

Luke 24:1-12

“Taking Our Place In the Resurrection”

It makes a difference whether someone is dead or alive.

Abraham Lincoln. He doesn't come to breakfast any more. Julius Caesar – his quest for power intimidates no one. Joseph Stalin's opinions no longer matter. John F. Kennedy. Martin Luther King, Jr. They can't make promises or compel action to fulfill their desires.

So what about Jesus Christ?

Is He dead or is He alive?

And if He's dead, then we are fools to rise at 5:30 in the morning and gather at the park to celebrate His life at sunrise?

But *if He is alive* – that changes *everything!*

If He is alive – then Jesus Christ can show up on the threshold of my life! He can do new things! He can surprise you! He can confront you! He can encourage you! He can instruct you! He can have a relationship with you!

Every New Testament writer from Matthew to Peter, from Paul to Luke, were firmly convinced that the story of Jesus continues! They stake their lives on the certainty of His resurrection! He is alive because God raised Him from the dead! That's why the resurrection is front and center in the earliest preaching: this is the good news!

Only if we understand the power of the resurrection do we then proceed with the rest of our life; and only then can we enter into the life of Christ and interpret what the resurrection means to us now!

Everything on which we base our lives – our present faith in God, the forgiveness of sins past, our hope for the future is an empty lie if there is no resurrection! In fact the Bible says: **If our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.** (1 Corinthians 15:19)

Do you believe in the resurrection of Christ? The resurrection of the dead?

Oh *Yes!* we should!

But I'm not so sure we do.

The resurrection of Jesus has set in motion the transformation of everything! As believers we are called to take part in the mission of God's Kingdom to bring that transformation wherever we see the need!

Let me tell you about one who saw a need – and how God used him to bring change into to thousands of lives. Little Charlie was the oldest of 10 children, born to a couple living in extreme poverty. His father was an alcoholic who regularly beat his wife. Unsure what to do with the children they had and the inability to provide for them, Charlie was abandoned at the age of 6 to fend for himself. Unaware how to survive, young Charlie fought through starvation by begging. For 12 years he lived on the streets struggling to survive.

Once he made his way to the city, Charlie was invited to a Church and to a hot meal. During that time at Church, he heard the good news about Jesus Christ and how much God loved him. It was here that Charlie gave his life to Christ.

Soon thereafter, Charlie walked 43 miles to Nairobi, the busy capital of Kenya, in search of work. He found work at a private home where his duties included tilling the garden, washing clothes, cooking in the kitchen, and other domestic chores. A year later, Charlie was promoted to

farm assistant and transferred to another farm where he met his future wife, Esther. He and Esther had eight biological children.

Though he had little education, Charlie happened to have pretty good judgment and sense. After working construction for a couple years, he bought a vehicle and began operating as a kind of Uber service, running people from city to city. At the same time, he started an agricultural business – and through a lot of expansion in his growing business ventures, Charlie became a business leader in Kenya, earning millions! His was a true rags-to-riches story!

But a time came when Charles Mulli couldn't deny the discontent of his heart. The hundreds of families, the number of innocent orphans that were left to try and survive in the trash dumps of the city reminded him of his own fight for survival. This unease came to a crisis after sitting 3 hours in his car alone, hundreds of miles from home, as he begged, "God, show me what to do. I will obey what You tell me. I'm willing to give up everything You've blessed me with. Use me to reach the kids, Lord. They are just like I was, without hope. Help me bring them hope."

The film "Mully" tells how Charles Mulli made a decision to sell everything he had to help the poor. It's a decision that made friends and partners think he had gone mad! He is abandoned again – by his network of successful business friends, his children experienced a complete reversal of living conditions. He is forced to carry out what seems like an impossible and unexplainable mission armed only with his relationship to God, as he begins to rescue street children from the slums of Nairobi, Kenya, picking up one child after another by himself and taking them to his home.

Through the years the numbers of kids rescued grew so that over the last 30 years, the Mully Family has given their entire lives and considerable fortune to rescue, adopt, house, feed, clothe, and educate well over 13,000 orphans who have graduated from the program as well as an additional 3,500 other children in new "villages" they have built in satellite towns in Kenya. His work has educated the children for free, trained them with skills to work in their remarkable gardens or other business ventures, so that their communities are self-sustaining in all that they need!

Charles Mulli follows a God who is alive! His is a ministry that is rooted in the resurrection. Because Christ is alive, His ministry continues and so does His mission! Someone once said, "Jesus is not a cheerleader from the heavens hoping we will get faith and ministry right... Rather, Jesus has His own ministry to do *...and He wants us in on it!*" (Andrew Purves) Jesus is still present and working and He is the principal actor in mission. And when the risen Christ tells His disciples to "go and make disciples of all the nations," He assures us, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 18:19-20)

He is with us; He goes before us. All of what the Church does should reflect His mission and desire as we take part in the ongoing ministry of our risen Lord! And "It is not our ministries that make Christ present and possible; it is the present, living Christ who makes our ministries possible." (Andrew Purves)

For many Christians, the meaning of Easter has only to do with life after death – the hope and promise of that future time when we leave this world. That's all we dare acknowledge: Christ was raised on the third day and we will be raised one day, too!

