

"The Road to Hope (Remember How He Told You)"

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, GA

Easter Sunday, The Resurrection of the Lord, April 21, 2019

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Holy Scriptures: Luke 24: 1-11; 1 Corinthians 15: 1-8

Luke 24: 1-11

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices which they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel; ⁵ and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise." ⁸ And they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now it was Mary Mag'dalene and Jo-an'na and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles; ¹¹ but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 (NRSV)

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters,^[a] of the good news^[b] that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ² through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

³ For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴ and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters^[c] at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died.^[d] ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Footnotes:

- a. 1 Corinthians 15:1 Gk *brothers*
- b. 1 Corinthians 15:1 Or *gospel*

- c. 1 Corinthians 15:6 Gk *brothers*
- d. 1 Corinthians 15:6 Gk *fallen asleep*

Sermon

Remember How He Told You

They say that a local newspaper ran an obituary for a gentleman.

The writing was fine.

The only problem with the obituary was that the next day,

the supposedly deceased soul walked into the newspaper editor's office.

"How dare you print my obituary in your paper!" he shouted.

"I'm alive. See, here I am!"

The editor admitted her error, saying, *"Yes, I see that you are.*

I'm sorry to say that there is nothing to be done about yesterday's news.

The best we can do for you is to list you tomorrow in the Birth Column

and give you a fresh start."

Fresh starts and restarts, setbacks and comebacks.

The Good News of Jesus Christ

is that God leads us into new starts, new life, a new reality

as we journey together along the road to hope.

"Reconciliation, reunion, resurrection –

this is the New Creation, the New Being, the New state of things.

Do we participate in it?

The message of Christianity is not Christianity, but a New Reality.

A New state of things has appeared,

it still appears;

it is hidden and visible, it is there, and it is here."^[1]

"Where there is a New Being, there is resurrection..." (Paul Tillich)

Remember How He Told You

...on the first day of the week, at early dawn, [Mary Mag'dalene and Jo-an'na and Mary the mother of James and the other women] went to the tomb, taking the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body.

While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel; and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? Remember how he told you, while he was

still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise.”

And they remembered his words...

Two men in dazzling clothes sitting in the tomb
proclaim the resurrection of Jesus

by saying, **“Remember how he told you...”**

Their dazzling clothes indicate that they belong to the transcendent world. [\[2\]](#)

In the beginning of the Gospel,

a heavenly host of angels announce to shepherds the birth of Jesus.

Now, near the end of the Gospel,

two heavenly angels announce to the disciples His resurrection.

The two messengers of hope welcome Mary Mag'dalene, Joanna,

Mary the mother of James and the other women,

and then gently remind them

to recall exactly what Jesus had prophesied.

The two point to the tomb, with the stone rolled away, empty.

This is all the proof needed to know that Jesus' prophecy has come true.

Just as Jesus predicted, God raised Him from the dead into new life.

Christ is risen!

He is risen, indeed!

Remember How He Told You

The fact that these followers of Jesus

didn't immediately believe or remember or chose not to is quite understandable.

There is no judgment or criticism or snide comments from God's messengers.

The angels recognize the women have just had a terrible setback.

If I can place myself in their situation,

after such a setback, such trauma, such sudden loss,

I would do the same, be the same, feel likewise.

Considering the circumstances these disciples find themselves in,

fully expecting to finish preparing Jesus' body for burial

yet surprised that it is absent, gone,

it is perfectly understandable that they have apparently forgotten

about that time when Jesus asked his followers, “Who do you say that I am?”

Peter answered, “The Messiah of God,”

then Jesus told them of his coming suffering, death, and resurrection. [\[3\]](#)

(Luke 9: 18–22)

In their shock, numb after witnessing his crucifixion,

they might have forgotten that their teacher, their healer, their friend

after healing a child and returning him to his father,

again predicted that he would be betrayed and executed
(Luke 9: 37–45).

And in their grief,

it is understandable they had forgotten

Jesus' confided to them the detailed account of what was to come
(Luke 18:31–34).

