

Matthew 28:1-15

“He is not here, for he has risen!”

Introduction

Today is Easter (Resurrection Day)! This is a very joyous day in which we celebrate Christ's resurrection from the dead. For the first time in 13 months, we are gathered in the KDDI Hall to worship together! The children also joined us in praising the resurrected Jesus.

Together, let's look at the wonderful things his resurrection has brought to us. Some of you may not be familiar with Christianity, but please listen to God's words to us.

Matthew 28:1-15

¹ Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

² And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.

³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

⁴ And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.

⁵ But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.

⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.”

⁸ So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

¹¹ While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place.

¹² And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers

¹³ and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’

¹⁴ And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.”

¹⁵ So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

Let's look at these verses using three points. The first point is the fear and doubt we have. We will focus on our doubts and fears about the resurrection and life of Jesus. The second point is the *fact* of the resurrection. Let's look at the reports of the resurrection. And the third point is the message of encouragement. We will look at the message of Easter and the encouragement it can be to us as modern people, especially in our first encounter with the risen Jesus.

1. Fears and Doubts

The Bible describes the resurrection of Jesus in a very concise way. The women who went to Jesus' tomb were initially filled with wonder and fear at his resurrection (although they later rejoiced). The ancient people of the first century A.D., like people of today, did not easily believe in the resurrection.

An angel suddenly appeared and spoke softly to the women who were searching for the body of Jesus, telling them not to be afraid. Luke, who wrote another gospel, states that the women were "perplexed." Here in Matthew 28:10, it says that even when they actually saw the resurrected Jesus again, right before their eyes, the women were afraid.

In fact, these two women, both called Mary, were eyewitnesses at the foot of the cross of the entire experience of Jesus' death. They saw the body being taken down from the cross, as well as when and where it was buried by Joseph of Arimathea. This happened just two days before, and it was burned into their minds.

Matthew 27:59-61. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

These women came to the tomb because of their deep respect and love for Jesus. They came to mourn his death by anointing his body with incense according to the Jewish custom. They had faithfully followed Jesus to the very end, to his death on the cross. But, even for these women, the resurrection was totally unexpected. They would not have thought at all about the possibility of Jesus being raised from the dead, even if they were confronted with an empty tomb.

In other words, their fears and doubts prove that the resurrection story is not an idea that came from those who had faith in Jesus. Respect, love and faith in Jesus did not give rise to the strange teaching of "resurrection". The "fear and doubt" that covered their hearts proves it.

What about the disciples of Jesus at this time? We don't see any of the disciples here. They were so afraid that they ran and hid when Jesus was arrested and crucified. Peter was so afraid that he denied even knowing Jesus. Jesus had clearly told his disciples not only about his death on the cross, but also about his resurrection. But, they did not believe. They were disappointed, afraid, and hiding.

Those of you listening now, if you are worried or afraid that there is no light in your life, that there is no hope, then meet the risen Jesus today! Even when you are wandering in the darkness of life, which may feel completely out of your control, the Bible tells us that there is hope through Jesus who rose from the dead.

Paradoxically, if you are feeling frustrated in your life, if you are tormented by anxiety and fear like the women and the disciples, this is your opportunity to gain the resurrection power of Jesus. The best preparation to meet Jesus is to acknowledge your insecurities, fears, unbelief and sins.

2. The Fact of the Resurrection

Let's consider this question: Is the resurrection of Jesus real? Is there any evidence for it? First, the "empty tomb," that is, the absence of Jesus' body, is the most compelling evidence for the resurrection. Death is usually confirmed by an autopsy. Whether by illness or accident, death is confirmed by the presence of the body, which is then placed in the tomb.

But, there is no body of Jesus! The tomb is empty. Could it be that the disciples stole the body in order to fabricate the resurrection of Jesus? According to the Bible, the theft of

the body by the disciples is actually nothing but a fiction fabricated by the Jewish leaders.

Matthew 28:12-14. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, 'Tell people, His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep. 'And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.'

If the opponents of Jesus had found the body in the first place, they would have been able to immediately overturn the theory of Jesus' resurrection. They frantically looked for it, but they were unable to find the body even though it had only been three days since Jesus' death.

Suppose the disciples did steal Jesus' body, hid it, and disposed of it. If so, the next question is this. Many of Jesus' disciples were martyred for proclaiming his resurrection. Did they risk their lives to die for a lie? Will a person really sacrifice one's own life for a lie?

