

Pastor Doug Larson

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen

I think I would have a better chance of convincing you that a spaceship landed in my backyard last night than that a man who died on a Friday afternoon came back to life on Sunday morning. Yet, that is what I have to tell you. Some may call this unbelievable, some might say it's maybe true and others will say, yes, I totally believe it because those who saw this man have told us. I can understand all three points of view. My mind can say it isn't possible but yet another part of me, my heart or my soul says something different. Greater minds than mine have believed this story and so I will go with them.

This event of the resurrection of Jesus triggered a movement that has encircled the earth. There are now about two billion Christians, one-third of the population that believes in the resurrection. King Agrippa, when he met the apostle Paul said, "So you are one of those who is turning the world upside down with your teaching." Ordinary people like you and me told the story. People like the fishermen Peter, Andrew, James, John and Levi or Matthew the tax collector. They told the story with passion and courage regardless of the cost.

But they weren't just telling a story of a man brought back to life. They were telling of an act of God that resets the world and how it operates. God came into the world as a human being, born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, baptized in the Jordan River.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus comes to people saying that the Kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the good news. God has come to people that thought God didn't care for them. In Mark's gospel, Jesus heals the sick, restored sight and hearing; he casts out demons and defeats the forces that are against God and what God wants. Matthew goes back into the Old Testament to show how God had been planning this event of Jesus for centuries and that Jesus was the savior God had promised. Luke records Jesus' first sermon in his home town of Nazareth where Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me preach good news to the poor, the oppressed, the afflicted, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, freedom to those in prison and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." John takes a more philosophical and ethereal way, telling us that the Word, that is God and has always existed became flesh and lived among us. He has changed the foundations of the world and declared that He is the way, the truth and the life.

That's quite a feat. If this world can exist with its infinite variety, of little insects that I come across and wonder what they do, and fish living 30,000 feet below at the bottom of the sea, with cells that can recover from a cut and hearts than be transplanted and men being sent to the moon—then God can intervene in the world in the person of Jesus. Then Jesus can come as the presence of God. In Jesus, we then hear what God wants from the horse's mouth.

Jesus is causing a disturbance in the force. For Star War followers, it was said, "There is a disturbance in the force." That was not good. But Jesus as a disturbance of the force is for good: those of power that want to keep it for themselves will be disturbed; those who want to live off the lives of others will be disturbed. These people and powers fought and will fight against Jesus. But the resurrection of Jesus is a message to these powers: "You will get yours!"

A Swedish theologian and pastor named Gustav Aulen described the resurrection this way: There is a door that would open and a person would go through it. The door would close and although there might be crying and shouting and shaking of the door, it never opened. One Friday, a man named Jesus walked through that doorway. The powers behind that door shouted in joy, "We got him, we got Jesus, we got God, we are in control, we have the power now." But on Sunday morning the door flew open, twisted and warped and Jesus walked back through it. The resurrection of Jesus was God's decision, God wins. The door still opens and people walk through it. It doesn't close as tight as it did. And Jesus tells us that we who believe in him, though we die, it will not hold us either.

A seminary professor, Terrance Fretheim would get letters from people disagreeing with him. I asked him how he handled them. He said, I try to build a better house next door and hope they move in. Jesus stopped Saul or Paul on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians with a blinding light and said, "Saul, why are you kicking against me?" Out of that encounter Saul moved into a better house. He left the laws and works to show how good he was to the forgiveness of Jesus. Augustine, around 300 AD was living a decadent and lawless life. His mother kept praying that he would become a Christian and he did. He went on to be one of the great theologians of the Christian church. He said, "Our hearts are made for thee O Lord and they shall not rest until they rest in thee." He moved into a better house. John Newton, a slave ship captain came to a point in his life and realized what he was doing. He repented, moved into a new house of Jesus and wrote the hymn, "Amazing Grace". A new house given by Jesus, how sweet the sound of grace that saved a wretch like him.

Capital One credit card asks what's in your wallet. Today we ask, what's in your heart, your soul? Who is there? The reason Christianity has lasted 2,000 years is because Jesus appeared to the women in our lesson, to the disciples and to others. He changed lives. He is not an idea, a concept. His disciples were not traveling salesmen. They told people that Jesus changes lives. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. Let me in and I will change your life. I will bring you back to the love of God your heavenly Father. For us who feel like the prodigal son, who went away, wasted our life and can only hope to be a servant, there is good news. The father was waiting for the son to return and brushed aside the son's plea to be just a servant, knowing he has disgraced himself. The father opened his arms, welcomed him home and gave him a new life. Jesus tells us of the waiting father.

The writer of the 34<sup>th</sup> Psalm said of a person, "This man prayed to God and God helped him.

Some here today will go home brushing off this Jesus, keeping him at a distance. Some will think, maybe Jesus can make a difference. Some will say, I love to hear the story of Jesus, because I know it's true. And some may say, "I want my life to be different, maybe I will take a step forward to Jesus." Amen