

Baptisms

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I am one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church. For nearly two thousand years, the Christian church has gathered to celebrate the anniversary of Jesus' death and resurrection—this story has stood the test of time. In fact, just this past week, a friend send me the link to a Washington Post blog that tells the story of Jesus' arrest and subsequent death, but the author tells the story as it might be reported in a newspaper today. She writes,

“The gentleman arrested Thursday, and tried before Pontius Pilate, had a troubled background.

Born, possibly out of wedlock?, in a stable, this jobless thirty-something of Middle Eastern origin had had previous run-ins with local authorities for disturbing the peace, and had become increasingly associated with the members of a fringe religious group. He spent the majority of his time in the company of sex workers and criminals.

He had had prior run-ins with local authorities—most notably, an incident of vandalism in a community centre when he wrecked the tables of several licensed money-lenders and bird-sellers. He...used violent language, too, claiming that he could destroy [the community centre] and rebuild it.

At the time of his arrest, he had not held a fixed residence for years. Instead, he led an itinerant lifestyle, [surfing the couches of friends]

and advocating the redistribution of wealth. He had come to the attention of the authorities more than once for his unauthorized distribution of food, and disruptive public behaviour...

Some say that his brutal punishment at the hands of the State was out of proportion and unrelated to any of these incidents in his record. But after all, he was no angel.”¹

Nearly two thousand years after the events in question, people continue to ask: *Who was Jesus, and why did He die?* The first Christians—those who were eye-witnesses—tell us that something incredible took place on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. All morning we have heard prayers, songs, and testimonies centering on Jesus—I want to take the next few minutes to speak about a word that is central to His story: *resurrection*.

illus: I went through some old files this week that caused me to reflect on how I spend my time as a pastor. In 20 years of pastoral work, I have attended—or led—thousands of meetings, I have met with and listened to thousands of people share their personal stories, I have taught or preached hundreds of times, but the number that grabbed my attention this week was the number 31.

On 31 different occasions I've sat in a living room with tear-stained families who have lost a loved one to death. I have officiated 31 funerals. 31 times I've stood by a graveside and spoken about life, death, and *resurrection*.

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/compost/wp/2017/04/12/crucified-man-had-prior-run-in-with-authorities/?utm_term=.e65ba5208d42

In the Summer of 1997, I was 24 years old; I had been hired by a church in Calgary and began my first pastoral role. Shortly after joining the church I met a guy named Doug and we became friends. I was 24 and Doug was 78: he was full of life, always smiling, telling jokes, always thankful—he was a joy to be around.

When Doug learned that I had played a lot of tennis in my teen age years, he challenged me to a game; over the next few years, I ended up getting to know a number of Doug’s tennis partners, but the one who stood out was Reg. The first time I played with Reg, he was in his early 90’s; his mobility wasn’t great but he had a beautiful stroke and if the ball was hit anywhere near him, he could do some damage. Reg was not a follower of Jesus, but for two decades Doug had been praying for him. Nearly every time I saw Doug, he would ask me to pray that Reg would come to know just how much God loved him.

I left Calgary in 2006 and about a year later I received a phone call from one of my former colleagues, Ray, to give me an update on Reg. Reg had recently turned 100 and they threw a big party for him at the church; not long after, Reg made an appointment to sit down with Ray.

When they got together, Reg began the conversation saying, “*Ray, I think it’s time to make the decision to follow Jesus; I’m not as young as I used to be, and I’m not sure how many years I have left.*” After talking for a few more minutes, Ray offered to lead Reg through a prayer of confession and commitment—a confession of faith in Jesus’ saving work, and a commitment to follow Jesus.

Ray would pray a line, and then Reg would repeat after him. “*Father in Heaven, thank you that you love me; thank you for sending Jesus; I believe that Jesus died so that I could be reconciled to You; thank you for forgiving the wrongs I’ve committed against You and against others; I believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead.*”

It was at that point in the prayer that Reg stopped praying, grabbed Ray’s arm, and said: “*Do I have to believe that Jesus rose from the dead?*” When Ray assured Reg that the resurrection was a pretty important part of the equation, Reg continued without hesitation: “*Jesus, I believe you died and rose from the dead.*”

Ray wasn’t wrong—everything rises and falls with the *resurrection*. Without the resurrection, Jesus’ death was nothing more than the tragic demise of a misguided revolutionary. Thousands of years before Jesus, a man by the name of Job posed a question that has been repeated many times, by many people, throughout history: “*Can the dead live again?*” This one of life’s most important questions because life is our most precious commodity.

Christianity isn’t primarily a moral philosophy, a set of rules, or one spiritual pathway among many—it’s something much more. At the heart of Christianity is a good-news-story, based on events that happened in history, that have brought about life-altering, world-changing, consequences.² Jesus was crucified on a Friday, but on Sunday He was raised from the dead.

² N.T. Wright, *Paul For Everyone: 1 Corinthians*, 206.

In 1 Corinthians 15:17-19 the Apostle Paul writes, “*if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. 18 In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! 19 And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.*”

If Jesus has not been raised, death remains our mortal enemy. If Jesus has not been raised, death has not been defeated and sin has not been forgiven. If Jesus has not been raised, we will not be raised either—in which case there is no hope beyond this life.

“*But,*” Paul continues, “*Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died. 21 So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. 22 Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. 23 But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.*”

Jesus was arrested, tried, convicted, and crucified as a messianic pretender. Jesus claimed to be God the Son, sent as a man, to reconcile humanity to God, to forgive sin, and to break the power of sin and death. Those who opposed Jesus sent Him to His death, thinking that would be the end of Him and His claims—they couldn’t have been more wrong.

When Christians speak about hope, it’s not to be confused with

wishful thinking or blind optimism; Christian hope is centred upon a Person—Jesus was crucified on a Friday, but on Sunday He was raised from the dead.

Our world, our relationships, and even our own bodies, are marked by corruption and decay. Since the time of Adam and Eve, death has been our enemy. But if Jesus has been raised, the power of the grave has been broken. When a loved one dies, we are tempted to think that death has the final word in life. But when we put our hope in Jesus, we align ourselves with the One who has tasted death for all, the One who has been raised from death to life—His resurrection points forward to our own.

The great English poet, John Donne, once wrote, “*Death be not proud, though some have called thee mighty and dreadful, thou art not so...One short sleep past, and we wake eternally, and death shall be no more.*”

This is the Christian hope. It can be yours as well. Jesus once said, “*You don't have to wait for the End. I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live.*”³

Going to heaven when we die is not the Bible’s vision of our ultimate future; the vision is much larger. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God has made a way for the healing of the world; one day war, famine, disease will be no more. When we put our hope in Jesus, we are not promised a way around pain, but hope does give us a way through.

³ John 11:25-26, *The Message*.

God's vision has not been fully realized, but it has already begun in those who put their faith in Jesus. His power over sin and death means that even now He can remake our lives—His strength and compassion meets us in our addictions, our compulsions, our anxieties, and fears as we follow Him. Because of Jesus, we are forgiven, reconciled, and set free.

Because of His death and resurrection, we have access to God—we are welcomed as daughters and sons. Already, in Christ, peace, joy, and love are available. We live in the joyful anticipation of the Lord's goodness—today, tomorrow, and forever.

Jesus stepped into our world, He took on our humanity, He bore our sin, He embraced death, and three days later was raised to life. Job asked, "*Can the dead live again?*" In Jesus, we hear God's resounding "**Yes!**" *Resurrection* might be the most important word we'll ever hear; my prayer is that each one of us will know the power of His resurrection at work in us, bringing new life.

Prayer

Worship

Benediction