

“CHRIST IS RISEN! ...SO WHAT?”

VA Synod Video Sermon Series
17 April 2022

Luke 24: 1-12
Easter Morning C

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

I am Bishop Bob Humphrey. I bring greetings from your siblings in Christ in the VA Synod and ELCA. Our denomination says, “We are church together!” In the Virginia Synod we are lifting up the ways God has been FAITHFUL+BOLD+SERVING and calls us to be and do the same!

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Let us pray... *Lord, grant that your word is proclaimed in truth and received with joy! Amen.*

I am always struck by the way Easter morning and Christmas Eve offer the preacher the biggest congregations of the year. And, not only that, the most varied. I mean, let’s be honest. Some of us are in worship today because this is the highest festival of the church year and we wouldn’t think of being anywhere else! While some of us are here because, well... because someone else made us come! Am I right?

The old joke is about the man who greeted the preacher at the door after worship on Easter and said, “You know, I wish you would find some new material... Every time I’m here you are either talking about a baby born in a manger or a man who was raised from the dead.” All kidding aside, there are many reasons we are here today. And, if I’m right, what is the preacher supposed to say to such a varied group of listeners, some who believe deeply and some who do not believe at all?

Today we will pray the liturgy of Holy Communion together and at a pivotal place the presider will read, “...we proclaim the mystery of faith,” to which many will respond, *Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.* Does that sound familiar? Do you ever think, “So what?” *Christ is risen!* What does it really mean for my life, for our community of faith, for our world?

Let’s start here: what concerns did you bring with you today? Personal concerns about health, wealth, faith, family, relationships, school, work... Concerns about our congregation, synod and denomination... Concerns about our community, Commonwealth and nation... about all our hidden identities, or our all too visible, prejudices and injustices. Concerns about a global pandemic that never seems to end, a cruel war in Ukraine, millions suffering from malnutrition, hunger, homelessness and hopelessness both here and around the world; partisan politics that we won’t dare talk about over Easter lunch, and more! *Christ is risen!* So what? What does that mean for our life, our church, our community and world? Well... I think it means EVERYTHING!

St. Paul wrote, *If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied...* and later proclaims, *all will be made alive in Christ. ALL will be made alive...* (1Cor.15:19 NRSV) Isaiah quotes God saying, *no more shall the sound of weeping be heard...or the cry of distress. No more shall there be an infant that lives but a few days or an old person who does not live out a lifetime.* (Is.65:19-20 NRSV) The psalmist sings, *I shall not die, but I shall live and recount the deeds of the Lord.* (Ps.118:17 NRSV). How wonderful, right?

In the Gospel according to John we read of Mary Magdalene who went alone to the tomb and met the resurrected Jesus she did not expect or at first, even recognize until he called her by name. Later, Jesus broke through the disciple’s fearfulness and said three times, (including to one who doubted), *Peace be with you.* (Jn.20:11-29) In the Gospel according to Luke the heavenly messengers ask the women, *Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.* (Lk.24:5 NRSV) *Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again...* So what?

So... If this story is true, and I know it is!...If this story is true, then the story may be *about* Jesus, but the amazing Good News of the story is for all of us! Because, now we can apply this

liturgical formula to our life and all of our deepest concerns about ourselves, our loved ones and our world. *Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.*

Yes. Much in and around us has died or is dying. (We can return to all those concerns we brought with us, right?) But, God promises that *ALL will be made alive*. God promises that Christ will come again. So, we can say, like those faithful women outside the tomb, with deep sadness that our loved one has died; that we are mired in grief, distress and sin about too many things... and we cannot free ourselves. And then, with the very next breath... we can proclaim with real hope, like they carried back to the disciples, that all – including us – like Christ, will be made alive – even if what dies returns to life in a way we do not expect or even recognize at first.

COVID-19 will change and even kill many things in our life and people we love; our friendships and other relationships will change; our sense of security may wane; our communities and ways of life will decay; in many ways our church is changing, even dying; many believe our planet is dying; and sometimes our hope and faith dies too. And finally, as my grandmother used to say, “While the Lord tarries...” we too, will one day die. (Remember how we began Lent on Ash Wednesday? “You are dust and to dust you shall return.”) It’s all true. And, we know it. Our faith does not protect us from death. So what does Easter mean? What does Easter mean for us?

It means what is dead will be resurrected – even if it is in ways we don’t expect or recognize. The Good News of Jesus applies to us; our relationships; security; society; church; and world. We will ALL be made alive again by the creative and redeeming power of God through Jesus. Our hope is not for this life only – but neither will we have to wait for heaven to enjoy *a foretaste of the feast to come*. Resurrection is happening right here and now. We need not be distressed forever! Death does not have the final word. The God of all creation does! For this is true as well..., *Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again*. God has us! We are never alone...

Listen, beloved... Christ is calling you by name, (Say your name to yourself or aloud)... *Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!* PEACE be with you... Peace be WITH you... Peace be with YOU!

Rejoice! Again, I say, REJOICE! In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen!

Bishop Robert F. Humphrey + Virginia Synod, ELCA