

Matthew 28:1-10

"Risen Up"

Have you ever experienced a moment when things seemed hopeless? Have you ever been so horribly frustrated in a situation that you were beyond words? Or have you been in a situation where you didn't know any of the answers? And then all of a sudden, something happens where everything turns out better than you could ever imagine?

This is what happened for the disciples and followers of Christ on this morning. They were lost, frustrated, didn't know where to turn. Yet appearing to the women was an angel telling them that indeed their Master had risen from the dead. The tide had turned for the better, and life had become more real than ever to the disciples and followers of Jesus Christ.

This morning is a big deal in the Christian world. Most of us can figure that out, as we are here on the on this particular Sunday morning. This is the morning that established the truth of Christianity for all to see. The whole of Christianity is rooted on this event that occurred today, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In our story this morning, we can see the ministry of Jesus Christ being fulfilled. Christ was person who did unexpected things and he was a person that would stand up for the marginalized of society. Christ was a person that stood up for those who did not have a voice, those that could not speak for themselves because of society.

This idea is manifested in who found out that Jesus had been risen from the dead. The women, the followers of Jesus, were the first to find out that Christ had been risen. The women had gone to the tomb to mourn, but what they found blew their mind away. They found an empty tomb with an angel telling them that Christ had been resurrected, just as he had told his disciples.

The significance of the women finding this out first is huge. For in the time of Christ women were considered to be lesser than men. They were not fully what a man was. Christ spoke for the women, so by the message coming to the women first this shows that Christ truly believed that all people could know the good news that he spoke of. The last people in society, were the first ones to know that Christ was fulfilling all that he was, all that the prophets had said that he was, and all that God said that he was on this earth.

The disciples were told by the women that Christ and resurrected, and that they were to meet them in Galilee, a town that was about 80 miles away from Jerusalem. Christ appeared there in the region where he first began his ministry, where he developed much of who he was. We learned a lot about Christ in his time in Galilee and much is recorded in the scriptures of this time. It's only fitting that the disciples would meet him where his ministry began.

For a moment though, let's think about this situation from the disciples point of view. How well would you receive the news? How well would take the news from the source that you were given? How much faith do you think you would need in order to believe all that was said and what was yet to be seen?

The disciples were still a product of their time. Even though they lived into Jesus's message of hope for all people, they may have had some difficulty in the believing the message that the women would have brought them. Here were a group of men that had just seen their teacher, master, and friend crucified. Hope would have vanished for them and then all of a sudden these women come onto the scene with their message of hope.

I think hearing the news of the resurrection would have been startling and hard to believe. No one on earth rose up from the dead. When you were dead, you were dead. There was no chance of being resurrected. Yet, Christ was no mere man, he was far more than that.

Jesus Christ was fully human and fully divine. Born of a virgin, and given gifts beyond any other person, he was the Son of God. It seems to be that the disciples and those in the story seemed to forget this detail. Christ all along said that he would be resurrected, yet folks seemed to have forgotten this detail. Now I think that I wouldn't forget these details, but then again, I'm not being threatened with death for knowing this man. Christ was indeed beyond any human on this earth, period.

All of this occurred over two thousand years ago in a far away land. Why are we still talking about this story and this man in our modern times? I believe that we still talk of the resurrection and of Christ because of the life giving qualities of Christ. In Christ we can see the way to a better life, a better way of living, and a better way of being connected with the Creator, the God of all things and all people.

Christ has a profound impact on us today because of the message that he had to bring to the world. Christ's message was one of hope, of life, of a better tomorrow. I think to understand Christ's message we have to look at who he ministered to in his time on this earth.

When Christ was on this earth he ministered to the prostitutes, shrewd tax collectors, broken and ill people, all of whom were considered unclean by those in power. Those in power felt that these people were the lowest of the low, that you couldn't get much lower in life than them. Those in power wanted to keep them in the bottom so that those on the top could stay in power.

