

March 23, 2008
Resurrection of our Ressurrection

“Dancing anyone?”

Jeremiah 31:1-6

"At that time, declares the LORD, I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be my people."

Thus says the LORD: "The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel!

Again you shall adorn yourself with tambourines and shall go forth in the dance of the merry-makers. Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant and shall enjoy the fruit. For there shall be a day when watchmen will call in the hill country of Ephraim: 'Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God.'"

Matthew 28:1-10

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. 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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 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." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

Sermon

What makes you want to dance, I mean really dance? I'm not talking about dancing as a recreational activity. I'm talking about spontaneous, can't-help-yourself dancing. The kind of dancing you do because there is so much going on inside you that it's just impossible to keep your body still.

I gave some thought to it, and a few events that do this might include your first kiss, or maybe when that special someone finally pops the question, assuming you actually want to marry the guy. Another is finding out that you're going to have a baby or become a grandparent. Coming into some unexpected financial windfall, getting a promotion at work, acing a big test at school: any of these might fill us with so much joy we just have to start moving, to start dancing. Some of us may have even started dancing a few months ago, having so invested ourselves in a football team over the course of the season that the LSU championship seemed as if it were our own personal victory and triumph. Such happenings can make us want to dance, because they are joyous and personal, close to us and life changing.

I was very, very tempted to make a change in today's bulletin. You know how we put in the italicized words "sit" and "stand" as direction in the service? I really wanted to put in there right before our sermon hymn "Lord of the Dance" the direction "dance" and just see how everybody would react. I think a few would have started to boogie, but I think most, if we danced at all, would have done so reluctantly without our heart in it. And that's kind of a shame.

Mind you, I'm not saying that because you don't want to start break dancing in the aisles that there's something wrong with you faith-wise. But I think there is a danger Christian face in that we hear the wonderful Easter story so often, that in a lot of ways it becomes that for us—a story. It's something that happened long ago in a place far, far away. And let's face it, we often let the many priorities and emergencies that jump in our face on a daily basis push this "story" off of our radar. We don't get the excitement, because it no longer seems personal and close to us, having an impact on our life here and now.

And a quick reading of Mathew's resurrection account may leave you saying, "Nice story." But if you slow down and think about it, there is a single verse that jumps out and makes all sorts of implications on your life, here and now.

"But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, as He said!'"

During His ministry Jesus said a lot of things, but the most spectacular and unbelievable this He said and the thing that always threw His disciples for a loop was His prediction of His death and resurrection. *"The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."* This was the third time in Matthew He spoke of it and every time He speaks of dying but rising again. But the rising part seemed so impossible that the disciples never seemed to believe it.

But it is true! Jesus' Word is true; good as gold. The resurrection He foretold came to pass! *"He has risen, as He said!"*

And since this most impossible resurrection is true, it punctuates how everything else Jesus preached from the promises in the Old Testament Scriptures to the predictions of His second coming in glory is also true. And these things, my friends, can't be left in a nice story from a long time ago. These things speak to you and I.

"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." That means right now and that means you. But you might say, "I'm not good enough. I'm too sinful. He can't mean me." Yes He can. Jesus spoke truth when He said, *"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."* You may try and reply, "But it's too difficult. Following my risen Christ is too much for me. I can't do it. It's impossible. How can I be saved?" No it's not. Christ says, *"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* Jesus speaks the truth to you here and now. He's done it and He's done it for you!

The truth of the resurrection is that Christ, mortal man and divine God subjected Himself to death and paid for all sin. But then He turned it all around. The death that is from sin and the sin that leads to death, that plague which has been upon mankind is reversed. Christ dies a mortal death but rises to an immortal life. And He does it so that the same resurrection can be yours, here and now!

It's true. Christ, who speaks only truth, has promised treasures in heaven. He speaks of a day when He will say to us, *"Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."*

This is why we celebrate today. This is what should make us feel giddy. The resurrection of Christ is confirmation and assurance that all the promises of Scripture are true, and are true for we believers today. We know that Israel is not just a nation or race from ages past, but it is now the new Israel, the fellowship of all believers today, now. We know God's words through the prophet are true and that they are aimed directly at you and me. *"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall adorn yourself with tambourines and shall go forth in the dance of the merry-makers. Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant and shall enjoy the fruit. For there shall be a day when watchmen will call in the hill country of Ephraim: 'Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God.'"*

We get excited and giddy and dance about so many things of this short, temporal life God has given us. How can we not dance and jump for joy knowing that He has gifted us so that this blessed life leads to another, one that is perfect and without pain and tears and suffering? How can we not be giddy knowing that the fearsome foe, deathly sin and evil, is not a foe we have to fight but one that is already defeated on this day?

It is true. It is all as He said! All the wonderful promises of God have come to pass, and they have come to pass for you and I today and into eternity. We can do the dance of the merry-makers because each of us can say, "Today, salvation is mine." God is faithful. His Word is true. It all has happened just as He said it would because He is risen!