

He is risen! We love to hear those words. Amen! There is power in those words. Amen! Words. We think words, we hear words, we speak words, we sing words, we write words, and we read words. Words are a big part of our life. Every day. Words are the foundation of our faith in Jesus Christ. At every stage in history God’s words are decisively and sovereignly powerful. The early chapters of the opening scenes of the Bible are replete with God using words to create, order, name, interpret, bless, curse, instruct and warn. God speaks and reality happens. God names and things are identified. When Adam and Eve were created, their first experience with God involved words. He gave them the mandate of their purpose, explains the boundaries of their freedom, and warns them against disobeying his command. When Satan enters the picture, his first action is to speak words that call into question the very words of God. When Adam and Eve rebelled against the only restriction they were given, they express themselves with words of fear and blame. God then interpreted their new fallen world for them and He also spoke the first words of the gospel - promising He would send his Son into the world to save his people and by sacrificing his life in order to crush the head of the enemy of humanity.

And so it’s no coincidence that when God sent his Son into the world that the apostle John called Jesus “*the Word*.” In John chapter 1, he writes: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. . . . The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:1-5; 9-14). Jesus is the Word of God, the power of God, the true light who gives new life to those who put their faith in him.

We see that most clearly in an event in Jesus’s life recorded in John 11. The chapter opens by telling us sisters Mary and Martha, who were good friends of Jesus, sent word to Jesus the news that their brother Lazarus, whom Jesus deeply loved, was mortally ill. This would not have been unusual at this point because Jesus had just performed a number of miraculous healings. Jesus response to their request was to say: “*This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it*” (John 11:4). This again would not have been an unusual response because the disciples had seen and people had heard Jesus heal people from a distance. The disciples themselves had no desire to see Lazarus because Lazarus lived in Bethany, which was two miles from Jerusalem in Judea – and they had just left life-threatening danger there, and they would not have been eager to go back. And so it was probably quite a surprise when in John 11:7 we read that two days later Jesus said to them: “*Let us go to Judea again.*” The disciples questioned why they would do that, saying: “*Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?*” (John 11:8). But in after the conversations that follow, in John 11:14 tells us that Jesus “*told them plainly, ‘Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.’*” And so they went to Bethany, and by the time they got there “*Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days*” (John 11:17). And we read that when, Jesus arrived Martha met him and said: “*‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world’*” (John 11:21-27).

The apostle John then records that Martha's sister Mary makes her way to Jesus and just like Martha, expresses her belief that Lazarus would be alive if Jesus had gotten there earlier. In her grief, she falls to the ground and weeps at Jesus' feet, which causes all who are there to weep also, including Jesus.

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odour, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." John 11:38-44

Here we see Jesus - who is God, who is the Word of God, who created life and all of creation by speaking the Words of God, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us – is the Jesus who spoke the Words of the light of the new life of the soon to be resurrected Jesus into the darkness of the dead body and soul of Lazarus, who had been stone dead for four days. *"He cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out.' The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'"* And the response of the powers that be in Jesus day to this miraculous resurrection from the dead through the Word who became flesh – was to gather together and try and figure out how to get rid of Jesus; *"From that day on they made plans to put him to death. Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews"* (John 11:53-54).

Well, the apostle John tells us that Jesus only kept that low profile for a short time. It was the season of the celebration of the Passover, where God's people would celebrate the time in their history when God sovereignly allowed death to "pass over" God's people, so God could rescue the nation of Israel from their bondage to slavery in Egypt. Jesus would soon enter Jerusalem where he would be met by a *"large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!'"* (John 12:12-14). And as the week went on – Satan and evil and sin and the world and the enemies of God and even those who claimed to be of God – slowly but surely closed in on Jesus, the Son of God, the Promised Savior, the Word who became flesh – until they finally arrested, tried and convicted him in the dark of the night; and then beat, tortured and crucified him on a cross in the light of day; his dead body placed in a tomb before the sun went down. *But* - then God's Word tells us that on the first day of the week after his death, *the tomb was empty*. Jesus had risen from the dead. Amen!

Why were the Jews and chief priests and the Pharisees and leadership council and Caiaphas the high priest and Satan and evil and sin and the world and the enemies of God and those who claimed to be of God *so bent* on putting Jesus to death after he called Lazarus out of a cave of death into the light of life?

