

Easter Sunday

*“He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.”
(Matthew 28:6 ESV)*

*“An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign,
but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.”
(Matthew 12:39 ESV)*

The Fact of Faith

April 17th, 2022

Matthew 28:1-20

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning everyone! Happy Easter to you! The Lord is risen – he is risen indeed! Thanks be to God! If you have your Bible with you I’d love for you to open in now to Matthew 28:1-20. I want to begin by reading the STORY of the resurrection. Most of us know this story very well – most of us have heard sermons on this story, we’ve seen plays – if you are my age you have seen FLANNELGRAPH depictions of this story and you could probably recite a great deal of this story – word for word – entirely by memory. But there may be people with us this morning who don’t know the story and so I want to take a few minutes and walk through it – but then I want to ask the question: why does it matter? The resurrection is laid down in Scripture as this FOUNDATIONAL FACT – THE foundational fact, in fact.

It is THE MIRACLE.

It is THE DEMONSTRATION.

It is THE DECLARATION and a great deal of reflection, application, response is built out from there.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ – BODILY – from the dead, on the third day is the MIC DROP of Christian theology. It is the argument ender. It is the jaw dropper. It is the objection silencer. It is the fact that changed the world and it is the fact that is supposed to change everything about us as the worshippers and followers of Jesus Christ. So let's talk about that today. We'll begin with the FACT and then we'll move on to the EFFECT that FACT is supposed to have upon us.

Hear now the Word of the Lord:

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." ⁸ So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." ¹¹ While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. ¹² And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers ¹³ and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.'" ¹⁴ And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." ¹⁵ So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day. ¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:1–20 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

That is the FACTUAL NARRATIVE of the EVENT that changed the world. The Evangelists all speak of it. Mark has the shortest version – but Mark is the shortest Gospel so we aren't terribly surprised by that. The climax of his Gospel finds the angel saying:

“Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” (Mark 16:6–7 ESV)

Luke adds the story of the Jesus walking with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and being revealed to them in the breaking of bread – we love that story!

John adds the story about Jesus restoring Peter to pastoral ministry with that 3 fold question: Peter do you love me? Once for each of the times that Peter had denied him. We love that story! My mom actually fell into the Sea of Galilee at the exact spot where that is said to have happened just to ensure that I would never forget that beautiful story. She is that committed to my growth and sanctification!

We love those stories!

But all of them merely ADORN this central fact – THE central fact of the entire Christian faith: that Jesus Christ rose BODILY from the dead on the third day. The first fruits of the resurrection in which all of his people will one day come to share. Can you say amen to that church?

Amen!

That is the FACT that changed the world.

Now how should that FACT change us? That's the question I want to try and answer this morning.

How Should The FACT Of The Resurrection Change Us?

The first thing I want to suggest is this; the FACT of the resurrection should make us confident in our faith.

1. It should make us confident in our faith

The resurrection of Jesus is the sign to end all signs. Jesus himself said that. In Matthew 12 it says:

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.”³⁹ But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.⁴⁰ For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.” (Matthew 12:38–41 ESV)

Are you hearing that? The scribes and Pharisees said: “Jesus, do another miracle and we will believe in you.”

Isn't that interesting? People still talk like that don't they? If God heals my grandmother of cancer, I will believe in him. If God writes me a private message in the clouds, I will believe in him.

We want God to dance to the tune we play. We want God to do the tricks that we demand. But that's not how it works. Jesus said that he came to do one, big, undeniable, unignorable miracle and then all human beings on the planet would be judged on the basis of their response to that. That's the tune he's calling! And he says that you actually shouldn't need any more evidence to determine your position than that.

He says: “The people of Ninevah repented when the prophet Jonah came back from the dead – metaphorically speaking – so what excuse will you have if you don’t repent when I come back from the dead – literally speaking?”

The physical, bodily, actual, literal resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the foundational FACT for all subsequent Christian faith – and the further you are from the event, the greater the reward for believing in it. Jesus said that to Doubting Thomas, do you remember that? Thomas is called Doubting Thomas because he missed the first resurrection appearance of Jesus and he had a hard time believing it merely on the basis of the report being made by the other disciples so when he does finally get to see Jesus in the flesh, the Lord gives him a bit of a rebuke. He says:

“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29 ESV)

That’s you, my friend. That’s me. Blessed are those who believe this fact and who build their lives upon it – not having seen it with their eyes, but having believed the report that was made of it by the Apostles.

