

Isaiah 25:6-9
Matthew 28:1-10

AS HE SAID

A woman in Ohio had the unusual experience of having her husband show up several years after he had been declared dead. The husband's car had been found on the shore of Lake Eerie. He was presumed drowned, although his body was not found. After a year, he was declared dead. The woman remarried. Then her first husband showed up. He had faked the drowning and had run off to another state. "I wish he hadn't shown up," the distraught woman said, but still she had to deal with his newfound life and his reappearance. She had adjusted to his death and now she was confronted with his life.

On a [Sunday morning](#) nearly two-thousand-years ago, two women in [Israel](#) were faced with a similar situation – only the outcome was far different! [Mary Magdalene](#) and the other Mary, who had been there at the Cross and when Jesus was laid in the tomb, came back to visit his grave after the Jewish Sabbath had ended and the next day had begun. Matthew tells us that there was a great earthquake that took place but that was minor compared to the earth-shattering event that happened next.

An [angel of the Lord](#) descended from heaven and rolled back the stone that had sealed Jesus' grave. The temple police, who had been assigned the task of securing the tomb, who thought they were in power, and who thought that they were keeping the dead entombed, became like dead men themselves. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay." What jumps out at me from the text were the words as he said. On several occasions during his public ministry, Jesus told his disciples that he "must go to [Jerusalem](#) and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." The disciples heard only the first part of that message for Simon Peter tried to prevent Jesus from going through with his destiny with death in Jerusalem. But, they didn't hear, couldn't hear, the rest of Jesus' words. And, even if they had, they surely couldn't grasp what he had been saying for people just didn't come back from the dead; they were dead and gone - period!

Not only had the disciples been told Jesus' plan of action, the religious authorities had learned of the details as well. Immediately after Jesus' death, the chief priests and [Pharisees](#) asked Pilate to post guards at [Jesus' tomb](#). They defended their request saying, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again. Command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first."

Thus, it was well documented by both his disciples and foes that Jesus had said, time and again, "After three days I will rise again." And there at the grave, with the stone rolled away, with the guards standing like dead men, and with the grave empty of its body, the angel announced to the two Marys, "I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said."

As he said!" We gain added insight from Jesus' seventh and last word spoken from the cross: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." The word commit (or commend) means to entrust something to someone, with the intention of getting it back. And so, we entrust our money to the bank for safekeeping until we need it. Or, we give our teenager the keys to the car with every expectation that we will get the car back, and, we hope, without a dent or a scratch! On the cross, Jesus gave up his spirit to God in full trust that God would raise him from the dead – just as Jesus said! And, we believe that God made good that promise.

After the angel showed the women the empty tomb, he sent the two women to tell the other disciples that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and that he was going ahead of them to [Galilee](#); "there you will see him." The women ran from the graveyard to carry out their mission and, en route, the risen Jesus greeted them. Both Marys wanted to hold on to Jesus and worship him but he sent them on

their way, saying, "Go, and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." Before, Jesus referred to the Twelve as his disciples; but now, in his newly resurrected body, his followers had entered into a new and eternal family relationship with him: brothers (and sisters).

We discover that we will experience the risen Christ as we obey him, as we go and tell others the gospel truth that Jesus Christ is risen! We can't explain the resurrection, but we can come to see our risen Lord as we venture forth in faith and obedience. When we go to our respective Galilee in order to serve Jesus by serving others, then we will see with eyes of faith and believe in the risen Lord Jesus. As we move out of our comfort zones, as we risk all, and announce the good news with words and deeds that Christ has triumphed over the grave, the truth of [Easter](#) will dawn on us anew – just as he said.

We believe, in accordance with scripture and the testimony of many witnesses down through the ages, that on the third day Jesus rose again from the dead. So what? What difference does it make? In the time remaining, I want to offer you two significant answers as to how Jesus' resurrection from the dead impacts and empowers our lives.

When we affirm that [Jesus is Lord](#) and that his resurrection trumps the power of death, we can live with hope, confidence, and assurance that there is life beyond the grave. Jesus' triumphant victory over death is our victory as well. And, the risen Christ will escort us home to the heavenly kingdom – just as he said: "In my Father's house, are many rooms... And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself so that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3).