And while that is certainly a part of the Easter message, we do ourselves a disservice if

that's all we hear surrounding the resurrection of Jesus Christ, because the New Testament writers insisted that the resurrection has *everything* to do with how we live the rest of our lives!

When we fail to understand the connection between the role of the Church and the resurrection, the Church is reduced to a religious institution and inevitably it becomes more about us than it is about Jesus. We, the members of the institution end up taking control of its vision and leadership. Everything we decide is based on what we can do for Him, instead of what He can do through us. Whatever we can do with our own human initiative and energy is what fuels our drive. It becomes "our church," or "the pastor's church," or "my church" instead of being the Church of Jesus Christ. And when this happens, when we reverse our roles, we're in *big* trouble.

The hymn writer was right, "The Church's *one* foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord." Don't we need to be reminded of that?

In the letter to the Colossian Church, the Bible reminds us about our salvation; what it was that attracted us to Jesus Christ: **We have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God's people, which come from your confident hope of what God has reserved for you in heaven. You have had this expectation ever since you first heard the truth of the Good News.** (Colossians 1:4-5)

And listen to this: From where did their faith come? **The confident hope of what God has reserved for you in heaven!** It is the Easter story that attracted us! We have had this expectation ever since we heard about it!

In the next chapter, we read: **Just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow Him. Let your roots grow down into Him, and let your lives be built on Him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.** (Colossians 2:6-7)

And let's not miss how this resurrection life leads us into spiritual growth:

1. Let your roots grow down into Him.
2. Let your lives be built on Him. [As roots grow down, something grows up and above with strength!]
3. *Then* your faith will grow strong. [After you are rooted in the ways of Christ, after you have invested in your obedient faith – *you will grow strong!*]
4. And *then* [the result of this healthy relationship with God –] you will overflow with thankfulness!

This verse describes what it takes to experience the full life, the life of love, joy, and peace with Jesus Christ.

But still, we're afraid to give our lives away to our heavenly Father – even though He has demonstrated His great love for us at the cross! So many of us struggle with this idea of surrender, surrendering our lives to serve the Father. But there's nothing He will ask you to do that won't bring great joy and tremendous satisfaction!

I doubt any of us will be led to something as grand as Charles Mulli, but that wasn't even a bad thing! His children who lived the high life as a millionaire family – overcame the resentment to their father to know real joy and peace in their new life serving God alongside their father!

At our special Thursday worship this past week, we were reminded that Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, teaching them with the last opportunity He would have, "I have given you

an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.” And honestly, anyone can wash feet. But living into the resurrection life is much deeper.

In order to do as Jesus has done it would be more fitting to do any menial service or undesirable labor reserved for the least and the lowest among us: dig a ditch; change a tire; clean up after a child's sickness; change the diaper for an elderly parent; be the volunteer at 2 a.m. to give the baby a bottle; cut someone else's lawn; wash a car; serve a meal to those who will never say thank-you or pay you back; babysit an overactive child; spend a day with a special needs adult to relieve a parent. You get the point.

Today's foot washing, today's expression of love, doesn't have to be an exact imitation of what Jesus did 2000 years ago. His lesson wasn't in the washing – it was in the serving, in the sacrifice.

And don't miss this: To be a Christian is to believe and confess that Jesus is alive! For everyone else – no matter how much Jesus may be admired – they think of Him as dead. But for you and me, He is the Living One and He shows up day after day!

And since He is alive His story continues through His Church! So in the classic words from the *Shawshank Redemption*, **we either get busy living or get busy dying!** I choose life through the risen Savior! Don't you?

So what are we going to do about living for Him?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ vindicates everything heaven and earth, angels and God Himself had to say about Him! His resurrection validates your decision to surrender and follow Him! This year, this Easter, receive the new life and power He offers to those who want to follow Him!

[PRAYER]: Our heavenly Father, when we consider the cost of following You, we often get stuck thinking of those things we have to leave behind – as though there was something on this earth that was more precious than what You offer! Remind us of the glorious treasure of Your promise and friendship; the depth of Your love and wisdom of which we've barely scratched the surface. We want to believe; but help us in our unbelief. Grant us grace to trust in You, courage to withstand the opposition within our own mind and in the circle in which we live, and conviction that Your resurrection life is all we really need. In Jesus' name we pray; amen.