A report they all DIED in the telling of. You know that right? The Apostles all died preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Apostle John was the only one to live to an old age and to die of “natural causes” but even that has to come with a bit of an asterix. They tried to kill John but it didn’t take. They dropped in a vat of boiling oil but he miraculously survived, so they sent him into exile on the Island of Patmos. But nobody stopped preaching this central, life changing fact. They preached it from the flames, they preached it in the oil, they preached from prison and they preached it while hanging on a cross. According to church history FOUR of the Apostles died by crucifixion – did you know that?¹ Most of us know the story of Peter being crucified upside down, but church history says that 3 others were also killed by crucifixion. “Do you want to preach your crucified Lord? Then do it from the cross!” That was the threat and the taunt that they faced in that first generation and on several occasions angry crowds and nervous governments followed through on that.

¹ Peter, Andrew, Simon the Zealot and Bartholemew/Nathaniel.

And yet – not a single one of the Apostles ever recanted his testimony that Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead. Not a single one! Now listen, nobody hangs on a cross for a lie. Nobody takes a bath in a vat of boiling oil for a lie. Nobody gets burned at the stake or hung upside down on the city gates by their ankles for a lie - but if you saw the empty tomb? If you placed your fingers into the marks of the nails and you placed your hands into his side; if you ate a meal with a man who had been dead and cold in the grave for 3 days? Then you know – you KNOW – that everything has changed.

The Apostle Paul saw the resurrected Jesus as well and it certainly changed his life. He went from hunting down Christians on behalf of the government to being the most wanted man in Israel because of his bold proclamation of the Christian Gospel. He considered the resurrection of Jesus Christ to be a FACT of ultimate importance. He said:

For I delivered to you as of **first importance** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:3–8 ESV)

What’s at the very heart and centre of the Christian faith? The FACT that Jesus died for our sins and rose again in accordance with the Scripture. Not “in our hearts”, not “he never really died because we remember him.”

No!

Jesus died and rose again – BODILY, ACTUALLY, PHYSICALLY – and he APPEARED to Peter, to the 12 and to more than 500 other people – go and talk to them, Paul says to the Corinthians. Next time you are in Jerusalem for a festival go and talk to them. They saw him. And I saw him too.

That's the centre. That's the foundation right there: Jesus Christ, dead, buried, and risen again!

That's a fact you can build your life on and that's a fact that should make you confident in your Christian faith. The second thing we can say hear is that the FACT of the resurrection of Jesus Christ should make us CLEAR in our allegiance.

2. It should make us clear in our allegiance

It certainly did that for the Apostle Paul, he said in the opening to his letter to the Romans:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations (Romans 1:1–5 ESV)

I love that! Paul tells them who he is, who Jesus is and how they better respond to him given the evidence. Don't waste your time on doubts: 'Is Jesus Lord? Should I follow him?'

HEY, Paul says, he was DECLARED to be the Son of God in POWER by virtue of his resurrection from the dead!!

CONVERSATION OVER.

Now submit to him. Obey him. And claim him as your Lord and Savior.

I like that.

The resurrection was God saying something about Jesus in a way that was impossible to ignore and impossible to refute. Thomas Schreiner says here:

“The resurrection of Jesus did not “make” him the Son of God; it declared and revealed in a powerful way that he was and had always been God’s Son.”²

That’s a really good reason to claim Jesus as your Savior and Lord!

Listen, Jesus made some absolutely outrageous claims. He said:

“I am the good shepherd.” (John 10:11 ESV)

“I am the light of the world.” (John 8:12 ESV)

“I am the bread of life.” (John 6:48 ESV)

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6 ESV)

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live” (John 11:25 ESV)

“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58 ESV)

Those are big claims! Who says stuff like that? I am the Messiah promised in the Bible! I am the light of the world! I am the bread of life! I am the way, the truth and the life. I am the only path of salvation. I am the resurrection of the dead. I am the eternal, pre-existent one.

Those are enormous claims!

If you are going to say stuff like that – you better back it up.

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* in the Baker Exegetical Commentary On The New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 41.

And Jesus did.

He backed it up. In the Book of Revelation he says:

“Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.” (Revelation 1:17–18 ESV)

That’s the ultimate MIC DROP right there. There ought to be a text note after that that says simply: BOOM!

What do you say in response to that?

