

Sermon: Jesus rose from the dead,,,, as so did we
Acts 10:34-43; Col 3:1-4; John 20:1-18
Rev Dr Jos Strengholt

The Lord is risen!
And you who believe in him, you are risen as well.

All things God promised in the Scriptures have come true!
Your sins have been forgiven
and your life is safely hidden in the risen Lord, Jesus Christ!

The Lord is risen!

1 The whole Bible is about the death and resurrection of Jesus

Peter and John did not believe Mary Magdalene who testified to the empty grave. Only when they saw the empty grave and the linen Jesus had been buried in, folded neatly, they believed. Now the matter was clear to them. And after this Jesus appeared many times to them, he ate with them, he talked with them.

Why did the apostles not believe Mary Magdalene when she spoke of the empty grave? Why did they not immediately believe that Jesus had risen from the dead? Let us be forgiving - it was too incredible to believe, even though Jesus had often spoken about it.

But John gives some interesting comment. He tells us in John 20:8-9 that Peter and John only believed the testimony of Mary and the resurrection of Jesus after they had seen the grave with their own eyes. Then John adds, 'for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that Jesus must rise from the dead.'

What John suggests, with hindsight, is that he and Peter should have expected nothing else. They should have understood and believed that Jesus would rise from the dead, for the simple reason that the Holy Scriptures say that the Messiah must die and rise again.

When John writes that they should have believed it because the Scriptures say it, what did he mean with Scriptures? What are 'The Scriptures'?

The Bible? Not really. Actually, only the part that we now called the Old Testament. The Jewish Scriptures, without the Gospels and without the letters of the apostles.

The Bible of the early church was really the Old Testament only. Surely, the earliest churches read the letters of Paul and Peter and John, and they read the Gospels. But do not forget, most of the New Testament was only written 20 or 30 or more years after the resurrection of Jesus.

The Holy Scriptures of the early church was the Old Testament. Why then do we read so little in the Old Testament? That was the Bible of the early church.

Surely, in the very early church, Jesus and his apostles were seen as the right interpreters of the Jewish Scriptures, but it took about 200 years before the church began to call the Gospels and the letters of the New Testament 'Holy Scriptures'.

This is important. It means that it is the Old Testament that predicted the death and resurrection of Jesus. And those predictions came true! Prophecies were fulfilled. What a great proof for the truthfulness of the word of God.

The Old Testament is our Word of God; the Old Testament is the book of the church. Just as much as the New Testament is our book. Read your Bible, study your Bible, and do not neglect the Old Testament. The Old Testament is about our Lord Jesus Christ, as we learn from the apostles.

Even Jesus underlined that our Old Testament is about him. A few days after his resurrection he walked on the road to Emmaus where he met two men who were so sad because Jesus had died. They told Jesus how sad they were; three days before, some of the women had been at the grave and they found it empty; some of the disciples, then went to the grave and they found it empty but they did not see Jesus. So they were confused.

Jesus then tells them, (Luke 24:25-27):

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Jesus used the whole Old Testament and showed how his Gospel - his life, his death, his resurrection, was staring at them from every page.

Not just the New Testament but also the Old Testament is about God's great plans with this world through Jesus Christ.

Maybe this was also the subject of the many talks Jesus had with his disciples after his resurrection, for 40 days Jesus appeared to them and he spoke about the Kingdom of God; would this not in the first place be about how to understand the Jewish Scriptures in the light of the death and resurrection of the Lord?

I think that is what they discussed. Peter, on the day of the resurrection did not understand that the Scriptures speak about the resurrection of Jesus, but only 50 days later, on the day of Pentecost he quoted from many parts of the Old Testament to show that the Messiah was to die and rise again. The risen Jesus himself had opened the eyes of the disciples for the correct understanding of the Old Testament.

We must learn from Jesus and the apostles how to read and to understand the Old Testament - it is the book of the church - it is the book about the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And about his resurrection the early church had no doubt whatsoever; God had made all his promises come true. This was very clear - the one who was as dead as can be, was totally alive again.

They saw it, they ate with him, they spoke with him. This is an amazing miracle and it proves a few things:

1. It confirm all Jesus has said and done. We can trust what Jesus tells us in the Gospels.
2. it proves the power of God over all things - he is even stronger than death.
3. it proves that there is life after death - quite an important thing to know. It is encouraging! or scary as well?

