

Easter Sunday – April 17, 2022, Year C

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 24:1-10

***“Your Bill Has Been Taken Care Of”***

Incredibly, there are some people today – that don't believe in the need for a savior, let alone one who rose from the dead! I try not to get political, but there is one U.S. Senator and Christian Minister has been recorded as saying “the meaning of Easter is more transcendent than the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Whether you are Christian or not, through a commitment to helping others we are able to save ourselves.” I truly have to wonder where this man's faith is – for it certainly is not in Jesus Christ! We cannot – no matter how hard we try – ever save ourselves. God knew that and that is why He sent His Son to go through torture and death – only to be raised from the dead. Praise God that we have the testimonies of eyewitnesses who have seen that Jesus rose from the dead.

I was watching a documentary on the Resurrection on the Science Channel, they showed physical, scientific proof of the earthquake that coincided with Jesus' crucifixion. As many good things that these documentaries bring up, they also share some absurd claims. Many of these claims show a real agnostic attitude and a tremendous lack of faith. These people are called ‘experts’.

Throughout the Gospel of Luke, Our Lord Jesus spoke of His Resurrection, including two of His greatest parables, which ended with references to coming back from the dead. In the parable of the Prodigal Son – the father rejoices because his son “*was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.*” (Luke 15:32) The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus ends with these words: “*If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.*” (Luke 16:31) But ironically nobody ‘heard’ what Jesus was saying. They were puzzled, and I guess understandably so. ‘Resurrection’ in the first century Jewish world, was what God would do in the end for all of the righteous dead, giving new bodies to everyone, from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob down to the most recent righteous martyrs. Though people could speak of a prophet like Elijah or John the Baptist returning from the dead – I think what they probably meant was that someone would come who seemed to have the same spirit, as well as the same fiery prophecy.

Consider the event recorded in John 11 when Jesus' friend Martha came to meet Jesus when her brother Lazarus had died. “*Lord, Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brothers would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord.” She told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.*” (John 11:21-27) The word Christ was not Jesus' last name. The word ‘Christ’ is a Greek word for Messiah – ‘Christos’, there is also a similar word in Hebrew – ‘Meshiach.’ So whenever you hear Jesus Christ it is really Jesus Messiah. So what she said was in essence ‘I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God who was to come into the world.’ They believed that after Israel's

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great and final suffering, all of God's people would be given new life, and new bodies. Can you just imagine their surprise and astonishment on that first Easter morning? It wasn't simply a lack of faith that prevented them from understanding what Jesus had said about His rising again. It was just that nobody ever dreamed that one single living person could be killed, and then be raised to a new sort of bodily life – while rest of the world continued living their lives.

The women who went to the tomb that Sunday morning certainly weren't expecting what they found. They were bringing the spices to dress the body, but what they saw was opposed to what they knew – they knew that people remained dead!

The Resurrection is recorded in each of the four Gospels – and when you read those accounts you realize that Jesus did not roll away the stone - but it was supernaturally rolled away – whether it was the angels or God's hand, the fact remains that Jesus triumphantly emerged from that borrowed tomb. It belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. The stone was moved so that the witnesses who saw it could report that the tomb was empty.

The mood of that first Easter Morning was one of surprise, astonishment, fear – and probably a whole lot of confusion. The Apostles were probably remembering that Jesus did say something like this would occur; He told us so, but they still don't know what really is going on, what it all meant, and what would happen next. They would find out truly on the Day of Pentecost.

Many people look upon the season of Lent as a drudgery – and they can't wait for it to be over. Many are thinking about the chocolate, and they really miss those "alleluias!" Holy week is a necessity because we need to be reminded of the tremendous price that Jesus paid – and to always remember that He did it willingly. Miraculously, Jesus walked out of the tomb – alive again! To Satan's surprise and dismay – he may have thought he won the battle on Good Friday - but lost it all on Easter Sunday. Folks, your bill has been taken care of!

From the beginning, the Gospel is good news of Jesus Christ, because it dares to tell us things we didn't expect, weren't inclined to believe in the first place and possibly couldn't understand. The truth is that Jesus of Nazareth paid the price that was owed by each of our sins. He paid the ransom in our place to free us from the ravages of sin and death, and He did it willingly. I pray that today more, and more people will come to the realization that this was personal – your name was on His mind, the name of all believers – and if you are thinking – well how could that be – remember who He is – He is God, and we should not put Him in a box or some sort of little container – He is bigger than we can ever imagine! Again, your bill has been taken care of. Have you ever gone into a restaurant and find out that someone paid your bill ahead of you? Just to treat you? If that has ever happened – well, we had it happen in a different sense. When we were in seminary, we pulled up to a toll booth to pay our toll on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and we were told that the person ahead of us paid our toll. So you know what we did? We paid the toll for the person behind us. You know, pass it on. I pray people would see Jesus as the Christ – the Messiah, and you would all invite Him into their hearts. I know that there are a lot of people who are here because you are believers, but there are a lot of people who are on-line who might be

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on the fence – and if you are - our prayers are that you would find Jesus in your heart today because you have invited Him in.

As we celebrated the Passover Seder on Maundy Thursday here at Saint Andrew's, along with several from Saint Mark's Methodist Church, those who were present witnessed how God used the Passover to repeatedly point toward the sacrifice that Jesus, as the Lamb of God, would withstand for the salvation of all mankind. During the Seder dinner there is a blessing of the unleavened bread – which we know as Matzo. How many people here have ever had a piece of matzo? It is really good with butter. 😊 We did not have it with butter at the Seder. Look at it, or at a picture of matzo – there are stripes on it and there are piercings. It does not have any yeast in it. People have been doing this for thousands of years – and taking three pieces of matzo in a special pouch; one on top, one in the middle, and one on the bottom. The middle piece of the matzo is then take out and broken. This is called the 'afikomen' which means the coming one. One half is then wrapped in linen and then hidden – to later be found by a child who is given a ransom. They are given a reward for finding that middle piece of matzo. Three pieces of matzo, signifying the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The middle one – the Son, is taken and broken with the other half returned to the pouch. For thousands of years this has been done, but has not been seen. I believe that one day God will lift the veil from their eyes. Today, we celebrate the Son, who indeed is living, having ransomed many. People have been celebrating the Passover for thousands of years – but not seeing the reality of Jesus as Savior, the Redeemer, the middle matzo, the Passover Lamb, by whose Blood the world is saved. Our Jewish brothers and sisters celebrate the fact that they sacrificed a perfect lamb, took the blood of the lamb and with a branch of hyssop painted their doorposts – so that the Angel of Death would Passover. They would be saved by the Blood of the Lamb. Today – we celebrate that we are saved by the Blood of the perfect Lamb of God.

Today, Resurrection Sunday – Easter Sunday, is the culmination of the total forgiveness of our sins, when we trust and turn to Jesus as our Redeemer, our Passover Lamb. Today is filled with total forgiveness, with love, with relationship, and with mercy. Mercy means not getting what you deserve. God's mercy is so powerful that it overcomes the huge debt that humanity has rung up, and He pays the bill in our place. The Apostle Paul puts it so clearly for us in Romans 6:23, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" Today, as we celebrate this amazing gift, let us all give thanks for Jesus' sacrifice, His Resurrection, and His promise to come again. Your bill has been taken care of.