

Luke 24:1-12  
Easter 2019

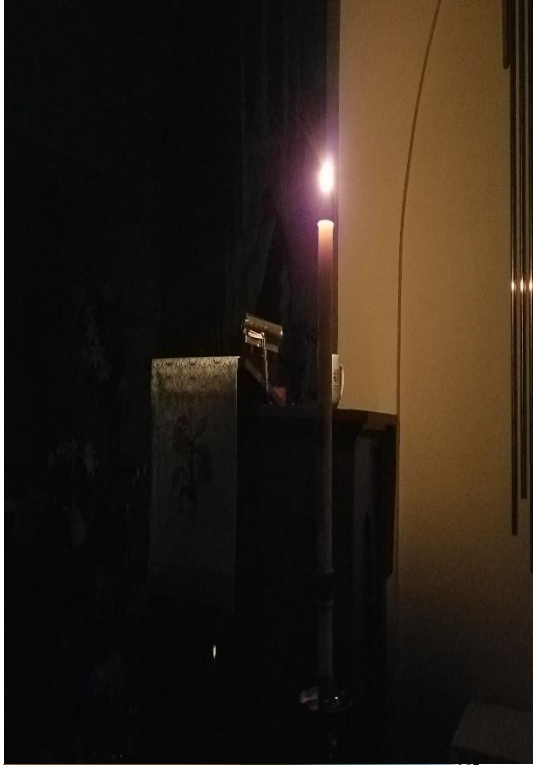
Grace and peace to you from God our Creator, and from the risen Christ! Amen.

Gone are the shadows cast against the barren and bloodied ground of Golgotha - shadows of 3 crosses strung amidst the somber hue of a setting sun slowly fading away bringing with it the darkness of night. Gone are the cries of agony and the stench of death encompassing them like a sheet of fog. Evening has given way to morning and the women head for the tomb His body was laid in. The air is cool on their faces. On the horizon they see the soft hues of yellow and orange signaling the rising of the sun but even in the morning dawn you can still see it on their faces. The tears are no more but their eyes reveal the heartache and pain of that fateful night. They arrive, fragrant spices in hand, to anoint His tattered and torn lifeless body. Suddenly, their eyes open wide with a hint of wonder and fear. What has happened? Why is the stone rolled from His tomb? They peer into the darkness of the cold tomb and enter unsure of what they might find. Step-by-step they hold onto one another. The rising sun has sprung forth just enough light to reveal His body is gone. Before they even have time to think about what this means their eyes are blinded by what seems to be a flash of lightning. The darkness is cast out by the most radiant and dazzling light they have ever seen and there in front of them stands the appearance of 2 messengers of God who say, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Their minds retrace their time with Him, going through the catalogue of sayings He shared while He was still alive, and suddenly they remember. Without a second to waste, they scurry from the dark, empty tomb into the majestic beauty of the new dawn. They throw open the door of the house where His eleven disciples had been huddled together since that fateful night. The light of the new day burst into the dark room. The men turn and look and hear the news the women greet them with, "He is risen!" Most of them laugh in amusement and turn away. Yet, Peter needs to see it for himself, bolts out the door, and heads for the tomb where he finds nothing but the linen cloths, they had wrapped Him in.

We gather this morning not amidst the black cloth wrapped around the cross Friday night or the darkness as the last candle on the altar that was snuffed out. We gather not amid the somber stillness and silence of death. No, on this day we gather, as people of the resurrection, in the dawn of a new day the Lord has created with our shouts of "Alleluia" (i.e. "Praise God") for our eyes too are once again open to the good news - God's way of life is greater the enemy's ways that lead to death. We, too, have been called to hear the same message as the women did at His empty tomb, "He is not here, but has risen."

These 7 words change everything.

I placed a post on the church's Facebook site earlier this morning along with three pictures. As is customary on Sunday morning, I made my way to this space in the darkness of the night (4:30). As I opened the doors from the handicap ramp that leads into the worship space signs of the resurrection immediately hit me. The fragrant smell of the flowers that adorn our worship space filled my nostrils and awakened my senses to the abundance and goodness of God. With the flashlight on my phone guiding my way to the front of the nave, I lit the Easter Candle, turned off my flashlight and sat alone in the front pew. (Yes, it is OK and quite appropriate for Lutheran's to sit in the front pew.) And, then the power of the resurrection that changed everything struck me again. Light cut through the darkness opening my eyes to see behind it the wooden cross, which just hours ago had been draped in black was now adorned with white and yellow flowers and the lilies had been placed around it upon the altar railing. Death has indeed given way to new life. Darkness has given way to the light of Christ. Resurrection hope abounds!



(This picture didn't show it well, but the cross and flowers were clearly visible by the candle light. The picture to the right is with the lights in the worship space on.)

Christ's resurrection has changed everything. Life wins. Love prevails. The eternal light of the risen Christ will forever shine amid even the darkest of seasons in our lives and in our world.

Many of us watched, along with the world, this past Monday as flames engulfed the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris doing extensive damage to a structure began in 1160. Tuesday morning, Pope Francis tweeted, "Today we unite in prayer with the people of France, as we wait for the sorrow inflicted by the serious damage to be transformed into hope with reconstruction." I also came across a quote by Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, who said, "This Holy Week teaches us that, like Jesus, death brings life. Today's dying, we trust, will bring rising."

This is the message the church is called to proclaim because of the resurrection that changed everything. God's faithfulness in continually coming to the aid and extinguishing the flames that wreak havoc in our world and in our lives transforming them into new life and hope. The glory of God will shine through and the miracle of the empty tomb of Easter morning will have the final say.

At times it is difficult to see the new life brought about through Christ's death and resurrection. At times our eyes too become clouded by the darkness of night. At times our senses aren't attune to the sweet aromas of God's goodness and abundance. While each Sunday the church gathers is a "mini Easter" (I believe Martin Luther said this), it is all too easy to get in a rut and struggle to remember just how glorious and life-changing this day is. Christ is alive and He is on the move. In the world. In our lives. In His church. His resurrection truly has the power yet today to change everything. And so, we too often need to be reminded that He has been risen such as this one shared with me and other members of the outside council of the Free *Indeed* congregation located within the heavily fortified stone walls of the Anamosa State Penitentiary by Pastor Jerry Collell. It is a story of resurrection hope. New life in a place in which many would think none could be found. He told of the recent baptism of 4 men and the affirmation of baptism of 6 others. He then went on to tell of how one of these newly baptized men who was in his early 30's had come to church for the first time in his life because his 3-year-old daughter had recently gone to church for the first time. Like the women at the tomb, this young girl, had given witness to her father of

the resurrection and love of Christ that had taken root in her heart. Through her testimony the Spirit worked to bring transformation to her father in prison. Pastor Collell states he has “grabbed onto God, the Bible, and Jesus” even after he told Pastor Collell many times there “ain’t no way” he’s coming to church or believing in the good news of Jesus Christ. Yet, now he reads from a Children’s Bible to his daughters when they come to visit.

Praise and thanks be to God! Let us go forth, with the risen Jesus, those faithful women at the tomb that first Easter, and this young daughter to proclaim to the world that, “He is not here, but has risen.”

These 7 words change everything. Alleluia!