Because the resurrection changed everything. The resurrection validated who Jesus claimed to be. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, Jesus would have been just one more in a long line of people who claimed to be God. But when Jesus rose from the dead, then and only then, did it really become clear to the Jews and the chief priests and the Pharisees and leadership council and Caiaphas the high priest and Satan and evil and sin and the world and the enemies of God and those who claimed to be of God - *that Jesus was much more than they thought He was and much more than they wanted Him to be.* When Jesus rose from the dead, people had to ask themselves: "Maybe He is the Son of God? Maybe He is God Himself? Maybe He is the long -promised Savior? Maybe His miracles were real? Maybe He could heal? Maybe He really is bringing in the kingdom of God? Maybe He is the way, the truth, and the life? Maybe He did raise Lazarus from the death? The resurrection changed everything! Amen? Amen!"

The *resurrection* changes *everything*. The resurrection is the heart of our faith in Jesus Christ. When considering if Christianity is true, *it's all about* whether Jesus rose from the dead. The lives of those who are truly following Jesus Christ demonstrate that the resurrection is still changing people. It changes fear into love, despair into joy. It changes anger into forgiveness. It changes pride into humility. The resurrection changes people from being stone cold dead to being totally alive in God. It changes guilty condemnation into a celebration of mercy and freedom. It changes anxiety into a hope that goes beyond the grave. It changes our sinful hearts so we want to follow Jesus. The resurrection is relentlessly killing sin in every true Christian - and when we neglect to emphasize the power of the resurrection, we will then have a meager expectation of the extent to which we can experience a resurrected life of gaining in our battle with sin. The resurrection is not just for the future; the resurrection is ours to live out today!

While this is the day that we specifically celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the truth is - *every Sunday is Resurrection Sunday*. We meet each week, among other things, in order to celebrate the glorious, wondrous fact that Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus's resurrection really did change everything. It was the most powerful divine event in the history of all creation, and it ushered in a new age of the Holy Spirit's activity and power in saving and transforming lives. This is why the resurrection of Jesus is the central story of what we believe. Without the resurrection, there is no Christianity. Or to put it another way, a Christian faith that is not founded on the resurrection of Jesus Christ is nothing more than just another system of ideas and principles to help you get through in life.

The apostle Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 15, as in writing about the resurrection of Jesus he says this in verse 14: "*If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.*" And then later in verse 19 he writes: "*If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.*" Here Paul is declaring to us that that the resurrection of Christ is the most important element in the story of Christian faith. If it turns out that the resurrection is a hoax, then his life's work is useless, faith in Christ is useless, and we who call ourselves Christians are revealed to be the biggest champs that ever existed. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead—if God the Father didn't raise up His son from the dead—then you and I shouldn't be here. All of this is useless. Even worse, we'd all be fools. No one deserves more pity than we do if what we're celebrating here today is just a nice little story.

But Jesus did rise from the dead! Proof of the resurrection is the empty tomb. Proof of the resurrection is the testimony of women who saw Jesus outside the tomb. Proof of the resurrection is that hundreds of people saw Jesus after his resurrection. Proof of the resurrection is how the lives of his disciples were dramatically transformed after he rose from the dead. Proof of the resurrection is the birth and witness of the Christian church. Proof of the resurrection is the conversion of Jesus' half-brother James from a skeptic to a transformational leader in the early church. Proof of the resurrection is the supernatural radical conversion of Saul from a fanatical hater and persecutor of Christians into Paul the greatest defender, missionary, and evangelist the church has ever known. Jesus resurrection *changed everything*.

When the resurrected Jesus speaks His Word into the hearts of fallen human beings, He touches and changes their lives. We see that in three different people right after Jesus resurrection – and so we're going to look at the three different interactions that Jesus with those three people after he rose from the dead. We'll start by looking at how the resurrected Jesus spoke with Mary Magdalene. Mary had a long history with Jesus. Luke 8:2 tells us that Jesus cast seven demons out of her. Mary Magdalene shows up prominently in the last days of Jesus. She is at the cross and at Jesus' burial and is listed as the first witness of the resurrection. The opening of John 20 describes how Mary went to the tomb early in the morning. When she got there she saw that the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty. So she ran back to where the disciples were and told them. Peter and John ran to the tomb to see if that was true. When they got there, they also found the tomb empty and eventually left, but Mary stayed behind. It was then that she broke down in tears. Two angels appear, who asked her why she was crying. She told them that someone had stolen Jesus' body and she didn't know where he was. We then read:

Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). John 20:14-16

Having told the angels that she didn't know where Jesus was, Mary turns around and she sees Jesus standing there – but she doesn't know it is him. The first words Jesus speaks to her is a question: "*Why are you crying?*" The first words Jesus speaks after he has risen from the dead are words of question of concern for someone he cared deeply about. He knows why Mary is crying. He knows what has happened to her in her past life and she knows what she is experiencing now – as she is grieving over Jesus pain, death, burial and now absence from her life. And while Jesus, in being God, knew all that, he asked her anyway - for her sake, not his – that she would know he much he loved and cared for her.