On April 8, 1945, when the German theologian and pastor, [Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#), had concluded a service of worship at the Flossenburg concentration camp, two Gestapo agents entered the room and said, "Prisoner Bonhoeffer, come with us." That had only one meaning for all prisoners – the gallows. His friends said goodbye to him. Dietrich Bonhoeffer took one of these friends aside and said to him: "This is the end, but for me it is the beginning of life." The next day he was hanged in Flossenburg (and was raised into the heavenly kingdom). (Life Together, pages 12-13)

We don't simply believe that our same old existence goes on continuously after death. Rather, Christ's resurrection offers us the hope and the assurance that life is healed, made whole, perfected within the heavenly realm. We won't carry with us our sins and imperfections into the next life. No, we shall be purified of all that is evil and we will fully realize the divine image in which we were first created. We will ultimately become what we were always meant to be.

A minister tells about a couple in his church, who had an adult son, who by his early 20s had a long criminal record. He was in and out of jail. The couple had great regrets for the behavior of their son, and they wondered how his upbringing had contributed to his tragic life of crime. One June day, the family got word that the son had died in a fight in jail. At the funeral, there was much sadness. "What a waste," many people said. The father and mother seemed inconsolable, but not quite. After the service, at the cemetery, the mother said to their minister, "At last he is at peace. For maybe the only time in his life, he is at peace. Now God can begin again with him. Now God can make up for any of our parental mistakes. Now the God who gave him to us, has him for God's very own." So also, that is our hope, our comfort, and our confidence.

The resurrection of our Lord gives us eternal life on both sides of the grave. When I was a younger Christian, I thought eternal life referred to the heavenly life that begins right after death. But then I discovered, especially while reading the sixth chapter of John's Gospel (after Jesus had fed the five thousand), he told them, "Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life" (6:47). Did you hear what Jesus said? He doesn't promise that, if we believe in him, we will have (future tense) eternal life. No, it's as he said, whoever believes has eternal life – has that special quality of life on this side of the grave as well as beyond. Jesus' resurrection from the dead offers us spiritual life, kingdom life, in the here and now as well as in the hereafter.

The women and men disciples were transformed immediately by their encounter with the risen Lord and they were empowered to serve as God filled them with the [Holy Spirit](#) on [Pentecost](#). [Martin Luther](#) said, "We do not believe in the resurrection because of the empty tomb but because of the Christ-

filled world.” And [John Wesley](#) said, “I believe in the resurrection not because I can explain it, but because it happened to me!”

When I think of the present-tense resurrection power that is available to us right now, I inevitably think of a couple in my second church, Jay and Debbie. They had two daughters, and their youngest daughter became sick and died of cancer at the age of six. A week or two after the Witness to the [Resurrection](#) service for their daughter, Debbie was back in her usual place with the choir. I can still see her singing an anthem with tears streaming down her face while, at the same time, her face radiated with love and praise to God. Debbie knew the risen Christ, and it made a significant difference in her life and in the lives of all those around her.

A young man is starting a church in his spare time at a storefront building in the depths of one of this nation’s troubled inner cities. He specializes in those who, in their despair, have gotten hooked on drugs. He has established a day care center that’s free to the single parent mothers who bring their children there. His little church is buying and renovating a nearby house to be a safe haven for women who are suffering from domestic abuse. And all the while he is working as an accountant during the day! How does he do it? Why does he do it? “Do you think this sort of risky, revolutionary approach to being the church will work?” a minister friend asked him. He replied, “Will it work? Look, after God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead, well, you won’t believe what could work!” (Told by Dr. Will Willimon)

Jesus Christ is risen – as he said – and there is more than enough resurrection power to change individual lives, congregations, and communities. Sin, evil, and death have been conquered. Victory is assured, and there is new, abundant, and eternal life for us all on both sides of the grave – right now and forever. Trust God and all that God promises us. Come alive to the Lord, who makes all things new. By the [power of the Holy Spirit](#), let us follow, obey, and go where the risen Christ sends us for he is indeed “the resurrection and the life” – just as he said! Amen.

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