

Death Swallowed Up

The Rev. Dr. Scott Ramsey
Isaiah 25:6-9; Mark 16:1-8
Lewinsville Presbyterian Church
Easter Sunday – March 31, 2024

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

Jesus Christ has overcome sin and the grave, and therefore, we do not need to be afraid, of anyone, or anything, anymore. The young man's announcement to the women in the tomb on that first Easter morning, from Mark 16, was, "Do not be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified."

Jesus was crucified. He hit rock bottom. As Layne reiterated on Good Friday, and as we say in the creed, Jesus descended into hell. Jesus knows what hell is like. He suffered the fullness of suffering, shame, agony, and loss. He fell into the abyss. His life came undone. Last year's Christ candle was extinguished for good on Friday night. Full stop. He was crucified, dead, and buried. That all happened.

What this part of the story teaches us is that whatever you are going through right now, whatever brokenness you are suffering, whatever disruptions there are in your life, whatever fears, whatever troubles, whatever sorrows, whatever betrayals - your Lord understands them; he knows what that's like. Your Lord is with you in them. Your Lord will sit with you in them, and your Lord will never ever leave you. In Matthew 28, at the very end of that gospel, Jesus tells his disciples, "I am with you *always*, even until the end of the age." Jesus is present with you, in everything you are going through. That is a huge piece of the good news.

But the Easter news does not stop there. The young man goes on to say, "He has been raised. He is not here." The Easter news does not stop with the assurance of Jesus' presence with us, although it is plenty, to know that Jesus is with us in everything that we're going through. Jesus was crucified, so that he can be present with every form of our hurt, but he was also raised, and he has gone ahead of you, the young man tells the women, he has gone ahead of you into Galilee, to the ordinary daily places where they lived their lives. This is teaching us that he goes ahead of us, as well, into all of the ordinary, daily places and situations where you and I live our lives. We may expect to encounter him in every future towards which *we* are moving, even as we speak. The crucified and risen Jesus is waiting for you in all of your tomorrows.

The language that Isaiah 25 uses for this is that God has *swallowed up death forever*. God has enfolded the great power of death – with all of its malevolent force – into the even greater power of God's mercy and God's love. When we put Isaiah 25 and Mark 16 together, what we get is that by raising the crucified, executed Jesus from the dead, God absorbed every power of death into God's own being. God has swallowed death, and in the process,

transformed death into newness of life, just as we will swallow the bread and the cup of Jesus' broken body and poured-out blood, and in the swallowing of communion, Jesus' death will become part of your body, transforming you, carrying you to new levels of your faith, new levels of hope, new levels of compassion, new levels of assurance of Jesus' presence with you, and in you.

Friends, Jesus Christ has overcome sin and the grave, and therefore, we do not need to be afraid, of anything, or anyone, anymore.

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