Some of us may be going through some difficult things right now. Some of us here today need to hear Jesus asking you "*why are you crying?*" Some of us need to know that Jesus cares about our pain. He understands because he entered into our pain on the cross, and he cares about what we are experiencing. Jesus wants to know why we are crying. But even more than that, Jesus wants to do something about it. Jesus doesn't just ask Mary why she was crying. The Word who became flesh also speaks the Word of new life into her heart with one simple word of simply saying her name, "*Mary.*"

How do you feel when someone says your name? Have you ever been in a crowded room before with lots of conversation and you hear your name from across the room? We hear our name differently than other words. There is something about hearing our name when it is spoken aloud that calls out to us, that pays attention to us and affirms us and comforts us and settles our hearts. After Mary explained to Jesus that she was crying because someone stole the body of her Lord, he simply said her name: "*Mary.*" In that moment, she recognized him and the painful influence of grief was broken. She realized that he was alive. She realized that he really is who he said he was. She realized that he had defeated death. In a moment, everything came together for Mary, and she joyfully responds to the risen Jesus.

The words of new life that Jesus spoke to Mary were words of love and comfort. She grieved his death, so he loved and comforted her. Some of us need to hear these words today. We need to hear God saying our name. We need to know that He is with us, in the middle of whatever it is we are going through. All of us need to hear these words at some point in our lives. Jesus' first words after the resurrection are words of love and comfort. In 1 Corinthians 8:3 the apostle Paul says: "*If anyone loves God, he is known by God.*" But even greater than knowing God is being known by God. What defines us as Christians is not most profoundly that we have come to know him - but that *he has saved us and made us his own.*

The resurrection of Jesus Christ brings us love and comfort because it points to a brand-new possibility for us. Jesus faced death and came out the other side. He endured incredible pain - but he won! Death could not keep him; Jesus had the last word. Jesus is Lord, not only over life, but over death as well. That means that Jesus, and Jesus alone can bring an end to pain and to death. Consider the fact that Jesus said Mary's name on the other side of death; that means today Jesus is saying our names on the other side of death. The resurrection changes everything in that pain and death will not be the last word in our lives. What we are experiencing now is nothing more than the last-ditch efforts of a dying enemy.

We also see Jesus speaking words of new life into the heart of Thomas. Thomas was with Jesus during his whole ministry. He walked with him. He asked him questions. He followed him for three years. But the night after Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to the disciples, Thomas was missing. The Bible doesn't tell us why he wasn't there, but in knowing he was the skeptical one, one could easily surmise Thomas may have been disillusioned. His most recent conversations with him revealed a stark unbelief.

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” John 20:24-29

We read the first time the disciples got together after the resurrection, Thomas was with them and he expressed his doubts whether they had, “*seen the Lord.*” His words may have indicated he had given up on Jesus but there was just something – or *someone* - that made him come back that night to where the disciples gathered. Some of us here today might have some serious questions about whether this whole Jesus and God thing is real. Or some of us may have been more passionate about your faith in Christ in the past but now we’ve become disappointed and disillusioned with how our lives have turned out. But this morning we are here. There is something, or maybe *someone*, that brought us here - whether it is our family or we wanted to go to church on Easter or some hope that maybe God could renew the faith in Jesus that we once had. But today we are here to sing and to pray and look into God’s Word and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. You and I are all gathered here just as Thomas was gathered with the disciples in a room behind locked doors, just after Jesus had risen from the dead.

Can you imagine what Thomas must have felt when Jesus appeared in the room? Outside of stunning amazement, he was probably hoping that everyone would have forgotten about what he said eight days ago. But Jesus didn’t let Thomas forget. He came right up to him and asked him to do every single thing that Thomas said he would have to do if he was going to believe in Jesus. See the nail marks. Put your finger where the nails were. Put your hand in my side. But Jesus wasn’t bothered by Thomas’ doubts. But he did take Thomas’ doubts seriously. Jesus heard each and every challenge that Thomas had and he responded to them one by one. Jesus gave him exactly what he needed so that he could have faith. And then Jesus said: “*Do not disbelieve, but believe.*” In other words: “Stop doubting and believe.”

