

TITLE: "Because Jesus Lives"

TEXT: Matthew 28:1-15 (NT pp. 33-34)

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you."

So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, "You must say, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told among the Jews to this day.

Introduction – Local call

A young man from Trenton, New Jersey, named Troy, decided to write a book about churches around the country. His plan was to begin in San Francisco and work east from there. So, he stopped at a very large church in San Francisco and began taking photographs and making notes. Inside, he saw a golden telephone on the vestibule wall and was intrigued with a sign, which read "Calls: \$10,000 a minute."

Seeking out the pastor, he asked about the phone and the sign. The pastor said that the golden phone was, in fact, a direct line to heaven and if he paid the price he could talk directly to JESUS.

The man thanked the pastor and continued on his way. As he continued to visit churches in Los Angeles, Dallas, Chicago, Milwaukee, and many cities and towns all around the United States, he found more phones, with the same sign, and the same answer from each pastor.

Finally, he arrived here in New York and, as a matter of fact, came right to our church. He asked Carol where our golden phone was and Carol said we didn't have one.

He came to my office and said, "Reverend, I have been in cities and towns all across the country and in each church I have found this golden telephone and have been told it is a direct line to Heaven and that I could talk to JESUS if I paid \$10,000 a minute. You don't even HAVE a golden phone; how come?"

I just smiled at him and said, "Troy, you're at the Dryden Presbyterian Church. We are God's FAMILY. If you want to talk to Jesus, just talk, He's right here."

Most people believe the guard's story that Jesus died and was NOT resurrected. We believe that Jesus WAS resurrected and BECAUSE Jesus was resurrected, Jesus IS alive and, in fact, Jesus is right here right now. And because Jesus lives, we know 3 things:

1. We know that Jesus loves us and is with us every second.
2. We know with Jesus' help we can make the world a better place.
3. We know that we will live with Jesus forever and ever.

1. We know that Jesus loves us and is with us every second

I just began reading a daily devotional titled *Jesus Calling* by Sarah Young. At one point in her life, Sarah believed in God, but there was no personal relationship between her and Jesus. That changed one night in the Alps of Switzerland:

One night I found myself leaving the warmth of our cozy chalet to walk alone in the snowy mountains. I went into a deeply wooded area, feeling vulnerable and awed by the cold, moonlit beauty. The air was crisp and dry, piercing to inhale. Suddenly I felt as if a warm mist enveloped me. I became aware of a lovely Presence, and my involuntary response was to whisper, "Sweet Jesus."

This utterance was totally uncharacteristic of me, and I was shocked to hear myself speaking so tenderly to Jesus. As I pondered this brief communication, I realized it was the response of a converted heart; at that moment, I KNEW I belonged to [Jesus]. This was far more than the intellectual answers for which I'd been searching. This was a relationship with the Creator of the universe.

That didn't mean Sarah's life was easy from that time on. She had her ups and downs and she even survived cancer. But through it all, Jesus was her constant companion. The book she wrote, *Jesus Calling*, are based on conversations she had with Jesus while she was praying. Here's the entry from January 3rd:

Jesus says: "Refresh yourself in the Peace of My Presence. This Peace can be your portion at all times and in all circumstances. Learn to *hide in the secret of My Presence*, even as you carry out your duties in the world. I am both with you and within you. I go before you to open up the way, and I also walk along side you. There could never be a companion as devoted as I am.

My conversion experience was not as emotional as Sarah's. I just said, "Jesus, if you are really here, come into my heart." From that moment on, I began to know that Jesus was with me, that Jesus loved me, that Jesus would help me get through anything I had to face and that I would be with Jesus forever. ...Jesus is here this morning, and Jesus wants each of you know these things too.

2. We know that we can, with Jesus' help, make the world a better place.

Because he lives, we know that we can, with Jesus' help, make the world a better place.

We LOVE our community and we try our best to make DRYDEN a better place. We give about 130 families a month a 3-day supply of food through our Kitchen Cupboard ministry.

We also have a weekend backpack program called WEB. WEB people collect nutritious snacks, put them in plastic snacks, and when the primary school kids are in class on Friday, someone puts them in 40 lockers.

We also have a clothing distribution. If you have good, clean clothing, please consider bringing it here.