Christ brought a message that was against oppression. In Christ's time Judea was a land controlled by the Roman Empire, an empire that persecuted and made life difficult for those that they conquered. The outer provinces like Judea were there to send wealth back to the city of Rome. Rome wasn't there to make life better for people at all.

Christ turned the tables on this oppression, by claiming titles for himself that the emperor of Rome claimed. Christ was the true Son of God, the true Redeemer and light of the world. The Roman emperor claimed all of these titles, but the Roman Emperor was only out to make the elite prosper. Christ told those in power where they could put it, so that those at the bottom, those who struggled to make it day to day, could live life in a way that would bring hope to themselves and bring glory to the one true God.

So here we are today, and there are still people in power and people at the bottom of society. We live in a society where those at the bottom still have no voice. We have people at the bottom such those who live in poverty, drug addicts, people trying to find their place in the world, and those who simply can't get a break. I am here to tell you today, that just like in the past Jesus Christ is there for you, for the broken at the bottom. Christ still speaks to those at the top of society who don't care about other people. The message of Christ is still the same today as it was when it was first proclaimed.

Christ just doesn't speak to those at the bottom of society though. Christ speaks to those who aren't sure how to live life. Christ is there for those who are lost in the confusion of life. We can all be in that position, regardless of where you come from. Christ promises peace and inspiration to those who need to have a direction in their life. I am here to tell you again, no matter where you are in life, Christ has a message of hope for you that all people can learn from and find life in. Christ is there for you.

In my reading for the preparation for this sermon, I turned to one of my favorite theologians, the Rev. Paul Tillich. Paul Tillich was a man that had faced hardship in his life. He was kicked out of his home Germany by the Nazis because he wrote against Hitler's regime and how the Nazis were not ruling with the interest of all people in mind. He was able to find refuge

here in the United States, because his colleagues offered him teaching positions at some of the most prestigious schools of religion. He rose up from being kicked out of his home to teaching at schools such as Union School of Theology in New York, the University of Chicago, and the Divinity School at Harvard. Throughout his career as a theologian and teacher he always kept the message of Christ close to him, as he worked in finding ways to make the message of Christ applicable to all people, especially in the horribly time of World War II and the time period following that devastating conflict.

One of areas that Tillich taught and studied was in the area of what is called Christology, or the study of Christ. He devoted a whole volume of his defining work, his *Systematic Theology*, to Christ alone. In this book he takes the message of Christ and finds a way for it to make sense to those who are resistant to the message of Christ and for those who think that the message of Christ has no meaning.

In his book on Christ, he writes the following on the Resurrection:

Like the story of the Cross, the story of the Resurrection of the Christ does not report an isolated event after this death. It reports the event which is anticipated in a large number of other events and which is, at the same time, their confirmation. The Resurrection, as well as the historical, legendary, and mythological symbols corroborating it, show the New Being in Jesus as the Christ as victories over the existential estrangement to which he subject himself. This is their universal significance.

Now what that all means, is that the Resurrection of the Christ is a message that stands in conjunction with the greater faith story. It is a story that stands as a part of the greater story that we are a part. It shows that in the darkest hours of Christ's life of the Cross he overcame the darkness and was resurrected into the light. Christ overcame death and hopelessness.

In this quote from Tillich, he speaks of Christ as the New Being. In this Tillich speaks of Christ as the new story for us all. Christ is the renewal of the mind and spirit. Christ is the new beginning for all people. Christ is still relevant for us today.

In the message of Christ, the message is for you. Christ is your advocate and your guide on the journey of life. Christ is the bringer of the message of hope for you. Christ is the source of life for you. In darkness of your own life, you don't have to be alone. Christ is there with you, ready to comfort and understand the hardship that you are facing.

On this day of Easter and of new beginnings, take heart in Christ. Christ is not only there for you, he is risen for you. Christ is the New Being for us all. If you want to know more about Christ then come and talk with us. As a community of faith we are here for you as you begin to know Christ. For those of us who have been life long Christians, there is still more to know. I am here, and we are here so that all people may know the hope of Christ.

Christ is risen today. Christ is risen today. Amen.