

Easter (1988) - the Reality of the Resurrection

by Mariano Di Gangi

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis of our assurance and hope, and it reminds us of the love and affection of Jesus for us.

Duration: 30:26

Scripture: Isaiah 53:6, Matthew 28:1-10, Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 14:50, Luke 2:8-14, John 20:19-20, Revelation 1:17-18

Topics: "Resurrection"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the significance of the angel's appearance to the women at the tomb of Jesus. The angel reassures the women not to be afraid, just as many other instances in Scripture where fear is addressed. The sermon also mentions the book of Revelation, which ends with the message of 'fear not.' The preacher connects this message of assurance to the current events of the Toronto Blue Jays' pursuit of the World Series. The sermon concludes with the note of affection, as Jesus greets the women and instructs them to tell his brothers to go to Galilee where they will see him. The preacher emphasizes the love and life that Jesus offers to his followers.

Transcript

Hear now the reading of the Word of God as it is recorded for us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel according to Matthew chapter 28. The 28th chapter of Matthew, reading the first ten verses. After the Sabbath at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and going to the tomb rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, do not be afraid for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen just as he said.

Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples he has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.

Now I've told you. So the women hurried away from the tomb afraid yet filled with joy and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them.

Greetings, he said. They came to him, clasped his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, do not be afraid.

Go and tell, go tell my brothers to go to Galilee and there they will see me. Christian friends, it seems like only yesterday that I began this six-month appointment as your interim minister. Is it significant that it began when the beloved Toronto Blue Jays seemed on the end of a pennant pursuit and it concludes as they start on the road toward the World Series all over again? It seems like only yesterday that we started and it hardly seems likely that two months from today, Lord willing, I will once again have the opportunity of preaching God's Word in several population centers of northern Italy.

You have some of the large industrial cities located there and you also have some magnificent Alpine country with hillside and lake. One of the Italian Alpine towns, its name is Domodossola and I'm not going to ask you to spell it much less grade you on your spelling, is on a hillside and centuries ago the stations of the cross using life-size figures were placed on that hill in ascending order so that pilgrims who would come particularly during Holy Week would take their stand at each of the stations of the cross, meditate appropriately, and use the prescribed prayers. The figures of Pontius Pilate, the Apostles, and so forth were life-size and the path from the bottom of the hill moving upward where pilgrim feet had trod for many a year, that path was well worn leading to the station of Christ crucified.

But the road that went beyond Calvary toward the summit and the Chapel of the Resurrection was not worn out but overgrown with weeds. It seemed that many of the pilgrims made their way to the Chapel of the Crucifixion but did not get beyond that to that of the resurrection. In the words of our text today we are reminded both of the redeeming death of Jesus and the reality of the resurrection.

To separate these two even for an instant would distort Christian doctrine and rob us of our immortal hope. When the messenger of God spoke to reassure the women he referred both to him who was crucified and is risen. It's a matter of death and life.

Now what do we find in this familiar passage? Let me share with you what I've discovered through reading and rereading this portion of Holy Scripture. For one thing we have here related an appearance of the risen Christ. The women, namely Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, come to look at the tomb.

These were also among the women who were last at the cross. They had been followers of Jesus. They had been with him in his Galilean ministry.

They had cared for him. They had provided for his physical necessities. They had given him emotional support and encouragement.

Let's never forget the humanity of our incarnate God. They were last at the cross and now they come to pay their respects and express their devotion and they are first at the tomb. Coming to the tomb they are disappointed because it is empty.

The body of Jesus to which they would minister with tender loving care, bringing spices for anointing, that body is gone. But in exchange for the emptiness of the tomb they receive a message that makes for the fullness of joy and they are told, you're looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here.

He's not here because he is risen. He is alive again. Come, see the place where he once was and then go quickly and tell his disciples he is risen from the dead.

He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. Now I've given you the message.

Get on with it. And it is while they are in the process of obeying the angelic request, while they are carrying out the will of God about communicating the good news of the resurrection and the triumph of life, that suddenly they encounter the risen Lord personally and he comes to them and he greets them. This is one of the many appearances of our Lord given to us in Scripture, mentioned in the Gospels, mentioned in 1st Corinthians 15.