"Perhaps the shock has numbed their senses..." [\[4\]](#)

"Perhaps when Jesus tried earlier to tell them what was going to happen,
the prospect of his suffering and death was too horrible for them to grasp,
the thought of his resurrection too impossible.

Perhaps the disciples were too concerned with the crowd's opinions,
or too preoccupied with who among them would be the greatest.
They needed to be reminded."

So, when the messengers of hope reminded them, they remembered his words.
Jesus' followers simply needed to be reminded.

"So do we." [\[5\]](#)

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed.

Remember How He Told You

This is the story that we have.

We gather together, each of us with our grief and gratitude,
the complexities of our day-to-day lives,
the sadness and shocks and surprises we cope with daily,
the onslaughts that leave us feeling angry or numb or doubtful,
the encounters with God in creation that remind us
how glad we are to be alive, in such a time as this.

We pause before the tomb, reeling from one setback or another,
thinking we need some kind of closure, some way to put this behind us,
only to find messengers of the holy.

They point into the tomb, into the shadows, into the abyss,
with the stone rolled away, empty, a sign of hope.

This is all the proof needed to know that Jesus' prophecy has come true.

Just as Jesus predicted, God raised Him from the dead into new life.

Christ is risen!

He is risen, indeed!

We need to be reminded, to remember how He told you and you and you...

This is the story we have.

And the story we have reminds us that our setbacks are not the end of the story.

God's story is our story,

and our shared story is about a comeback.
Sometimes we need to be reminded, and then we remember...
The Spirit created the Church to help us to remember, to re-member.
The Church connects us with God and one another
with the hope and a prayer that we will remember,
that we will do this in remembrance of Him,
that we will become agents of mercy, of hope and justice.
Setbacks can make us feel so alone, so afraid, so lost.
The Spirit delivers us by forming us into a community of faith.
We are delivered into community, and therein lies our salvation, our shared liberation.
We remember that we follow a Living God who knows the way out of a tomb,
who knows the way out of a grave to a new reality and life everlasting,
who rolls away the stone,
any and every stone that seemingly blocks our way out and up,
onward and forward along the road to hope.

Christ is risen!
He is risen, indeed!

Remember How He Told You

I'm reminded me of the Easter Sunday that a Georgia preacher and cab driver
arrived in heaven at the same time.
The preacher was sent off to live in a shack;
the cabbie got escorted to a mansion with a view.
The preacher went to St. Peter to give him a piece of her mind.
After all, she had given her life to Christ and sacrificed so much.
St. Peter said, *"Listen, I'm going to be honest with you.
When you preached, you put people to sleep.
This cab driver, however, saved countless souls.
His driving was so exciting, his passengers prayed and shouted, 'O God! Save me!'"*

We have borne witness to setbacks and comebacks this week, this life,
and some have led us to pray or shout, *"O God! Save me! Deliver us!"*

Two years ago,
a 41-year-old recovering from multiple back surgeries could barely walk,
much less swing a golf club.
His family and spiritual and physical life had been in shambles,
and anyone who counted him out, who said he was done for,
was affirmed for their acuity.
As a matter of fact, he himself wondered aloud if his chosen career was over.
Last Sunday in Augusta, Georgia, 11 years after his last victory there,
this same guy, now 43, playing against the best athletes the sport has to offer,
won the Masters, for the 5th time, to claim his 15th major win.

Tiger Woods faced so many setbacks, some of his own making, some not,
to achieve a comeback for the ages.
Rank this one with Bethany Hamilton surfing again after a shark took her arm.
Stack it next to Ben Hogan winning 6 majors
after a horrific auto accident left him broken.
"It's probably best not to try to rank the indomitable spirit,"
wrote Steve Hummer of the AJ-C.
"It's like trying to rank the most inspirational sunset.
Just let yourself be moved by each." [6](#)

Comebacks after setbacks speak to the sheer power of the human spirit,
renewed lives fueled by the Spirit of God,
whose will is for restoration, reconciliation, resurrection.
Accept and appreciate each one for what they are,
what they mean, the hope they point to.
Don't try to rank sunsets or comebacks, renewals or resurrections;
just let yourself be moved by each.
This is all the proof that is needed.
Christ is risen!
He is risen, indeed!

