more than anything?"

"No. What do you fear?"

~~"I'm afraid it might be true!"~~

"What might be true?"

"I'm afraid that God really did raise Jesus from the dead... that Jesus really is Savior and Lord."

"You mean you're afraid that it *isn't* true?" I said.

"No! I'm afraid that it *is* true."

"Afraid? Why would you be afraid that it's true?"

"Because," he said, "if it's true, then what Jesus said about money and possessions is true and I live a comfortable life. What Jesus said about turning the other cheek is true and I like to get even. What Jesus said about the poor being blessed, and what he said about forgiving others must be true. It frightens me because if God really did raise Jesus from the dead my priorities are all messed up.

"If God really did raise Jesus from the dead and if Jesus really is Savior and Lord... and I'm afraid it's true... then what he said about forgiving others

must be true and there's someone I need to forgive who hurt me years ago... someone I hate. But if it's true, and I'm afraid it is true, I'm going to have to find a way to forgive that person."

*That guy nearly ruined my whole Easter. But, you know, when he put it that way, the thought of Jesus being alive and savior and lord is a frightening thought. It puts a question mark on a lot of my priorities and the priorities of our nation and world.*

After our stunning victory in Iraq there's a danger that we Americans might come to believe... as apparently Saddam Hussein believes... that terror, violence and military might is the way to security. But Easter is God's way of telling us that there's a force at work in this world that's more powerful than the injustice, violence and terror that nailed Jesus to the cross and ~~which continues to lead to wars today.~~

The Greek philosopher Plato once said, "We understand and forgive the child who has seen the darkness and is afraid. But the tragedy of men is the man who has seen light and is afraid of light."

I think that, more often than not, we Christians who confess that Jesus is the light of the world, are afraid that Jesus Christ really is risen and that he's savior and lord.

When we hear of Jesus Christ, it's so easy to say, "I want to follow him. I want to follow the Christ of humility - but I don't want to be humiliated. I want to follow the suffering Christ - but I don't want to suffer. I want to follow a stigmatized Christ - but without the stigma. I want to follow the persecuted Christ - but I don't want to be persecuted. I want to follow the hated Christ - but I don't want to be hated. I want to follow the risen Christ but I don't want to die to sin and be raised to newness of life. And it can't be done (Ben Haden, Now What).

It is a little frightening to think that Jesus is risen; that he's savior and lord - that he goes before us that that you and I will see him. What will he say? What will he do when we see him?

But fear is not the last word. The message of Easter is good news. The first word that was spoken upon the discovery of the empty tomb was, "Do not be alarmed." The most characteristic word on Easter is "Be not afraid." For the One who is risen, is the same Jesus who ate and drank with sinners and raised the dead to new life.

I'm not here this morning to deliver a historical lecture on something that happened 2000 years ago. I'm not here to give you a philosophical discourse on eternal life. I'm here to bear witness to what I believe... and not only what I believe... but what the church has believed for nearly 2000 years. ~~I believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and that he goes before~~ us and that we will one day see him face to face.

I believe the tomb was really empty.

I believe that the Risen Christ really appeared to his disciples.

Jesus didn't merely survive death. He didn't merely resuscitate. He didn't merely survive spiritually. The resurrection is the story of God's giving life to a dead man. Easter has nothing to do with the flowers that bloom in the spring or the trees that put forth their blooms each spring after a long winter's rest. Easter has to do with God giving life to a dead man.

I believe, that the same Jesus who healed the sick, forgave sins, challenged the authorities, preached the Kingdom of God, befriended sinners, was crucified, dead and buried-- God raised from the dead. Jesus is alive in this world. He is Lord and Savior. He goes before us. And if we say we trust him we'll follow him and he'll give us grace to follow.