

04-21-19

Easter

Luke 24:1-12

“Really Alive?”

Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church

I love gardening, but I'm not that good at it. Last week, Colleen and I walked around the yard, and checked out every bush and plant that we've planted through the years. Most of them lived through the winter, and are now showing signs of growth and new life. But a few of our perennial flowering plants have us worried. They haven't poked through the mulch yet. Have they expired? Are they lifeless? Or are they alive, deep down in the red North Carolina clay?

Jesus expired. No question. He was 100% deceased. On Good Friday, Jesus had been executed, crucified. He breathed his last. They stuck a spear in his side, just to make sure. Then they buried him. They sealed him in a tomb. He was positively lifeless.

But on Sunday morning, everything changed. The women arrived at the tomb, and found it empty. The angels announced that Jesus had risen from the dead. The women listened, but didn't know what to believe. They wondered, “Is Jesus really alive?”

So they went and shared the news of the resurrection with the apostles. The men who made up Jesus' inner circle didn't quite believe it, either. They questioned, as well: “Is Jesus really alive?”

And it wasn't until Jesus proved it, appearing to them in the flesh, that they were convinced. “Jesus is alive,” they realized. “He is risen! He is risen indeed!”

And the living, risen Jesus changed their lives. Changed their outlook. Changed their purpose for living. Changed their priorities and plans.

You see, Christ's death on the on the cross paid for their sins. But Christ's resurrection from the dead sealed the deal, proved God's power, proclaimed God's ultimate victory.

In the end, those apostles and those women devoted the rest of their lives to proclaiming to the world that Jesus really is alive. And the resurrected Christ worked his power in them, did miracles through them, and brought many more people to faith through his Church.

But what about our church? Is Jesus really alive today, here at Hope? That question was at the very heart of the matter on the first Easter, and it still is for us.

You know, we can point to all sorts of evidence to say that, yes, our church is alive. We have 54 adults in our spring New Member Class, getting ready to join our church. We know of several families that travel over an hour every week to worship here, including some from Virginia. We have ___ kids signed up for our June Vacation Bible School already. 45 high school youth are going to a National Youth Gathering this summer. Volunteers serve in 21 different community-based ministries, and more than 100 Hope members have been involved with mission trips in the past year.

These are wonderful signs of life here at Hope, and I'm thankful for all of the energy and vitality in our congregation. But none of this really means all that much if Christ Jesus is not alive here. If Christ the Lord is not active here, all of this activity is futile. If our Easter Savior is not empowering and

energizing his Church here in this place, then we're just going through the motions, aren't we?

Is Jesus really alive here? Without a doubt! Jesus isn't visible among us; but I see Jesus invigorating our church every single day.

I see people coming to faith here all the time, and people being renewed in faith. And who is it that's making this happen? Jesus himself said, "No one comes to the Father, except through me." Christ is alive, here at Hope!

I see people here at Hope wrestling with adversities and hardships, yet their faith survives. And I know that it's Christ Jesus himself who is hanging on to them. For he says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Christ is alive, here at Hope!

I see people carrying on the work of Christ all the time here, using their spiritual gifts, loving others selflessly, giving of their time and resources generously, all to enable our church to keep reaching people for Jesus Christ in our community. Yes, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. He is alive, here at Hope!

Is Jesus really alive, in you? Go ahead today and celebrate the Easter Bible story. Celebrate the living Christ at work in our church. But don't fail to take all of this personally. Is Jesus really alive, in you?

You know the Lord's death paid for your sins, right? But what about the resurrection? Does it change your outlook? Does the living, risen Jesus transform your purpose for living? Adjust your view of worldly trials? Strengthen your faith? Empower you to resist worldly temptations? Alter your priorities and plans?

All of that can happen, because Jesus is alive! We can't do it ourselves. We can't come to Jesus, or suddenly decide to shape ourselves up. But Jesus has the power. He's the one who reigns victorious. Jesus promises to be with us, he offers us his help, and he loves us enough to make it happen.

So let's pray, with faith and trust and humility, on this resurrection day, asking the living Lord to live in us. To make healthy Christians even healthier! To rejuvenate drooping Christians, and to bring back to spiritual life those who seem to be spiritually dead. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, on this Easter Day, we pray for new life. Like the plants of the springtime, we want to grow. We want to blossom. But we need your help. We believe in your resurrection. We know you are alive, Lord. So live in us today. And give us new life in you, as you will. Amen.