We need to remember that we are dealing here with matters of fact and not just feeling. We need to remember that we are dealing with a resurrection that was as real as the death on the cross three days earlier. They encounter the risen Christ.

Others will encounter him on their way back to the town of Emmaus. Others will meet with him on a shore. Others will meet with him in an upper room in an urban setting.

Some will see him while they are alone. Others will see him as they are met together in a group. He will appear to his own brother James and be instrumental in his conversion.

He will appear to Simon Peter to reassure him that the shame of his denial has been washed out and the tears of repentance have availed to bring him pardon. He will appear also to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road, convicting him, converting him and commissioning him for world evangelization. Appearance after appearance is recorded in Scripture and the first of them is met right here.

And so what we find is the relating of an appearance of the risen Christ. But we see more than that in our text. Beyond his appearance, there is their adoration of him.

It took place in Joseph's lovely garden. In another garden, Adam and Eve having transgressed, being agitated by an evil conscience, being disturbed in the depths of their soul, having fear complicated by guilt, they were drawn away from the presence of the living God. But here are women moved by faith, moved by love, who are drawn to the incarnate God and they worship him.

In the Cathedral Church of Copenhagen, there's a famed sculptor's work of Christ. It's by the Scandinavian sculptor Thorvaldsen. And an author went to visit the cathedral and looked at the image from afar and a friend nudged him and said, you will not see the face of Jesus until you kneel at his feet.

As long as we regard Jesus as another human teacher, as long as we regard him merely as a benefactor of the poor and the oppressed, as long as we think of him as a social reformer, as long as we fail to think of him as God manifest in the flesh and worthy of our worship, we do not understand him as we ought. It is only when we kneel at his feet that we can get a look at his face. It begins with an act of reverence, of worship, acknowledging him as did Doubting Thomas as my Lord and my God.

He is God over all, blessed forever, and therefore worthy of the worship reserved for God Almighty, Father, Spirit, and Son. Adoration. They come and they worship him and they clasp him by the feet.

This is no incidental reference. This is a very significant touch that the Holy Spirit guides Matthew to record. And what is the significance of the fact that they clasped him by the feet even as they worshiped him with their hearts? It is to demonstrate the bodily character of the resurrection.

What you have here is not some lingering melancholy memory in the mind of his followers of a Jesus who once was and is no more. What you have here is the resurrection of Christ bodily. What you have here is not the shadowy survival of the soul with some kind of independent immortality, but the resurrection of the body.

What you have here is not a vision, is not a hallucination. It is the risen Christ in his resurrection body and the women come and worship him and clasp him who is risen bodily from the dead. And the Apostle Paul refers to that in First Corinthians 15 and tells us that although the resurrection body will be different from the body we now have, there will still be some kind of continuity in God's own mysterious way.

Sown in weakness, raised in strength. Sown corruptible, raised incorruptible. Sown in dishonor, raised in glory.

A spiritual body, yes, but body all the same. And that is why we believe that on the third day he rose again from the dead. And that is why we confess with hearts of hope in the words of the Apostles' Creed, I believe in the resurrection of the body as well as the life everlasting.

For this mortal must put on immortality and this corruptible must put on incorruptibility and then shall be brought to pass that which is written. Death has lost its sting and the grave itself has been swallowed up in victory. We believe in the resurrection of the body and that is the significance behind the perpetuation of that act through the written word that they worshipped him and they clasped his feet.

An appearance, an act of adoration. Third, we have here a note of assurance. The angel says to the women, don't be afraid.

Have you ever noticed how many times scripture tells us not to be afraid? That's the way the story of Jesus began. To shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. Shepherds to whom the angel of the Lord appears and the glory of the Lord shines round about them and in that close encounter of the most mysterious kind, they are shaken and they tremble and the angel says, don't be afraid.

I'm bringing you good tidings of great joy which can be shared with all kinds of needy people. And isn't that the way that the book of revelation brings the scripture to a close? Fear not. I am he who was dead and behold, I am alive and alive forever.

A word of assurance. Don't be afraid. The body's not gone missing.

He is not here because he is risen from the dead and he will be seen. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis of your assurance and mine. If Christ were not risen from the dead, Paul spells out the doleful, deplorable, dispressing consequences in first Corinthians 15.

