

With the early Christian Church, we confess:

- I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.
- We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.
- We believe that Jesus rose physically from the dead and that he will also raise us.

Starting with doubting Thomas there have always been demands for proof. Christ's physical resurrection is set aside as impossible, as too much to believe. We're told here's what must really have happened:

- the disciples hallucinated en masse, that Jesus was alive again and that changed them.
- ...that the feeling of unity they had when Jesus was with them somehow returned.
- Some say that Jesus lived on in the memory of the disciples. They lived out what they had learned from him.

John knew there were objections to the resurrection and demands for proof. But he did not look to set logical proofs or theological arguments in front of us. He simply proclaims the fact of the resurrection. Jesus rose from the dead. What he sets before us is the affect his resurrection had on people.

I think John would have had a ready answer for the idea that Jesus lived on in the memories of his disciples. There's this word he uses 8 times in his account: tomb. Tomb is not the best English match for the word he used. A better match would be "memorial." Eight times John refers to the tomb as a place for memories. It doesn't take a miracle to live on in someone's memory. Sometimes all it takes is a tombstone, a memorial marker.

Now you know what's at stake. Especially those of you who have travelled from this sanctuary to Washington County Memorial Park, those of you who have invested in a grave or crypt there and then paid to have a name engraved in stone.

Memorial Park is not a distinctly Christian term for a cemetery. You don't need Jesus to be able to remember someone. But to remember them with joy and hope, that is a different matter entirely.

Our joy and hope in the face of grief and loss begins with the empty tomb. The place for memories was empty. Yes, our confession is that Jesus rose again on the 3rd day. We tell you: The Tomb Is Empty, so...

Expect More Than Memories!

That really is the biggest challenge for most of us, that our expectations, our faith, reflect the fact that we have a living Savior, that we expect Jesus to make the difference that only a living, loving Savior can make.

The early Christian Church turned the world upside down. Some would say that was by the power of lies. The disciples stole Jesus' body in order to claim he had risen.

When Peter and John heard the news of the empty tomb, what did they do? They raced to the tomb. They were surprised by this news. If they had been involved in some conspiracy to steal Jesus' body and claim he had risen, would they have run to the tomb with such great urgency?

Peter and John, the one Jesus loved, raced to the tomb. John arrived first, but only looked in. He saw the strips of linen. Peter, always the bold one, went right in. He observed the strips of linen lying there. He saw the cloth from Jesus' head lying in place, wrapped up. Then John entered. We are told what affect the empty tomb had on them. We are told, John **saw and believed**. But also that **They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead**.

Those two statements sound strange together: John believed, but they did not understand. They recognized something momentous had happened. They trusted in Jesus, but they still needed to grow in their

understanding of how his resurrection was a necessary fulfillment of what God had promised through the prophets.

If this were a made up story, it would be a very strange story to come out of first century Judaism. The first witnesses of the empty tomb were women. Yet, at that time these noble women would not have been considered legally valid witnesses. It would be a strange thing for the disciples to present themselves as having forgotten what Jesus had promised, as timid and fearful, and so slow to figure things out.

We can understand why they would hide from Jesus' enemies behind locked doors, afraid they would be next. But how would a made up story get them past that fear? Consider the price they paid to proclaim the Risen Christ to a hostile world. Where would they find the strength? In some wonderful memories of the teacher they lost? No, they had more than memories. They had a Risen, living Savior! Jesus would protect and guide them, hear their prayers. He would bless their work/message. He would give them strength and hope. John set down this record of Jesus' miracles with the expectation that through that written word people would believe that Jesus is the Christ and have life in his name.

What affect did the resurrection have on Mary Magdalene? We witness the depth of her grief. She made her way to the tomb in the darkness to carry out a difficult task. Her grief was multiplied by finding the tomb empty. She ran to find the disciples, and then returned to the empty tomb. She stood there weeping.

The angels, Christ's messengers, express a concern, "**Woman, why are you crying?**" Jesus expressed the same concern, but she did not realize it was Jesus. "**Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?**"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Emphatically she says, **I myself** will get him. I won't trouble you. I'll take care of this myself. Just tell me where he is.

Consider how the world looked to Mary at that moment. And remember something that can help explain the depth of her grief. We first meet her in Luke 8 as **Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out**. Jesus had turned her world upside down once before. She had had firsthand experience with evil beyond what we can imagine. The first time she had seen Jesus' face and heard his voice, she found him standing between her and evil. If Jesus is gone, what stands to protect her?

Jesus raise her expectations? He raised her expectations with the most subtle expression of the Gospel. He called her name. She remembered his voice. How can I call that an expression of the Gospel? She remembered/recognized that voice. That familiar voice told her everything she needed to know about the world. Would she have put it this way?

- That she lived in a world where sin has been covered.
- Where death had been defeated.
- Where Satan's head has been crushed.

Probably not. Sin, death and the devil is a decidedly Lutheran way to break things down. What did she need to know? Jesus was alive. Jesus lives! She wasn't merely clinging to memories. She took hold of a living Savior.

Memories are powerful... Even the best of memories can serve as nothing more than painful reminders of loss. But one thing is more powerful. The real thing. The living Jesus.

Jesus lives. Wake to that good news every day. Take on the challenge of living up to that glorious reality. The tomb is empty.