

## The Power Of The Resurrection.

Text: 1 Cor 15:3-5

1) Understanding The Past

Suggested Hymns:

2) Purpose In The Present

502, 91, 97, 289, 103

3) Hope For The Future

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, <sup>3</sup> *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that He was seen by Cephias, then by the twelve.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we are continuing our series on the Nicene Creed. Today is part 6 and we are focusing on the words, *The third day He rose again according to the Scriptures.*

*"The third day."* That is today, Sunday. Now, why did the early Christians choose this day of the week for their public worship? Why didn't they retain the Jewish Sabbath?

After all, they were bound up in many ways with the Old Testament church, which worshiped on Saturday. Or why didn't they choose Friday, the day that Christ died? We know that Paul said he was determined to know nothing among his converts *except Christ and Him crucified.* But the Christians did not choose either of these days.

The reason is that they realised there would be no Christianity without the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But Jesus Christ did rise. They confessed it, and so do we. We do so again today as we consider *The Power of the Resurrection.*

Christ's rising again is the master key that unlocks the door for us to understand the past, to see purpose in the present, and to find hope for the future. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### 1. Understanding The Past

*"He is risen."*<sup>1</sup> This is the witness of all four of the gospel writers. This is the climactic event to which they all witness.

Christ is not in the tomb. He is risen. The women who came to the tomb on Easter morning declared the resurrection of Christ. The disciples who followed them had their scepticism changed to conviction by the resurrection. The eleven who were locked in the Upper Room were transformed by it, from fearful men to faithful followers.

Thomas, who demanded empirical proof, received it as he touched the risen Lord and had his doubt converted to conviction. And as if this were not enough, there was the witness of more than five hundred brethren who had seen the risen Lord at the same time, some of whom were living and could testify to the truth of Paul's proclamation. Looking at the New Testament we could say, *"He rose again according to the Scriptures."* ***He is risen! The Lord is risen indeed!***<sup>2</sup>

However, it was St. Paul who first said that *"the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures."* Now the phrase takes on an entirely different meaning, for the Scriptures to which Paul was referring were undoubtedly not the New Testament accounts of the resurrection, but rather they were the Old Testament sacred writings that were so well known in his day.

The phrase *the third day* is important. Remember Matthew 12:40, <sup>40</sup> *"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*

What Paul is saying by his statement was that the resurrection of Jesus unlocks the meaning of everything God had been doing in the past in the history of the world.

It was this same sort of proclamation that convinced the two disciples walking along the dusty road to Emmaus on the first Easter. As they considered all that had happened — the capture, the trial, and the crucifixion of their Master and Teacher — they expressed their despair.

It was then that the Stranger who had met them on the road, Jesus Himself, said, as we read in Luke 24:25-27, ***“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> “Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” <sup>27</sup> And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.***

The refrain comes out loud and clear in the later witness of the first apostles. John speaks of what ***“God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets,”<sup>3</sup>*** and what ***“all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days.”<sup>4</sup>*** Coming to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, Peter witnessed to the risen Christ, to whom ***“all the prophets witness.”<sup>5</sup>*** And Paul wrote in our text, ***that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.***

The resurrection of Christ has the power to give us understanding of the past. There is no doubt about it. As they lived their lives from day to day, the Children of Israel wandering in the wilderness, Joseph imprisoned as the result of his brothers’ treachery, and all the others whose lives made up the story of the Old Testament wondered just what God was up to.

What was the meaning of the rise and fall of all the kingdoms, the changing fortunes of Israel, captivity and conquest and captivity again? Peter says that ***of this Salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, <sup>11</sup>***

*searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.*<sup>6</sup>

They knew God had a plan. But the way He was operating did not make much sense. It did not, that is, until *the third day Christ rose again according to the Scriptures*. Then it became clear that in everything He did, God was acting for their benefit. God was totally involved in all their activity, directing it toward solving the dilemma in which they found themselves, the dilemma of sin with all its accompanying results of sickness and poverty, despair and disillusionment and death. God knew what He was doing even though they could not see it at the time.

At times we cannot see it either. Looking back on the history of the world, even reading an account like that given to us in the Scriptures, we cannot fathom God's action. One event follows another, and the activity becomes history. The frustrating thing is that it simply seems to happen over and over again without rhyme or reason.

We cannot see what God is up to. We cannot, that is, when we forget that the Christ is the Christ for us and that *"the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures"* for us. But when we see it and remember it, then we see Him as Lord — not the victim of the events of history, but the Lord of the events of history. He is the Lord for us who are the creatures of history with all its frustration and apparent meaninglessness.

An old device is occasionally used to entice people into buying things. The cereal companies sometimes use it. It consists of a rather meaningless drawing or a picture with hidden figures in it. The challenge is to find the meaning of the drawing or to locate the hidden figures. The trick is that the only way it can be done is by using a glass that comes in the box. When you use it, the picture makes sense, and the hidden figures can be located at once.