Some of us came here this morning needing to hear words of love and comfort. We are going through difficult things and need to hear Jesus say our name. But others of us came here this morning needing to hear words of faith and belief. We have questions. We have doubts. We have disappointments. We need to hear something that is going to help us believe. We need the Word who became flesh to speak the Words of new life into our hearts, so we might have the faith to believe that the crucified and risen Christ is our Lord and Savior. Jesus wanted to help Thomas have the faith to believe. Jesus met him where he was and invited him to trust Him. Jesus wants to help us have the faith to believe. Jesus has risen! – and he is here with us today. He has come to meet us where we are and put our trust in Him.

The *resurrection* changes *everything* in that it gives us faith to believe that Jesus is God, the Son of God who came into the world in the physical form of a sinless human being to die on a cross in our place, to pay the price of our sin, which is death – so that when we receive him as our Lord and Savior, he will forgive us and heal us and restore us back into the relationship with God we were created for – which means when do die, we will also rise from the dead, just as Jesus rose from the dead - and we will then live with God in the joy and glory of heaven forever and ever. If you are struggling with the faith to believe, take your doubts to Jesus. He invites you to put your trust in him!

We also see Jesus speaking words of new life into the heart of Peter. We know a lot about Peter. He is probably the most well-known disciple. He was quick to act. Courageous and faithful. And compulsive. The last several days before his encounter with the risen Jesus had not been good ones for Peter. Mary was dealing with grief. Thomas was dealing with disappointment. But Peter was dealing with *failure*.

Just before Jesus died, Peter had boldly proclaimed that he would follow Jesus even unto death. Jesus corrected him by saying that the opposite was come true. In the end, Jesus was right; Peter denied Jesus three times. He wouldn't even acknowledge knowing Jesus as he faced humiliation, torture and finally death. After Jesus died on the cross, Peter had a lot to deal with. He had to deal with the confusion and sadness of watching the man he thought would be the Messiah horrifically die on a cross. But he probably even more so struggled with the reality that he had abandoned Jesus when Jesus needed him the most. Perhaps Jesus would still be alive had Peter followed through on his promise. And so Peter may have felt a bit more relief than the other disciples when he heard and saw that Jesus had been raised from the dead. But Peter mostly likely still carried the shameful weight of his failure to fulfill his promise to sacrificially love Jesus in his time of need. But the resurrection changed everything. In John 21:15-17 Jesus speaks the word of new life into Peter's heart regarding his failure to love him.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." John 21:15-17

This is an intensively powerful encounter between Peter and Jesus. Three times Peter had denied Jesus, and three times Jesus gives Peter the opportunity to affirm his love for him. The apostle John does something to make sure we see the connection. In verse 9, he tells us that this scene took place around a "charcoal fire." The Greek word for that kind of fire is only used in one other place throughout all the New Testament – and that's the same "charcoal fire" where Peter was warming himself when he denied Jesus in John 18:18. Peter denied Jesus. Not once, but three times. Peter is overcome with failure. What words does Jesus speak to him? Jesus speaks words that give Peter a chance to tell Jesus *that he does love him*, even if he had failed to love Jesus in his time of need. And in response to each of Peter's affirmations, Jesus gives Peter a charge, a mission, a commitment to a purpose. In the midst of his failure, Jesus, the Word of God, speaks words of a new life of commitment to a purpose for Peter. What purpose would that be? Jesus gave us the answer to that question when he told Peter what loving him means. Three times, after Peter assured Jesus that he loved him, Jesus told him, "Feed my lambs . . . tend my sheep . . . feed my sheep." In other words: "Take care of those whom I love." What Jesus is saying to Peter is: "I am the Good Shepherd. I will be leaving soon and I need someone to look after God's people. Take care of those whom I love. Love them as I have love them. *Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.*" Jesus' words here, this commitment to a purpose, is a reflection of the greatest commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. . . . and you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31).

Jesus spoke words of new life of love and comfort to Mary which helped in her grief. The resurrection of Jesus gives us love and comfort because death is defeated. Jesus spoke words of new life of faith to believe to Thomas which helped his doubts. The resurrection of Jesus gives us faith to believe because it proves Jesus is who he says he is. Jesus spoke words of new life of a commitment to a purpose to Peter which helped him deal with his failure. The resurrection of Jesus gives us a commitment to a purpose because empowers us to love God and love others as God love them beyond our ability to do so. Jesus is the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, who sacrificed his life on a cross for our sins and rose from the dead so we might live with him in heaven forever and ever. The resurrection of Jesus changed everything. *Has the resurrection of Jesus changed you?* I pray the words of Jesus have spoken new life into your hearts today. Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" Today Jesus invites us all of us proclaim: "Yes, Lord; We believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God! Amen!"

