
Too Good to Be True?

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 20 April 2025 • Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34-43 • Luke 24:1-12



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The great day is here when we celebrate the miraculous, the impossible, the amazing resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He has conquered death and returned from the grave. God has raised him up, from the depths of the pit to the heights of heaven, to sit again at his right hand. God's plan for humanity has come to glorious flower. The scriptures have been fulfilled and the prophets vindicated. God has done it! God has brought it about!

And we have great reason to rejoice, because God has done this wonderful thing for our benefit. We have been forgiven our sins and made whole. Christ has opened the gates of heaven for us, that we may all enter. Nothing and no one else could have brought this about. It is all the doing of our heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the day that the Lord has made:

let us rejoice and be glad in it!

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the central events in our Christian faith. As Paul says, if Christ had not come back to life, then we would have no faith. There would be no meaning to any of this: this church, these songs we sing, nothing. We wouldn't even be here. But we are here because Christ did rise again, and because we believe that Christ rose again.

On that fateful Sunday morning, the women who were among Christ's closest associates went to the tomb. They went there not to find out if he had risen; they went there with spices and lotions to anoint a dead body, the dead body of their friend and rabbi Jesus. There is no suggestion that they had any hope left at all, after seeing him breathe his last, nailed up there on the cross. In the very first revelation God gave to anyone, an angel met them and told them what had happened.

It is not a small thing, this belief, or faith. It did not come immediately even to the people who knew Jesus Christ as a human being. After the women encountered the angel and learned what had happened, they ran to tell the other disciples — the men. But the men didn't believe them. Why? Many people have noted that at that time, in that society, women were not considered trustworthy witnesses. When a crime was committed, a woman's witness was not admissible in court. So the men thought the women's report was "nonsense."

But maybe there's another reason too. Have you ever been told something that seemed too good to be true? Maybe you go for a job interview, for a job you really want, but you think you haven't interviewed well and there's no way you're going to get the job. Then you get a phone call and the job is yours! "Wait — really?" you say. It's hard to believe. Or you think you've met the love of your life, and then you discover that he or she loves you too. Great good news is always a bit of a shock. I'm sure the disciples felt that way. Jesus was dead — they saw him dead. And a crucifixion is not something you survive. Even those of the disciples who remembered what Jesus told them about rising again would be amazed to find it come true. They saw him die — and now here are some women telling them that an angel told *them* that Jesus is alive. Now he's standing among them again! I can certainly forgive Thomas for doubting. Surely they all must have doubted!

This is important because, 2000 years later, we don't have the experience of seeing Jesus in the flesh, before and during and immediately after the crucifixion. We have the Bible, with its eyewitness accounts from a handful of people. Can we doubt? Of course we can! But we have something the disciples

did not. God has planted in our hearts the truth of the Gospel. God has given us the Holy Spirit to guide us. God has given us faith.

The disciples saw him face to face. We don't. But in a way, we do see him. We see him inside our heads, inside our hearts. We see him because we understand that he loves us, and will always be with us. If we understand that, then in a way we see him, and we see him even more than the disciples way back when, who saw but did not understand. Jesus told them that when they see him, they see the Father, and the same is true for us. When we see Jesus — when we see him in our hearts and in our heads — we see God. Jesus is our way to God, our way to truth and life. We see Jesus because we believe in him. We often say, "Seeing is believing," but I guess, for us, believing is seeing.

And the way to keep Jesus in our hearts and our heads is to keep believing in him. Believe that the promises are true. Believe that what Jesus did on that Passover so many years ago was for our benefit. Believe that God loves us so much, and Jesus loves us so much, that he died for us. He died — for us! And because he died and rose again, escaping even death, we also can live.

He died — he rose — he lives — and we live with him, in his love, forever.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Amen.