

RISEN

Texts: Acts 10:34,37-43

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 (Series B. Resurrection Sunday) Psalms 118:1-2,16-17,22-23;

Mark 16:1-8

I passed on to you what I received, which is of the greatest importance: that Christ died for our sins, as written in the Scriptures; that he was buried and that he was raised to life three days later, as written in the Scriptures.

Prayer:

When I lived in Europe many years ago, I spent my past time during which I visited a great many Churches large and small. Especially I liked walking slowly through the burial grounds, reading the inscriptions on tombstones.

"All of them were sincere, and many deeply touching," but I was amazed to see how many epitaphs managed to avoid the plain word, "**died.**" Here are some of the words and phrases used instead ...

Left this life. Fell asleep. Departed this life. Forever at rest. Taken by the hand that is Divine. Entered into rest. Passed to a fuller life. Now reunited. Taken to his holy home. Home with Jesus. Jesus called her away, Free at Last, Fought a good fight, Served others, and Tak for alt etc.

Isaac Asimov tells the story of a fire-and-brimstone preacher looking down decisively at the worshippers in the pews and saying, "*What a fearful thought it is that every member of this congregation is going to die.*"

His statement induced a somber-looking expression from everyone – with one exception. A man in the front pew had a disbelieving smile on his face. The preacher's face grew red as he looked squarely at the man in the front pew and said, "I repeat! Every member of this congregation is going to die!" Again, a disbelieving smile came over the man's face. Now the preacher addressed the man directly.

"May I ask you, what do you find so amusing in my statement that everyone in this congregation is going to die? To which the man replied, "***I am not amused. I am relieved. You see, I am not a member of this congregation.***"

Regardless of whatever else we may choose to believe. Jesus knew He was going to die. And die He did! And so, today's Gospel Lesson begins at the place where He was buried.

Picture the mood of the disciples on Easter Sunday. They had loved Jesus. They had left everything to follow Him. In Him, they had experienced God's Presence and God's Love as never before. Have you ever find yourself wondering, if only for a brief moment, whether there really is life after death?

If you do, it's a common experience. Most people want to know what happens when we die. What will it be like? What sort of body will we have? What will we experience at the moment of death?

All of us are faced with the question from time to time as we see loved ones die or hear of other people dying in tragic circumstances. It's a question that has intrigued people for thousands of years.

"At the age of nine, my niece was hit by a car in Regina. We prayed and prayed that she would live. A week later, she was brain dead and her life-support was turned off. As one year old, I baptized her pouring water over head in the triune God, nine years later I presiding over her grave saying earth to earth, ashes to ashes and dust to dust.

Few days later when things kind of settled down in a family gathering, my sister Agnes held me by collar, angry and shook me and said you are the priest of the family and you failed.... you did not pray enough. I tried to comfort her, she would have none of that.....my feelings about God right now is shattered into tiny pieces, as she cried.

When you consider the human life and how it ends, you wonder, what's the point of it all? What's the point in creating a garden, or a painting, or anything that's beautiful? What's the point of anything you do or achieve if ultimately it dissolves into black oblivion, if, at the end of our days, we are just dust and dust we return.

Have you at some time thought like that? Have you asked similar questions about the purpose of life and death when grieving the loss of someone through death? At one time or other most of us question why a person who is full of life and who still had so much to offer suddenly drops off into oblivion like stone that sinks into the bottom of the ocean.

The disciples and their friends must have wondered this very same thing when they saw their master nailed to a cross, he was only 33, in the prime of his life. They must have wondered what was the purpose of his death, when there was still so much to be accomplished.

In fact, God must have got it all wrong when the most wonderful man, the most kind and caring person who ever lived is suddenly yanked away from among them.

What a terrible waste! Struck down when life still held so much for him, disappearing into oblivion like stone that sinks into the ocean. When Jesus died so did their **hopes**, their **convictions**, and their **faith**. They huddled together behind locked doors confused and afraid.

The women who went to Jesus' tomb went there not with the expectation of seeing Jesus alive, but rather to finish the job of burying him. No one expected the resurrection. In spite of what they had heard Jesus say about dying and rising 3 days later, the last thing they expected to find was an empty grave.

The message of the angel who was sitting where Jesus' body had been laid, "*He is not here – he has been raised!*" was totally unexpected. Something illogical, unthinkable, unnatural, and incredible has happened. The one who had been certified dead has come alive.

The resurrection might have been unexpected but there is no doubt that it happened. The gospel writers give a clear account of what happened when the women went to the tomb on Easter morning and they record the many occasions that the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples and *to more than five hundred of his followers at once*" (1 Cor 15:6-8).

In fact, the resurrection is the most important thing we believe in as Christians. The resurrection is of first importance to us, not because it is a nice ending to the story of Jesus, but because it is the **centre** of our faith, it is basic to our lives as Christians, it is the thing that we all look forward to.

It is the thing that gives us **hope** and **comfort** as we stand at a grave of someone dear or face the day of our own dying. There are those who scoff at the whole idea of the resurrection of Jesus, and those who believe that when this life is over that's all there is. There is nothing else to look forward to.

And then there are those who believe that there is a heaven, a life after this life. I'm sure you are as glad as I am that a central part of *our faith* is the fact that after we have taken our last breath we will go from this life to eternal home with God of the Bible.

We will not only experience the joy of being welcomed by Jesus on the other side of death but we will also experience the joy of being among all the faithful who have gone home before us. That is the confidence that we can have because of Easter Day.

Death is not the end of us, but it is the beginning of a *brand new life*. We will rise from the grave and be given a new life, a new and refreshed body, and we will enjoy God's new heaven and earth. Didn't St Paul say,

- *"The truth is that Christ has been raised from death, as the guarantee that those who sleep in death will also be raised" (1 Cor 15:20)?*

And Jesus says,

- *"I am the resurrection the life ... whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 10:25)?*

And what about the promise,

- *" There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2)?*

What can be surer than that? We will live - Jesus has shown us that death has been defeated, and we too will rise from death to life. Today we are celebrating a victory. Christ has won the victory over the grave and assures us that death will not hold us down.

But there will still be those times when we will look at life (and death) as *Agnes* did after her daughter was killed. We will be sad, we will question God's wisdom and get angry, we may lose faith (like the disciples).

To be sure, we will have pangs of fear and anxiety shoot through our minds when we think of our own death and the thought of leaving everything we know and love in this life and being placed in a grave alone.

It is just at those moments when we think of ourselves as doomed human beings that is when the meaning of the word "Saviour" has full impact. Jesus has saved us. Without his *death* and *resurrection* life would be pointless and death completely final. Jesus has saved us, therefore fear not.

He chose us. He gave his life on the cross for us and on Easter morning we hear the cry, "*He is risen!*" Because he is our Saviour and we will rise from death to life, a glorious new life. In this we are sure.

We Sing Hallelujah to our God and King.

Prayer concerns: *Ingeborg Eidnes, & Matilda Molyneau-Piper, & Covid -19 patients, essential and Frontline workers.*

Let us pray: Son of God, our Savior Christ, You are the Word with God from the Beginning, Who is Beloved of God, and through Whom God is brought to each of us. Release us from our self-imposed tombs of sin, that we may transcend mortal desires, be stronger in faith, and lift our souls to You. We ask through You, our Living Lord, the Power of the Holy Spirit, and the Enduring Grace of the Almighty, who together are our One God, forever and ever. Amen.

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Jesus Christ Is Risen Today # 365
- Christ Jesus lay in Death's Strong Bands# 370
- Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds# 367