2 He will come to judge

Scary as well, yes. Because there will be judgment. When Peter preaches to the home of the Roman soldier Cornelius, a few years after the resurrection of Jesus, he speaks in plain and simple words to those pagan people.

Peter tells the story of the life of Jesus, how he was murdered, and how those who followed him also saw him alive, "God raised him to appear not to all the people but by us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead."

This is the great message of the church: our Lord, the head of the church, was stronger than death.

And Peter continued, 'God commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that Jesus is appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead.'

There is life after death, and Jesus will judge all people. So... we must prepare. How do we prepare? The basis of our preparation is simple:

"To [Jesus] all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

That is good news! We are assured by the resurrection of Jesus Christ that there is life after death, and we are assured that we receive full forgiveness of all our sins if we believe in Jesus Christ.

He is the judge, and we know what the judge will look at. Do you believe in me? And to anyone who believes in Him, the judge will say, 'not guilty' - your sins have already been forgiven. If you owe 2000 pound to your landlord, and someone else goes to the landlord to pay the 2000 pound, do you still owe the landlord anything? Your debt is gone.

If you believe in Jesus Christ, your debt is gone. Your sins are forgiven. If you believe in him, if you trust in him, then your sins are forgiven. Then all fear of punishment, fear of God, fear of hell, is gone. No more debt, no more condemnation. The judge is our friend, Jesus Christ!

Jesus paid an awful price, he is the one who with his death, paid for our sins. But for us, forgiveness comes free. We have to believe in Jesus Christ.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died and rose again?

3 We died and rose with him

Forgiveness is free. And still, there is a price to pay for us. The apostle Paul speaks about this in his letter to the Colossians.

The few verses we read, Colossians 3:1-4, are packed with deep theology. Again it is about the resurrection of Jesus, but Paul shows that the resurrection of Jesus has amazing impact on you and I.

Peter called it 'forgiveness' when talking to some people who were quite ignorant about the Gospel, but Paul, when he writes to the believers in Colossae, writes to mature Christians and he gives them some deep theology.

What does he tell them? When Jesus died, you died. When he rose, you were raised with him. Also, as Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God, you have to live your life in a manner that belongs to heaven. And when Christ will come again, you will also appear with Him in glory.

All things that happened and will happen to Jesus Christ, have also happened and will also happen to you.

When Jesus died, you died - for sin. You are no longer living for doing your own thing.

When he rose again, you rose again - to live for God, to love him and to love all people.

when he went back to the Father to sit in the throne, you were allowed into the throne hall to always relate to God the Father. God is not far, he is very close to you now.

and when he returns in glory, you will be changed and you will get your glorious eternal new body. All things will be new - you will be a new creation!

Everything that happened to Jesus happens to us. That is the best message in the world! It means your and my life, it is absolutely secure.

When you were baptised and when you put your faith in Jesus Christ - you died and rose with him in a new life. You became so united with Jesus, that you are now hidden in him. And Jesus is hidden in God.

Think of yourself as the small Russian babushka - by faith you have become part of Jesus Christ. You are safely hidden in him. [put doll in other doll]

So your life is absolutely secure. And all things that happen to Jesus Christ, happen to you. His death and resurrection, his ascension, his return in glory, it is yours. You are not a spectator, but a participant.

One day you will rise from the dead, as Jesus did - but because you are already part of him, you already today share in his eternal life. That is why today you are able to talk with God - listen to Him - enjoy the community of God.

With Christ we are also hidden in God. [put doll in next one]

You are in the most secure, safe, blessed position of all people. Your sins are forgiven, you are part of Jesus Christ, hidden in God. The judge of heaven and earth embraces you. All is well! Because you believe in him.

Conclusion

In Holy Communion we celebrate that thanks to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are safely hidden with Christ in God. We anticipate the communion of eternity in our church today.

That communion is real, pure, full of love and forgiveness. All Jesus has promised to us, he has given. All that was promised in the Old Testament, has happened. God donated salvation - by faith alone.

And when we go home, we do this to love and serve the Lord. We died for sin, we rose again into life with God. Let our life be in accordance with Jesus Christ in whom we are so safely hidden. He gave himself for us; let us in response now offer our souls and our bodies as a living sacrifice to him, to our risen Lord.

Amen