

"Jesus is Alive! and on the Move!"

By Steve Ramer, Pastor

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Scripture

John 20:19-31

That Sunday evening, the disciples had locked the doors for fear of the Judeans, but Jesus came and stood in front of them and he greets them, "Peace."

Then he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were delighted to see the Master. Jesus greets them again: "Peace," he says. "Just as the Father sent me, so now I'm sending you."

And at this, he breathed over them and says, "Here's some holy spirit. Take it. If you forgive anyone their sins they are forgiven; if you do not release them from their sins, they are not released."

Now Thomas, the one known as "the Twin," one of the twelve, hadn't been with them when Jesus put in his appearance. So the other disciples tried to tell him, "We've seen the Master."

But he responded, "Unless I see the holes the nails made, and put my finger in them and my hand in his side, I'll never believe."

A week later the disciples were again indoors, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood in front of them, and said, "Peace." Then he says to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands; take your hand and put it in my side. Don't be skeptical but be a believer."

Thomas responded, "My Master! My God!"

"Do you believe because you have seen me?" asks Jesus. "Those who can believe without having to see are the ones to be congratulated."

Although Jesus performed many more miracles for his disciples to see than could be written down in this book, these are written so you will come to believe that Jesus is the Anointed, the Son of God, - and by believing this you will have true life in his name.

Sermon

On Easter morning, Jesus pulled off the unexpected by coming back to life from the dead.

Because of this, life and not death, is the final reality.

Hope is now the final word rather than despair, and resurrection is now the primary motif of life.

Love won and will always win!

Our only response is to embrace it and celebrate it.

The season of Lent led us ultimately to an empty tomb.

For forty days we were on a journey, a pilgrimage that included both contemplation and action. A journey, we hoped would be one of renewal - an intentional 40 days of stepping out from the ordinary and stepping into that which might shake up of our lives, maybe just a bit.

It was a journey where we could leave behind destructive desires, behaviors and attitudes while simultaneously embracing pathways, both new and familiar, that would lead us to new lives.

Again I will say it, it was resurrection that lay at the end of that journey. And that, my friends is what the empty tomb ultimately holds for us!

Now we tried to flesh out this framework of pilgrimage by looking at stories in the Bible that included the number 40.

Direct experiences of humans with the Divine Creator may, no doubt, often seem to be instantaneous. And yet most (if not all) of the Biblical accounts where humans have actually encountered God, some form of a journey was also included, usually a journey that lasted an extended period of time.

For the children of Israel it was a 40 year Exodus, wandering the deserts of Sinai, that took them from slavery in Egypt to freedom in a place where God's promise was waiting for them.

Within that long Exodus there were other smaller journeys. Moses' spent 40 days on top of a mountain with Yahweh, Joshua and his fellow spies also spent 40 days reconnoitering in that future land of God's promise.

It took Elijah 40 days to make his journey to that same mountain to also meet with God.

And while Jonah may have needed only three days, in the belly of a fish in order to come to his senses, he ended up spending 40 days preaching on the streets of Nineveh before his enemies decided to repent of their evil ways.

We also certainly cannot forget Jesus' own wilderness journey, one where he went without food for 40 days, a crucial journey that preceded the launching of his own ministry to help God save the world.

But last Sunday, Lent gave way to Easter. Easter, as I have reminded you time and time again, is an entire season in the church calendar and not just one day! And curiously enough, Easter, The Resurrection (with a capital T and capital R), that was The Destination (with a capital T and capital D) of our Lenten pilgrimage, is also the beginning of a season that will last, How many days? - you guessed it, 40!

From resurrection until his "ascension" into heaven, Jesus remained here on earth walking the dusty roads of Palestine encouraging and teaching his followers. During this time it was reported that he made numerous sudden and unexpected appearances.

He was alive and on the move!
Alive and on the loose!

He was difficult to pin down and no one was able to predict where and when he might show up next.

Seemingly he would suddenly appear and then disappear, until he was finally obscured by the clouds as he ascended back to his heavenly home.

But quickly on the heels of this, the promised Spirit came at Pentecost, providing comfort, courage and power for those disciples, who cowered in fear, to get up and live. For 40 days the risen Lord was alive and on the move, popping into and out of the lives of his followers often in many unexpected ways.

And with Pentecost, it was the Holy Spirit who took up residence with God's people to move and to shake them up in profound and mysterious ways!

But lest we get too far ahead of ourselves by jumping forward six weeks to the next church season of Pentecost, we must embrace the journey through Easter first.

Maybe Easter does need an entire season so that the reality of it all, of what actually happened can begin to sink in?

Jesus is alive, and if he is alive then, as I already mentioned, resurrection is for real!

But the truly scandalous thing about this is, - resurrection is now possible for everyone.

That's right folks everyone, everyone from those on death row, to selfish billionaires, to mean relatives and even racist cops. Even, my brothers and sisters, to you and to me!

But it is crucial, I think, that we keep our eyes open and our ears peeled, for signs and murmurs of resurrection both in our own lives and in our world.

We may need to even train ourselves a bit to begin to expect the unexpected since so often we are conditioned by our society to not even be open to the gifts of Divine grace!

But before I conclude this morning, I would like to share a short video, of one of the most powerful expressions that I have experienced of resurrection.

It comes from my travels with CPT to Israel and Palestine a place filled with so much pain, oppression and despair. Similar, I suppose, to those tombs of death we are led to at Easter.

Perhaps it is necessary for all of us to first travel to places of despair before we too can understand and experience the immense power of resurrection?

Usually one of the highlights of our CPT delegation is a visit from members of the Parents Circle/Family Forum. They always come in pairs, one Palestinian and one Israeli, who both have lost a close family member to the violence.

I have had the profound fortune to meet in person the two men in this video clip.

Rami Elhanan is Jewish and Bassam Aramin is Moslem
and yes I do get the irony when I say that two non-Christians
have taught me more about resurrection than anyone else.
And they have shown me that this hope for resurrection
is something that I can base my life on!

VIDEO CLIP: <http://on.aol.com/video/rami--a-grieving-israeli-father-s-story-518300039>

We are a part of an age old journey a journey towards resurrection,
one that is searching for something that can make us truly alive!

We may stumble at times in the dark
but we know that resurrection has happened, can happen!

And we live with the life - giving hope and expectation
that resurrection will occur even during moments of future despair.

But as a faithful followers of the Resurrected One
(capital T, capital R and capital O) we must remain open,
especially for the unexpected!

Steve Ramer

Pastor Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship
300 E. Oak St.
Ft. Collins, CO 80524
(970) 412-7510