Remember How He Told You

I was walking down the street
when a neighbor pulled his car over to the curb,
then rolled down his window to talk.
He asked if I had heard that the Notre Dame cathedral was on fire.
We shared our shock, our sadness, for such a deep, communal loss.
Later, when I got home,
our family looked at photos of our daughter standing in front of Notre Dame
when she was 12-years-old, and we remembered.
We ache for our shared loss.
The shock is numbing, like grief delayed but not denied.
However, when the Church and France and the World Community
vowed & pledged to rebuild,
hope crept in, reminding us that when life is at its worst,
that is when we rise to the challenge and show our best.

This week our adult daughter reminded me
that the symbol of Atlanta is a phoenix.
The city that burned, left in smoldering ashes and rubble, rose again.
Like a phoenix rising from the ashes into new life,
Atlantans joined together to rebuild and be reborn into a new being,
an international melting pot,

proud to claim the moniker *The City Too Busy to Hate*.
Or, for those of us caught in traffic, *The City Too Busy to Merge*.

Perhaps like Jesus' disciples at the tomb, we need to be reminded.
Whenever we see our fair city experience setbacks,
 people getting left back, tribalism causing push back,
 remember this indomitable spirit,
 this divine grace that, indeed, we can come back, together,
 we can rise up and move forward down the road to hope.
Like a phoenix, we've done it before; we can do it again...and again...and again.

"Christianity has died many times, and risen again and again," said G.K. Chesterson,
"for it has a God who knows the way out of the grave."

The whole people of God – that's us, my friends --
 experience setbacks and loss and tragedies again and again.

And we have risen time and again,
 come back from the abyss and risen to new life, a new being,
 for we have a Living God, a Mighty God, a Prince of Peace
 who knows the way out of the grave.

This is all the proof needed to know that Jesus' prophecy has come true.
God raised Him from the dead into new life.

Christ is risen!
He is risen, indeed!

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Invitation to Holy Communion

The late Professor Paul Tillich observed that the word "resurrection"
 is not an entirely accurate translation from the Aramaic,
 which is the language Jesus spoke.

Paul Tillich said we really ought to talk about the "new being."

The new being is that,
 out of something which is distorted and bent, strained and bruised,
 God can fashion something new and wonderful.

*“The word resurrection has for many people
the connotation of dead bodies leaving their graves
or other fanciful images.
But resurrection means the victory of the New state of things,
the New Being born out of the death of the Old.
Resurrection is not an event that might happen in some remote future,
but it is the power of the New Being to create life out of death,
here and now, today and tomorrow.
Where there is a New Being, there is resurrection...”*
*“Reconciliation, reunion, resurrection –
this is the New Creation, the New Being, the New state of things.
Do we participate in it?
The message of Christianity is not Christianity, but a New Reality.
A New state of things has appeared,
it still appears;
it is hidden and visible,
is there and it is here.
Accept it, enter into it, let it grasp you.”^[7]*

Let God fashion you and the whole world into something new and wonderful.

Come to the Table of the Lord, where you are loved, received, and made welcome.

[1] “The New Being” by Paul Tillich. *Transcribed from Paul Tillich’s sermon delivered on the eve of his retirement from Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1955.* Published by The Words Group, Lacey, Washington, 98503 USA.

[2] Exegetical notes from The People’s New Testament Commentary by Craddock and Boring, P. 278-279.

[3] Notes on being reminded adapted and quoted from “April 21, Resurrection of the Lord (Luke 24:1-12)” By: April Yamasaki. Christian Century Magazine. March 26, 2019.

[4] Ibid. Yamasaki.

[5] Ibid. Yamasaki.

[6] Steve Hummer, “What Can Woods Do for an Encore?” Atlanta Journal-Constitution, April 17, 2019. Page C1.

[7] Ibid. “The New Being” by Paul Tillich.