

“Easter Is Release”

Text: Luke 24:1-12

Today is the first day of a new week, but we may feel like it's the last day of a long week: Holy Week, the week we just finished celebrating. We heard a lot last Holy Week; we heard ...

- that Jesus (in the Gospel of Luke) is a prophet, Who fulfilled the ministries of all the prophets who came before in the O.T.

- that like those prophets 'of old,' Jesus spoke for God to His people, validated His words with miraculous signs and wonders, and then was rejected and made to suffer

- that Jesus suffered to pay the penalty for the sins of the world and so reconcile the world to God

- we heard on Holy Thursday that Jesus demonstrated that reconciliation by eating with sinners

- we heard on Good Friday that Jesus accomplished that reconciliation by dying for sinners to forgive them

We really have heard a lot. And all of that is the reason for a journey Jesus makes in the Gospel of Luke – a journey from heaven to earth and then back to heaven / from God to man and then back to God.

The back to God part of Jesus' journey was accomplished in Jesus' Ascension, which we will celebrate in 40 days. But it began with Easter, with Jesus' resurrection. In that great event that was our Lord's resurrection from the dead we see Luke's-Jesus released from death, never to die again. Easter is release. Let's look at that now together ...

We begin by returning to today's Gospel, where we hear again St. Luke say that:

“On the first day of the week, at early dawn, they (i.e., the women who had been ministering to Jesus) went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.” (Luke 24:1-3)

Right at the start there’s something interesting about those words: they begin by referring back to something that is actually found in the previous verse. When you look at Luke 23:56b (the words that come right before today’s Gospel), you see that Luke makes a reference to the Sabbath – he says:

“On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.”

Then in the very next verse, which is the first verse of today’s Gospel, the original text refers

again to the Sabbath. Translations usually render it as: (quote _____ above), but it literally reads this way:

“On the first day from/after the Sabbath(s), ...”

Luke measures the “first day of the week” *in relation to the previous week’s Sabbath*.

Not only that, but he also uses a construction in the original text that, while it often gets lost in translation, is kind of important. It’s translated this way: “on the one hand; on the other.” So Luke begins his Easter account this way – it literally reads like this:

“On the one hand, they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment; on the other hand, on the first day from/after the Sabbath, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, ...”

Now this is important, because the phrase “on the one hand; on the other” is used to compare or contrast something. It can also mark a transition between periods of time. What transition does Luke have in mind here? What is he comparing or contrasting?

Simply this: the old covenant of the Law and the new covenant (recall 22:20) of Christ. Along with that Luke compares and contrasts the old era of sin and death with the new era of forgiveness of sin and life. And the conclusion he comes to is this: with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, life triumphs over death; forgiveness sets free from sin. Death no longer has a hold on those who belong to Jesus, because they have been released from it by Christ’s resurrection from the dead! Easter is release!!!

This becomes clearer when we continue on in the text, as Luke goes on to say that:

“And it came to pass (Luke’s heads-up that something important is about to take place) that while they were perplexed about this, behold (another heads-up from Luke), two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them: ‘Why do you seek the Living One among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.’” (vs. 4-6a)

The two men there were obviously angels (Luke even says so later on, in v. 23), but Luke doesn’t call them angels there; he calls them “men ... in dazzling apparel.” This takes us back to earlier in Luke’s Gospel – to the Transfiguration of Jesus in ch. 9, where we also meet two “men,” speaking with Jesus – Who by the way is also said there to appear “dazzling”: those men being Moses & Elijah. Luke says there that they spoke with Jesus about His “exodus, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”

Moses & Elijah were two of the greatest of Israel's prophets, who both made journeys to lead God's people 'of old' to freedom. As we've heard before here in church, Luke's-Jesus makes a journey, a journey to a cross, a cross on which He suffers and dies to lead all people on an exodus from sin and death. As such, Luke's-Jesus is, as we said at the beginning, *the* Prophet, Whose ministry fulfills the ministries of all the prophets who came before, including Moses and Elijah.

After all, Moses led God's people Israel to freedom after four centuries of bondage in Egypt, only to have them return to bondage later on in Babylon. Elijah actually raised somebody from the dead!, but the person he raised (the son of the widow at Zarephath) just died again later. Jesus, by contrast, rose from the dead *to live FOREVER*. In His resurrection Jesus frees all people from bondage to sin and death, never to be enslaved by it again.