But now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that slept. And because of that fact, you and I need not be afraid. We have assurance.

Notice all that enters into this and we can only suggest it in broad strokes and let your own mind fill in the details as you contemplate these things. Fear not. Don't be afraid.

Be assured because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Why? What makes it so important? John Calvin used to call the truth of the resurrection, the cardinal doctrine, the hinge on which everything else would

hang and swing, remove it and everything falls to the ground. For one thing, the resurrection shows us that the prophecies and predictions of Jesus had been fulfilled on no fewer than five occasions.

Jesus had mentioned to his followers that he would be betrayed, handed over to sinners. They would spit upon him, scourge him and slaughter him. And on the third day he would rise from the dead, destroy the temple of my body.

And in three days I will build it up again. Those prophecies came to pass. Predictions were fulfilled by the resurrection.

Moreover, he had claimed to be the son of God and to claim to be God's son meant to claim equality with God. That is the way his Jewish contemporaries understood it. And he didn't correct them for having mistaken his meaning.

When he called himself the son of God, they rightly understood that he was claiming equality with God. His death, they hoped, had put an end to that kind of arrogance. But when he rose again from the dead on the third day, God set his seal of approval on the claims of Jesus.

God validated the claim of Jesus to be God's only son. And what happened was that by the spirit of holiness and the spirit of power, God raised him from the dead and demonstrated conclusively that this was indeed his co-equal divine son. And Romans 1.4 declares that very truth.

Moreover, Jesus had died on the cross and he had ascribed to his death a saving significance. The good shepherd is going to give his life as a vicarious sacrifice for the sheep. The son of man is not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many, a redemptive offering to liberate them from the penalty and power of sin.

Had he remained under the spell of death, it would have meant that that sacrifice had not been accepted, that the atonement that he made had been rejected. And then we would still be in our sins without a living savior. But now is Christ risen from the dead and God declares by this that the death of his son is an atonement that finds full acceptance and our debt has been fully and finally paid.

Moreover, by his resurrection, Jesus defeated man's last enemy and the same spirit that caused him to rise from the dead will cause our mortal bodies to be raised from the dust of death in due time. And that is plainly taught in Ephesians one and repeated again in Romans eight. No wonder we have assurance because he is not dead.

He is alive and alive forevermore. 43 years ago this week in Nazi Germany, the noted theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was taken from prison and executed. But before his execution, at the request of fellow prisoners, he conducted a service.

And before he was led away to die, he said, the text that I have expounded is first Peter one. Thanks and glory be to God who is begotten us to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You think this is the end, but for me, it will be the beginning of life to live as Christ, to die is gain because Jesus lives and because he lives, we too shall live an appearance, adoration, assurance, one thing more.

And that is the note of affection. Jesus greets the women and then tells them not to be afraid to go and to tell his brothers to go to Galilee where they will see him. Who were these men whom he calls brothers? They were frail.

They were fallible. They had failed him in his hour of need for the all forsook him and fled strike the shepherd says the prophet and the sheep will be scattered. But now that great shepherd of the sheep is risen from the dead and he goes ahead of his flock into Galilee and he will gather these dispirited broken depressed men and they will see him and they will be assured by him of his love and of his life.

And from cowardice, they will be turned to courage and from shameful depression, they will have boldness in declaring the truths of the gospel. You with wicked hands killed him. God raised him up and made him a and a savior.

Affection for the men who had denied him, for the men who had forsaken him, for the men who had failed him. He is not ashamed to call them his brothers. He's not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters and he goes ahead of us and he wants to meet us and by that friendship transform us into what we ought to be.

And so we go forth from this place on another Easter Sunday. Having seen the risen Christ portrayed by the Holy Spirit in the pages of the scriptures, having worshiped him together with the Father and with the Spirit, having received the confirmation of our hope through this blessed assurance, and having rediscovered the expression of his affection in regarding us with all our faults as his brothers and sisters, and he wants us to meet with him and experience the power of his resurrection. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the resurrection and the life. You can quicken those who are dead in trespasses and sins. You can give us the hope of the resurrection of the body at the last day.

We have your promises. Help us to trust completely and continually in you and because you live to be sure that we too shall live and because you have triumphed we may exceedingly rejoice. For your own glory do we ask it.

Amen.

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