Something like this is what happened and what happens for us as we remember and confess that *“the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures.”* The resurrection of Jesus Christ makes sense of the past.

## **2. Purpose In The Present**

But more than that, the resurrection of Christ gives purpose to life in the present. When they understood that *“the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures,”* the mood of the disciples changed dramatically. From fearful and frustrated disciples they were transformed into jubilant giants of witness who turned the world upside down.

You may be familiar with a setting of the liturgy known as the Twentieth-Century Mass. In the portion of the service that includes the Nicene Creed, the change of mood is brought out dramatically by the music. As it speaks of the work of Christ beginning with His birth on through to *“He suffered and was buried,”* the musical setting becomes more and more sombre.

It is somewhat as St. Paul describes the humiliation of Christ, who was made in the likeness of man, took upon Himself the form of a servant, and humbled Himself unto death, even death on a cross.<sup>7</sup> Then comes that marvellous phrase of our text announced with fanfares and full orchestra that shocks you out of all lethargy, *“The third day He rose again according to the Scriptures.”*

Something like that happened to the first disciples. They were no longer just followers. Now they were witnesses - witnesses to the most wonderful, earth-shaking event that had ever occurred. They had a mission now, and when you have a mission, there is purpose. Life can never again be a boring, frustrating, or unhappy existence. Never, that is, unless you forget that *“the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures.”*

But here is the problem. The phrase and the fact become a Sunday exercise rather than a constant confession. It is so easy to let this happen

as we are caught up in the daily routine, the rat race of trying to maintain a living with some measure of security.

We find ourselves going around in circles, one day blending into the next and indistinguishable from the following. Boredom sets in, and it is not very easy to be happy and optimistic when you are bored. Maybe the reason is that we forget that Jesus rose and that His resurrection gives purpose to life in the present.

Life now is not a matter of things, but it is a mission - a mission involving people — people for whom life and history do not make any sense and who, because it doesn't make sense, are bored and frustrated too.

The mission is to lift them out of their boredom and their frustration by confessing that Jesus rose again and that now life does make sense because it doesn't consist of things — it consists of people.

When you get involved in the problems, hopes, and dreams of people, you can never be bored. Jesus knew it very well, for He said in Matthew 16:25, <sup>25</sup> *“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”* There is joy in losing your life in the mission that gives meaning to all of life. The resurrection of Christ gives your life purpose in the present.

### **3. Hope For The Future**

The resurrection of Christ also gives us hope for the future. Without the power of the resurrection there is no future. We are constantly reminded that everything that has a beginning also has an end. Nature holds no real hope for a person. It only reminds him of the uncertainty of life and anything in it. The day begins, but it also ends. There is spring and summer, but there is also autumn and winter.

There is birth, but there is also death. This is the ultimate reality that constantly confronts every person who stops his busy life long enough to think about it. The end of life is death.

But the resurrection of Christ speaks to us of something else. It assures us that in the midst of life we are not in death, but that in the midst of death we are in life. Because “*the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures,*” it is no longer true for those who believe in Jesus as their Lord, that the end of life is death.

Rather for them the end of death is eternal life. When Christ, in whom all history finds its meaning, entered history as its Lord, He reversed the march of history. It is no longer a movement in a circle, or worse, a march from life to death. It is the exact opposite.

In Jesus there is hope. Not a hope based on some vague wish but a hope based on the certainty that Jesus who experienced death in all its horror and bitterness rose again from death. We do not realise all this fully now. There is much that seems to contradict this hope. Yet the faith which God has given us by His Holy Spirit is the guarantee that it is true.

It is the Holy Spirit who causes us to pray in one of the collects of the church, *Lord God, You have prepared for those who love You good things beyond human understanding: Fill our hearts with love to You, so that we love You above everything else. And give us the good things You have promised, which are more than we can desire.*<sup>8</sup>

The resurrection of Jesus Christ makes all the difference in the world. It gives meaning to everything we do. We are not working for time now, but for eternity. Whatever we do, we can do it with confidence because we know that with our Lord we have already passed from death to life. We can do it with peace, even though life may not seem peaceful, because we know that in Christ we have already won the victory.

It may not appear that we have passed from death to life when there is still so much death in the world. It may not seem that we will be victorious in the struggle of day-to-day living. But such doubt is only for the moment — the moment we forget Jesus who is the Lord of all history.

When we turn our attention to Jesus once again and not to ourselves and the things that obstruct our view of Him, then we know that victory is certain in our lives too since *“the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures.”*

So in conclusion, the power of Jesus’ resurrection gives meaning to our life, for it helps us to understand the past, it gives purpose in the present, and it provides hope for the future. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Matt 28:6, Mark 16:6

<sup>2</sup> Luke 24:34

<sup>3</sup> Acts 3:18

<sup>4</sup> Acts 3:24

<sup>5</sup> Acts 10:43

<sup>6</sup> 1 Pet 1:10-11

<sup>7</sup> Phil. 2:7-8

<sup>8</sup> Collect for Fifth Sunday After Trinity