The Watergate scandal is a well known presidential crime. Charles Colson, a special assistant to the president at that time, believed in Jesus before he was convicted and imprisoned, and later founded Prison Fellowship, a prison ministry.

Colson wrote, "I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world—and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible!"

It is also worth noting that the first witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus were women. In ancient societies, women were not allowed to be public witnesses and testify in court. If the resurrection of Jesus was fabricated or was a religious myth invented later, why depict women as the first witnesses? It's not very convincing. If the story was invented to make people believe in Christianity, it would have been men who were the first witnesses. The Bible records women as the first witnesses because the resurrection of Jesus is a fact.

It is also important that the names of those who encountered the resurrected Jesus are recorded. This was so that they could be investigated. Since they were alive, the intention was that those who had doubts about the resurrection of Jesus could question them and their testimony.

Beloved, the resurrection of Christ is a historical fact, and therefore it is our hope and the hope of this world, which is on the verge of death, so to speak—full of sin, fear and anxiety, strife and envy, hostility and hatred.

3. The Message of Encouragement

By the way, did you notice the change in the attitude of the women who came to the tomb? They had not yet met the resurrected Jesus, but when they heard the news of his resurrection, they departed . . . "with fear and great joy," (verse 8). However, I recently had this conversation with a Christian about the resurrection of Jesus.

"The resurrection doesn't really fit into the practical realities of life today. I know historically that Jesus rose from the dead, but I'm not sure how that relates to my life." Many people may feel the same way. How is the fact of Jesus' resurrection, the power of his resurrection, and the hope of his resurrection manifested in our daily lives?

The key to unlocking this lies in the process by which the women heard the news of the resurrection, met Jesus, and then shared this news with others. They began to rejoice in spite of their fears, and the resurrection became a real power and hope within them. They actually met Jesus and that was the beginning of a new life.

Essentially, the same thing happens to us today. Christianity is more than a religion, an ideology, a philosophy, or teachings on how to live. If you believe in the resurrection of Jesus, what happens for you is love, repentance and forgiveness of sins, the privilege of being a child of God, fellowship with the triune God, eternal life, trust in and obedience to Jesus, prayer, witnessing and having a testimony to share, and living for the kingdom of God with great joy, hope and passion.

So, like the women, let's hear (read) and ponder the news of Jesus' resurrection as recorded in the Bible. Believe, pray, and encounter Jesus. Share or announce it to someone else. For if this good news remains stagnant in you, its power will be weakened and the meaning of the resurrection will be diminished.

Two of my friends have schizophrenia, yet are living their lives with Jesus. They always remind me of two things: First, that we are not in control even of our own lives; there is much suffering and despair. Second, that we have salvation and hope because of the fact that Jesus died and rose again. One friend emphasized to me, "Fukuda-kun, it is a fact that Jesus died on the cross and rose again. It's a fact that Jesus is alive and loves us." These two friends reflect upon Jesus' resurrection and tell me the news of his resurrection. In this way, we find hope and strength in the fact that Jesus is risen and alive.

The women went to bring the news of Jesus' resurrection to the disciples. On their way back from the tomb (i.e. to bring the news of the resurrection), they met the risen Jesus. In the same way, let's go out to share the news of the resurrection. Let's teach others. Through this process, we will meet our risen Lord. We will be encouraged; we will worship, rejoice, be passionate, and experience the reality of the resurrection.

One specific way to do this is to use the devotional calendar provided by Grace City Church in order to read the Bible, and listen to the gospel every day. Another way is to join a community group and challenge each other to not only share the gospel with one another, but also to pray about how to share it with others around you. You will most certainly meet the risen Christ and experience the power and reality of his resurrection. Do not be afraid! Jesus has risen and is alive today! He will meet us and lead our lives.

Prayer

Heavenly Father. Hallelujah! We praise you for the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Thank you for accomplishing forgiveness for us and giving us eternal life through your death on the cross. We have fears and anxieties, and we need the love and power of the risen Jesus. We humble ourselves before the Lord Jesus. Please lead us by your Spirit. May we follow Him, trusting that the risen Lord is with us, even though we cannot see Him. I pray that everyone will hear the wonderful news of Jesus and that their lives will be transformed. This I pray in Christ's name. Amen.