“I lived, I died, I went to hell, I tore the doors off the hinges, set the captives free and then came back to life. How you doing?”

What do you say to that?

You say what Doubting Thomas said:

“My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28 ESV)

What else are you going to say? Who else are you going to trust? Who else are you going to follow? Who else are you going to listen to, once you know that?

“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.” (Psalm 20:7 ESV)

We know who he is, we know what we did – so we trust in him. The FACT of the resurrection ought to make us CRYSTAL CLEAR in our loyalty and allegiance. He was declared to be the Son of God in power by virtue of his resurrection from the dead, JESUS CHRIST our Lord – thanks be to God!

The third thing and the last thing I want to suggest to you this morning is that the FACT of the resurrection of Jesus ought to make us courageous in our witness.

3. It should make us courageous in our witness

It certainly had that effect on the Apostles. I mean, how did Peter go from being PETER – the guy who only stopped shooting himself in the foot to reload; the guy who made big claims but couldn't follow through; the guy who promised to stand with Jesus but who denied him THREE TIMES on the night of his trial before the Sanhedrin – how did Peter go from being that guy, to being the guy who just a few months later STARED DOWN that same Sanhedrin – having just been arrested and forbidden to preach anymore in the name of Jesus and who said:

“We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” (Acts 5:29–32 ESV)

What explains that dramatic turn around?

Peter CRUMBLED before the power and authority of the Sanhedrin on the night of Jesus' arrest – how can the same man now stand and say to the same people: I WILL DO WHAT GOD TOLD ME TO DO. I will preach Christ crucified and raised again. I will follow JESUS as my Leader and Savior – no matter what you say and no matter what you do to me!”

What explains that transition?

And this was not just hot air and bluster from Peter. The Bible says that the Sanhedrin had them BEATEN that day – they would have been bent over a waist high stone pillar and they would have received 39 lashings on the back of their legs with a rod. Peter took that – he ATE that - along with the other Apostles – and the Bible says:

“they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. ⁴² And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.” (Acts 5:41–42 ESV)

That’s the EFFECT that the resurrection of Jesus Christ had on the Apostle Peter. He went from confused and cowardly to courageous and clear. And that’s the effect that the resurrection of Jesus should have on all of us.

If Jesus rose from the dead, then what he said was true and everybody needs to know about it.

And if Jesus rose from the dead, then nothing anyone DOES to you compares in any way to what Jesus can give you – and will give you at the Final Judgment and in the eternal kingdom that lies beyond. That’s why Paul – who suffered more than most, who says that he received the synagogue beating FIVE TIMES³ - that’s why he could say:

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Romans 8:18 ESV)

What do I care about beatings? I’m getting a new body anyway! Do what you want with his old thing, Paul says, I got a new one coming. The glory, the beauty, the majesty of which you can hardly think or imagine.

And what can you take from me?

You know, Paul lost a lot for preaching the resurrection of Jesus. He lost his standing in the Sanhedrin, he lost access to his family fortune, some even say he lost his wife. He must have been married to have served in the Sanhedrin in the first place but after his conversion, no wife is mentioned and he never remarried. Did she leave him because he became a Christian? We don’t know. But we know that he lost everything – humanly speaking – but he believed that he had

³ 2 Corinthians 11:24.

made an incredible deal. He considered it all NOT WORTH COMPARING to the glory that lay ahead.

The fact of the resurrection ought to make us exceedingly bold and daring in our life and Christian service, because you literally can't lose! You can't lose because losing is winning and dying is gain! Paul said:

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (Philippians 1:21 ESV)

Brothers and sisters, let me tell you this, we will be the first generation of Christians in Canada to pay a price for our preaching and witness to the person and work of Christ.

Are you ready for that?

Are you ready to lose jobs, money, friends and freedom? Because it is going to happen. How will you respond to that? Are you going to be like Peter BEFORE the resurrection or AFTER? Are you going to be CONFUSED and COWARDLY or are you going to be CLEAR and COURAGEOUS? Because you can only be like that – you can only be like post resurrection Peter, Paul, Andrew, John and even Doubting Thomas if you build your life and centre your faith and plan your mission and witness on the basis of the empty tomb of Jesus Christ.

Reckon with that FACT and you'll be ready to go out and change the world and that's exactly what the RESURRECTED JESUS TOLD US TO DO. He said:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18–20 ESV)

Thanks be to God! Let's pray together.

