

## **What Are You Running to Do**

**Sermon of 2020-07-19**

**By Pastor Sharon Tidd**

Easter is the premiere celebration of the Christian Church. From the Day of Pentecost onwards, the apostles proclaimed the truth that Jesus Christ was crucified at the hands of evil men and then was raised again by God the Father on the third day. That is the Easter story! And it's not just a 'story', it's not fiction, it is truth! The Bible confirms it, as do many other historical records from that time. Jesus Himself predicted His death and resurrection multiple times in the weeks and days leading up to His arrest (Matthew 16:21-28; 17:22-23; Mark 8:31-32; 10:33-34; Luke 9:22; 13:33; 18:31-33). Why? Because these two events were pivotal to His work and mission on earth. He came to die as a ransom for the sins of the world, bringing forgiveness in His Name. He came also to rise again so that He could bring life abundant and eternal to all who believed.

This was/is the Good News, the Gospel that the Church proclaimed then and continues to proclaim today. These are the primary truths that the Church holds on to. God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, in love chose to die for us so that we could be forgiven. And He rose again bringing the gift of hope ... hope of life everlasting and free.

The Apostle Paul highlighted the importance of the resurrection to the Christian hope in 1 Corinthians 15:17,20 saying: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! ... But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Without His death and resurrection, there is no victory over sin and death for us! That Christ did die and did rise again provides for us the assurance that we too are made dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus! This is what the Church celebrates at Easter. And while we were not able to gather this past Easter to celebrate together, I am sure that we each celebrated these glorious truths in our own way in our own space. As we have come back together, the Spirit prompted me to focus our time today in celebration of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In preparing, I was taken back to the first Easter. For Jesus' followers these three days were not days of celebration. On the Thursday night they shared an intimate meal with their Teacher, a meal where they were humbled as He washed their feet, a meal where He declared that He would be betrayed, a meal where He shared wine and bread with them and advised that those elements symbolized His own broken body and poured out blood, a meal where an affirmation by Peter

that he would willingly die with Jesus was met with rebuke and a declaration that he would, in fact, betray Jesus.

After that meal, the disciples were with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane where He prayed in agony over what lay ahead. They were present when Jesus was betrayed by Judas with a kiss and when He was taken into custody by Roman soldiers carrying swords and clubs. They then fled in fear for their own lives, not willing or able to stand by His side as He faced multiple false trials in the dead of night. Peter stayed relatively close, but as had been predicted, he denied Jesus three times early Friday morning.

On what we now call Good Friday, the disciples would have heard the crowd, worked into a frenzy by the religious leaders, shout "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" as Pilate asked, "What shall I do with your Jesus?" Then John and some of the women stood at the foot of the cross where He was hung to die in agony. They heard every word He spoke from that cross. They witnessed His body broken and His blood poured out. They felt the earthquake. They stood in the darkness that shrouded the land. They learned how the veil in the Temple was torn in two ... from top to bottom ... at the very moment of Jesus' death. The women later witnessed His body being taken down from the cross and placed in a

tomb. And on the Sabbath (Saturday) they witnessed a Roman seal being put in place and guards standing in watch over Jesus' burial place.

On Sunday morning, early, before the sun had risen, when they could feel somewhat protected because of the dark, those same women made their way to the tomb in the hope that they could anoint His body. Their only question, as they journeyed, was how they would move the gravestone. They did not go expecting to discover a miracle. They did not go anticipating a resurrection. They went prepared to find His dead body where it had been placed the day before. Though Jesus had predicted both His death and resurrection, those words were not in their minds or their hearts. They had witnessed His crucifixion. He was dead. He was gone. And they simply wanted to honour the love and care that He had offered them while He was alive by seeing that He was lovingly anointed. Their hearts knew only grief and sorrow that morning as they journeyed to the tomb. They had suffered 60 hours of agony, and now they wanted to do this one final thing ... to offer this one final gift of love ... before saying their final "good-bye". That first Easter Sunday was not a celebration.