That's what Jesus came to do, after all: He came to release from sin and death. He said that in the very first sermon He preached, which was in His hometown of Nazareth and which Luke records for us in ch. 4 of his Gospel. In that sermon Jesus said (and here again, this ties-in with Him being the Great Prophet) that He had come to fulfill the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“... to proclaim *release* to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to *release* those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.” (vs. 18-19)

We heard on Good Friday that, though Pontius Pilate repeatedly tried to release Jesus and not crucify Him, he ended up releasing an actual criminal instead (a man named Barabbas). What Pilate didn't know, what Jesus' enemies didn't know, was that *being bound Himself* was what the ministry of the Great Prophet was all about. Being bound to the

world's sin, and then punished for it, was *how* Jesus would bring *release* from it.

That release was found in an empty tomb, as Luke writes, again, that:

“On the first day of the week, at early dawn, [the women] went to the tomb, ... And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.”

On that “first day of the week,” a new era dawned – the era of release; the era of freedom from sin with forgiveness; the era of death being driven out by life! As Luke says in today's Gospel, Jesus is “the *Living One*.” He has no place among the dead. He was released from death on Easter. Easter *is* release! – for Jesus, and for all Who follow Him in faith.

We see further that is the case when we read on and we see what happened to Peter on the day of Jesus' resurrection. Peter is an interesting character in Luke's Gospel; it's almost like there's a story-within-a-story in Luke – within Luke's story of Jesus is the story of Jesus and Peter. It's quite fascinating ...

Peter is first called “Simon” back in chapter 5 of Luke, a name that seems to signify, at various places in Luke's narrative, a lack of understanding and faith. For example, when Jesus warns Peter of Satan's desire to have him, He calls him Simon – twice, in fact, for emphasis (see 22:31). That happened during the Last Supper, just before Jesus' prediction that Peter would deny Him that night. And an important part of that was when Jesus assured Peter that He had prayed for him, and that because of His praying for him, Peter would eventually “turn” (22:32) and lead the others in faith.

That appears to happen on the first Easter, as we see Peter already acting in contrast to the other apostles. Luke writes:

“... Peter, having risen, ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.” (v. 12)

Note what Luke says there: “Peter, *having risen*, ran to the tomb.” Though Peter may yet have had to journey a bit further to saving faith, it appears that already on Easter morning he had begun the process of *rising again*, rising from the despair of his sin against Jesus to a renewed faith in Jesus’ forgiveness.

That process was completed later on Easter, as Luke goes on to write (later on in chapter 24):

“...they (i.e., the Emmaus disciples) ...returned to Jerusalem. And they

found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, and saying: 'The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!'" (vs. 33-34)

the same Simon for whom Jesus had prayed the night before; the same Simon who was now believing in Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Oh, what must Peter have felt the night he denied his Lord. You've felt it, the guilt and shame of letting someone down, of failing to come through when you were needed. Oh, what must Peter have felt that Easter day, when Jesus came to Him to assure him that it was all o.k. because He/Jesus had risen from the dead. Jesus took the time that busy Easter day to meet with Peter alone to release him from his guilt and shame, and in fulfillment of Jesus' words, Peter went on to lead the others in faith (see Acts 1-11).

That is the essence, the very heart of Christianity: faith in Jesus' resurrection from the

dead. Which takes us back to where we began, to all we heard last Holy Week ...

The Great Prophet has completed His journey – He has reconciled the world to God, restoring earth to heaven / mankind to God by paying for mankind's sin with His death on the cross. As we heard on Good Friday, Jesus died for sinners to forgive them, *and forgiveness is release!* That release was brought out into the light of day the day Jesus rose again from the dead.

But that isn't all, for as we heard on Maundy Thursday, Jesus eats with sinners, giving them/us to eat and drink His Body and Blood. That Body and Blood is ever *living* as of Easter, because it's the Body and Blood of Jesus and, as Luke tells us today, Jesus is "the *Living One*." As we eat and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus again today, we know that we too will one day rise again from the dead like Jesus, on the Day He comes again.

Until then we press on in faith. And to help you with that I tell you again today that your sins are forgiven, and you are free from the curse of death. Life everlasting with God is your future. How can that be? Because Jesus Christ IS risen from the dead!!! Easter brought Him release! Easter *is* release!, for us all –

– in Jesus' ✠ Name,
Amen!