



“Expectations – Risen”

Mark 16:1–8; Colossians 3:1–4

It is Easter -- Alleluia!!

Nearly 2,000 years ago, a group of women walked toward the tomb where Jesus’ body had been laid early Friday evening. With the ending of the Sabbath, they carried spices to lay beside the decomposing body. But, as they approached the tomb, they saw that the stone had already been rolled aside. As they entered the tomb, they didn’t see a body lying there,

but, instead, a young man who spoke to them.

Alarmed. Terrified. Amazed. Afraid. Those are the words that Mark uses to describe the reaction of the women to the empty tomb. I’m sure that Salome and the two Marys would have had trouble putting their frightful surprise into words. Some surprises are clearly occasions for joy, others for sadness. But sometimes, like the women’s surprise on that Sunday morning, there is only confusion and anxiety and even fear.

Frankly, at first glance, none of this makes sense to us. We think to ourselves, it’s Easter morning! Christ is risen! Alleluia! How could alarm and terror characterize the women’s experience? Isn’t an angel there to explain to them what has happened?

To understand their fear, there are a few things we need to keep in mind:

- ❖ Among first-century Jews, there was no expectation of a suffering, much less crucified, Messiah. The Messiah was to arrive in power and might and wonder and glory to cleanse the temple, expel the pagans, and restore God’s kingdom. The fact that Jesus ends up dead on a cross could only mean that he wasn’t the Messiah. Wonderful and beloved rabbi, yes. Prophet, yes. But the Messiah could never meet such an end . . . or so everyone believed.
- ❖ And if there was no expectation of a dead Messiah, there couldn’t be any expectation of a resurrected Messiah, or for that matter the resurrection of any single person until all were resurrected on the Day of the Lord. The ancients knew what we know; namely, until that day comes, the dead stay dead.
- ❖ Thus, when the three women arrive and find the stone rolled away, their only thought would be that someone had beaten them to the tomb, either to take Jesus’ body or to desecrate it.

To reiterate, they do not arrive at the tomb hoping to find that Jesus had been resurrected. Instead, they don’t know what to make of the empty tomb . . . and then they discover an angel is present.

Raised with Christ

Later, the women found their voice, telling Peter and the whole world of an empty tomb and a visiting angel. They would learn that as Jesus had been raised, in a very real sense, so had they. By virtue of their faith in Jesus, they had participated in both Jesus’ death and his resurrection.

Paul expresses this early Christian understanding in his letter to the Colossians, using the imaginative wardrobe metaphor of 3:1-14. Because we have been raised with Christ to new life, he writes, we are to take off our old clothes of anger, slander, wrath, deceit, and the rest. We are to don a new wardrobe of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, and, foremost, love. Off with the old; on with the new.

Yet, this is no mere admonition or hope. Paul writes, “you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self” (v. 9) Notice that he uses the past tense. We are already new selves. Now, we must live as the people into whom God has made us.

This transformation encompasses our whole being. Intellectually, we believe things that we didn't before, about ourselves, this world, about our purpose in life, and so on. Morally, we gain a different sense of right and wrong, of good and evil. Behaviors, thoughts, even TV shows and movies which once seemed harmless, no longer do. Emotionally, we love differently. We lavish less love upon ourselves and pour out our love upon God and one another. We become spiritually open to God, but also to the spiritual needs of others. We see the image of God in those whom we once ignored, or worse, oppressed.¹ Truly, the old has gone, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Daily Bible Readings *More on the resurrection*

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| Monday | Matthew 28 | Matthew's account of Jesus' resurrection |
| Tuesday | Luke 24:1-12 | Luke's account of the resurrection |
| Wednesday | Luke 24:13-35 | The risen Jesus meets two disciples walking to Emmaus |
| Thursday | Luke 24:36-59 | Jesus comes to see the disciples, as "flesh and bone." |
| Friday | John 20 | John's account of the resurrection and some later appearances |
| Saturday | John 21 | More accounts of the resurrected Jesus |

How can we be "raised with Christ"?

Colossians 3:1

Paul's reference to Christians being raised with Christ can be read as soaring, but empty, rhetoric. How can we be resurrected with Jesus when we have not even died yet? Good question.

But he means exactly what he says. For Paul, it is as real as the chair you are sitting in. But how could something have happened already, if it hasn't happened yet? How could it have happened and yet still be coming?

We have a bit of experience with such a notion. We once spoke of marriages as being consummated. Though the bridal couple might be pronounced husband and wife at 3:00 PM, the marriage was not "official" until it had been consummated later by the couple's sexual union. If there was no such union, then there had been no marriage; the couple's subsequent separation would not be a divorce but an annulment, which is the recognition that there never had been a marriage.

Thus, if you asked the couple at their reception immediately after the wedding, "Are you married?" They could legitimately reply "yes" and "not yet." Until the consummation, the couple would be in a kind of "in between" time.

Now, that illustration is a mere shadow of what Paul claims. With the death and resurrection of Jesus, God's kingdom, his new world, has come already, but not yet. Though the consummation (our own bodily resurrection) lies yet ahead, God's people are already part of this new world. What is true of Jesus, is true of us. As N.T. Wright puts it in his commentary on Colossians, "You died with the Messiah, so you don't belong in the old world any more . . . You were raised with the Messiah, so you possess a true life in God's new world."¹

1. from Wright's *Paul for Everyone* commentary

¹ I have paraphrased some of this from John Stackhouse's book, *Humble Apologetics*, Oxford press, 2002.