But what they expected to find was not what they found! The stone was rolled away from the tomb. Angels, in glorious glowing white, stood before them. The earth again quaked under their feet! The angels announced that Jesus was

not there but was, in fact, risen! To the women, in their grief, these words seemed fanciful ... unbelievable really. The angels instructed them to go and tell the disciples. And John reports that Mary Magdalene set off running to find Simon Peter and John

(John 20:2a). And what does she report to them? “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put Him!” (John 20:2b) She doesn’t proclaim that Jesus was risen! All that had penetrated her mind at that time was that His body was gone, and in her longing to anoint Him properly, she needed to know where it had been taken! That morning, for Mary, Jesus’ story had gone from bad to worse. Not only had her LORD been crucified, but now His body was missing ... stolen ... re-buried in a place unknown to her; a place out-of-reach. So she runs to her brothers, hoping that they would find the answers she desperately longed for that day.

And John tells us that he and Peter both ran to the tomb to see for themselves (verse 3-4). You get the sense from his account that this was an all-out sprint; a race, in fact, with John arriving first! And on arriving they both, in turn, enter the tomb and find the strips of linen and the head cloth ... all of Jesus’ burial clothes ... lying neatly folded where His body had once lain (verse 5-7). John states that at that moment, he saw and believed (verse 8). But what he

believed is somewhat unclear, because in writing his account of Jesus' life many years later, John adds an explanatory note in verse 9, "They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." In that moment, though, it seems a spark of belief in Christ's resurrection may have taken root in John. Perhaps he recalled Jesus' predictions. But as the Gospel accounts make clear, it wasn't really until they actually saw Him alive and resurrected, with their very eyes, that they came to believe fully, and the glorious truth of His resurrected life became a primary tenet of their Gospel proclamations. Jesus' resurrection ultimately brought the assurance of their own resurrection ... and ours too!

As we celebrate Easter, we do so with the confidence of those who know that Jesus died and was raised to life again. It's not just the biblical and historical accounts that testify to these truths. More significantly, it is the assurance within our very souls that comes as we see the newness of life that journeying with Him brings. The resurrected life He promised is ours already. It is transforming us. It is restoring us. It is creating real life in us. That inner renewal that we experience as we journey with Him is proof of the resurrected life that He offers. He died to assure our forgiveness; to pay the penalty for our sins. He rose to assure our victory. This is the lived hope that is ours.

Still, if we're honest, we will acknowledge that there are days when we struggle to feel that hope. There are days when we struggle to believe in that victory. There are days when we don't feel restored or renewed. There are days when we feel dead. And what are we to do on those days? Well, I think we should follow the example of Simon Peter and John. On those days we need to run to the empty tomb! We need to sprint ... or move as quickly as we are able ... to the place where Resurrection Life is found. We need to return to the source ... the very spot where the truth was proclaimed: "He Is Risen!" When our minds, our hearts, our souls, our bodies seek to deceive us into believing that we have not been made alive in Christ Jesus, we need to return to the one place where those lies can be countered: the burial place that now sits empty. And in returning to that empty tomb, we need to ask God to open our ears so that we can hear again the words of the angels: "He is not here. He is Risen!" And we need to pray to the Spirit to assure us again that, "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." (Acts 17:28) Satan is determined to have us believe otherwise. But the Truth ... the Truth of Christ's Resurrection and our Resurrection Life ... is stronger and surer than any lies he tells us.

What are you running to? In those moments when Satan attacks with his lies, in those moments when you struggle to believe that you have received

resurrection life, in those moments when your heart and soul and body feel dead ... are you sprinting to the empty tomb? Peter and John did ... and belief took root! You see, the empty tomb is the place of undying hope! The empty tomb is the place of abundant life! The empty tomb is the place of indescribable joy! The empty tomb is the place of boundless love! And every day that we run, full-out, to the empty tomb is an Easter morning; a day to experience new life and resurrection power through Jesus Christ! Will you race with me to the empty tomb?