

***RISEN AND RENEWED***  
Isaiah 65:17-25; Luke 24:1-12

Jesus is risen from the dead!

Thomas Long, author and theologian wrote, "It is somewhat reassuring to realize that the first Christian sermon ever preached did not register high on the Richter scale. When the women came back from the cemetery on Easter morning, they brought with them word of an empty tomb and astonishing news: "He is not here but has risen!" All Christian preaching begins here."

This is the autobiography for all Christianity: Jesus is risen from the dead.

There are 775,000 words, more or less, in the Bible, and not one of them makes sense without these six words. There are roughly 2 billion Christians in the world, and not one of us has a thing to say without these six words.

These are the words that the breathless women carried from the empty tomb back to the other disciples. These are the words that have been passed from person to person, from community to community, every day since then -- in secret, in triumph, in darkness, and in celebration.

Jesus is risen from the dead.

It is these six words that have taken us from scattered, broken people who are lost to the largest religion in the world. It is these six words that have found countless individuals whose lives were already dead -- broken by pain and suffering, by sin and darkness -- and given them new life.

Jesus is risen from the dead.

These are the words that are whispered at bedsides and shouted from rooftops and shared at dinner tables and workplaces and in neighborhoods. These are the words that have been forbidden by governments both ancient and modern, and yet somehow they have still been spoken, still been shared.

Jesus is risen from the dead.

These are the words that the martyrs sang as they were being burned at the stake and fed to the lions. These are the words that Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German martyr who opposed the Nazis and was forced into seclusion, taught his students in the secret seminary he managed to hold.

Jesus is risen from the dead.

These are the words that Oscar Romero was speaking as he was gunned down while celebrating the Eucharist in El Salvador. These are the words that Martin Luther King Jr. held fast to as he opposed the violent racism of our culture, the words that inspired Desmond Tutu's work in South Africa. These are even the words that Mother Teresa admitted had lost meaning for her, at the end of her ministry. And yet she so believed in their meaning for the world that she did not abandon her work with the poor.

Jesus is risen from the dead.

C. S. Lewis once said, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”

This is the story of our lives, the story of the life of the world, the story of life itself. It is the story of how life is stronger than death, how God’s love for us is stronger than death. It is, in the end, the only story that there is. And so, this Easter Day, we hear these six words again: Jesus is risen from the dead – and we rejoice as we proclaim the Resurrection and the Renewal that those words bring.

These are the words that gave hope to British minister, W.E. Sangster when he began to notice some uneasiness in his throat and a dragging in his leg. He went to the doctor who determined that he had an incurable disease that caused progressive muscular atrophy. He was told his muscles would gradually waste away, his voice would fail, and his throat would soon become unable to swallow. He threw himself into his work in British missions, figuring he could still write and he would have even more time for prayer. His daughter recalls that his prayer was, “Let me stay in the struggle, Lord. I may not be able to be a general, but give me just a regiment to lead.” Sangster wrote articles and books, and helped organize prayer cells throughout England. “I am only in the kindergarten of suffering” he told people who pitied him.

Gradually Sangster’s legs became useless, his voice left, but he could still hold a pen, shakily. On Easter morning just a few weeks before he died, he wrote a letter to his daughter. In it he said, “It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice to shout, ‘He is Risen.’ But it would be worse to have a voice and not want to shout!”

Jesus is risen from the dead.

These words change lives. These words change the story of our lives. Because of these words we have the assurance that we can come out of the tombs of our lives. We are no longer sealed in, the tomb of fear or the tomb of hopelessness or the tomb of dreams that have been lost or delayed. Because he lives we no longer seek the living among the dead. Because He lives, our worlds are renewed, the sun shines in darkness, and we have hope for a future that is brighter than the darkest of days. Because he lives a world at war, a culture at odds, people in pain hear these words and know hope... Because he lives!

Every day we have the opportunity to proclaim these life-giving words again and they are no less true today than on the first day; these words are no less miraculous today than on the first day -- no less shocking, no less joyful, no less important, no less life-changing and meaningful.

Jesus is risen from the dead.

Run and tell the others what you’ve heard.