

Just the Beginning

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it! Alleluia! Christ is risen from the dead! Alleluia and Amen!

I've got to tell you something. I've conducted a lot of funerals in my short career as a pastor so far. I still have classmates who haven't had one yet, but I've had quite a few. Of all those times that I have conducted a funeral, I've never seen anything like this! Not once has one of those people come back from the dead.

That shouldn't surprise you. Why not? Because people don't just come back from the dead. We've all known someone who has died. Yet, none of us has ever attended someone's funeral where they saw their loved one dead in a casket only to see them alive again three days later. Those things just don't happen.

You can imagine why, then, on this first Easter morning so many years ago, that every single one of Jesus' followers expected that Jesus was still dead. They probably hadn't even had time for that to sink in yet. They haven't even had time to process the nightmare of his betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion. All they could think about was that Jesus was dead.

But he wasn't.

Once they found that out, it came as a huge surprise to them. Their loved one, their leader, their Lord—whom they thought was dead and gone—was indeed not dead. He was alive! Certainly, that is surprising! Just imagine if one of your loved ones who died were to come back from the dead and be alive again. Wouldn't you be surprised? Wouldn't you be filled with joyous, exuberant, glee over having your mom or dad, brother or sister, son or daughter come back to life? Of course you would!

That is what happened on this day all those years ago. Jesus rose from the grave. But, there is something even more surprising than that. Did you know that? Did you know that there's something even more surprising than Jesus rising from the dead? Maybe you're wondering, "How could there possibly be something even more surprising than that?"

Let me tell you...

This was God's plan all along, and he didn't keep it a secret. When sin entered the world, God revealed his plan to send a Savior. That Savior was Jesus. Everything Jesus did was to accomplish his mission of being our one and only Savior. That meant he had to be God and man wrapped up in one person. That meant he had to be perfect. That meant that he would have to die on the cross and be buried. It also meant that three days after his death and burial, he would rise triumphantly from the grave!

When Jesus was here, he told those closest to him that he was going to suffer and die. They should have known this was coming. Even before Jesus was here, many prophets prophesied about his coming, his death, and his resurrection. One of those prophecies comes from Hosea which reads, **"I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?"**

Paul quotes these words in the great resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, and uses them to show us that because Jesus died and rose, death no longer holds us in its cold, grim grip. Instead, Jesus has conquered death and has freely given us his victory. So, when someone who believes in Christ dies, we don't have to worry about what comes next. We know that because Jesus lives we too will live.

When Hosea writes those words, they come in a different context. It's mainly an angry and punishing tone. Hosea is prophesying against Israel by bringing the word of God's judgment against them for their stubborn idolatry. They have done terrible and sinful things. So, God says that he will snuff them out. Here is an example of what God says he will do: **"Therefore they will be like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears, like chaff swirling from a threshing floor, like smoke escaping through a window."**

Yet, in the midst of this proclamation of judgment, we see a beautiful verse of Gospel. That juxtaposition of wrath verses deliverance stands out like a light in the darkness. There is hope—a hope that can only be found in the Lord. Even though destruction is and plagues may come, God says he will deliver his people from the power of the grace. God says he will redeem them from death.

Today—Easter—is the fulfillment of God's marvelous plan for our salvation! Today we see that God has indeed delivered us from death! So, with Hosea and Paul we can stare death in the face and ask with a confident and triumphant voice, "Where, oh death, are your plagues? Where, oh death, is your destruction? Or your sting? Or your power? That's right! It's not there! Jesus has won! He is victorious! Death, Satan, hell...I don't have to worry about any of you ever again!"

Because this is true, we can finally get to what is even more surprising than Jesus rising from the dead. With death defeated and Jesus the victor, today is just the beginning! This day marks just the first line of chapter one of the great book of life. A book that tells the tale of heaven. A book that is so great and so beautiful that earthly words cannot even begin to express or record what it will be like.

In heaven, sin is gone. Life goes on forever. All the terrible things that we see in this world evaporate. They are forgotten and replaced with the undescribed joys of heaven. I wish I could tell you more, but I can't. All I know is this part. All I know is that Easter is just the beginning.

I've been at a few funerals. Maybe you have too. Neither of us has seen anything like this before where someone comes back to life. Thanks be to God that that is exactly what happened on this marvelous day so many years ago! Jesus lives! And because he lives we too shall live. The best part is, that's just the beginning! Amen.

Now may the peace of God which transcends all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.