This morning you have information about One Great Hour of Sharing in your bulletins. This mission program helps people in need all over the world. After the earthquake, tsunami and radiation leaks in Japan, One Great Hour of Sharing immediately gave \$100,000 to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance to help with rescue and support efforts in Japan. If assistance is needed after the tornadoes in North Carolina, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance will be helping there as well.

Our Youth group, which includes teens from our church and the Methodist church next door, will be hosting a Tea Party and Jewelry Sale May 1st, a week from today, at 3:00 p.m. here in our church. Invitations with RSVPs are on the lectern in the fellowship hall. Proceeds from the Jewelry Sale will go to a charity selected by the teens. While some are taking drugs and causing trouble, our teens are making the world a better place.

If you listen to the news, you know that the world is a mess. We can't solve all the world's problems, but we can, with the help of Jesus, our community, and the world, better places.

3. We know that we will live with Jesus forever and ever

Because Jesus lives, we know that we will live with Jesus forever.

A few weeks ago, the best golfers in the world gathered. Their goal? A green jacket, the green jacket awarded to the winner of The Masters Tournament.

I have played golf a few times. If you saw me play, and were honest with me, you could say, "Dave, you will NEVER, EVER, wear that green jacket." And you would be right! And, if watched any of you adults play golf, I would probably be pretty sure that YOU will never wear that green jacket. The ONLY way you or I will EVER wear that green jacket is if someone else wins it, and GIVES it to us to wear.

The way, the ONLY way you or I will get to heaven is if Someone Else wins our salvation and GIVES it to us. The ONLY One who can do that is Jesus Christ. And that is why Jesus says this to us this morning (John 14:1-6):

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Conclusion – "Acres of Diamonds"

Let me close with a story. It is by Russell Conwell who used this story in a sermon called "Acres of Diamonds." He preached that sermon over 5,000 times, all across the country. Some of the proceeds went to start Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, which is the seminary from which I graduated.

The story is about a wealthy farmer who was one of the richest men in Africa. Hafid owned an extensive tract of land with fertile soil and he had orchards of dates and figs and raised herds of camels, goats and cattle.

One day a wandering holy man visited his farm and told Hafid that huge fortunes were being made by people who found diamonds—and these people attained wealth far greater even than Hafid.

Hafid, eager to increase his wealth, studied all he could about diamonds. He learned that diamonds were often found in the white sands of rivers that flowed out of valleys surrounded by V-shaped mountains.

Then and there, Hafid sold his farm, herds and orchards. He placed his family in the care of someone else and set out to find a fortune in these precious stones. Hafid's search for diamonds took him to the farthest reaches of Africa until, after years of searching, his money was gone. Finally, in deep despair, he threw himself off a mountaintop and died a bitter, broken and poor man.

Meanwhile, the farmer who had bought his farm was watering his camels by the river when he noticed a pretty rock that sparkled at the water's edge. He took it home and put it on his mantle piece where the sun would strike it, sending rainbows shimmering around the room.

One day the same wandering holy man came back to the same farm. He was startled by the sparkling stone and asked if Hafid had returned. The farmer explained that he had bought the farm from Hafid and did not know where he had gone. The holy man examined the rock and said, "This is a DIAMOND! Where did you get it?"

The farmer, somewhat confused by the excitement of the holy man, explained that he had picked it up down by the river. "Show me," said the holy man.

The two of them went to the river, which flowed out from a valley surrounded by V-shaped mountains, and there, in the white sand, they found an even larger diamond, then another ...and another ...and many, many more, large and small.

Actually, the land Hafid sold in order to fund his search, turned out to contain acres and acres of diamonds. In fact, it eventually became the Kimberly Mine, the richest mine in all Africa.

Don't spend your life searching for riches when the most valuable thing in the world is right here, in this room, this morning. What is more valuable than money, silver, gold or diamonds?

Jesus Christ. And Jesus is here this morning because he was resurrected on Easter morning. And...

Because Jesus lives, Jesus loves you and wants to be with you every second;
Because Jesus lives, Jesus wants to help you make the world a better place; and
Because Jesus lives, Jesus wants you to be with Him forever and ever and ever.

Amen.