

“JUST AS GOD SAID.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Matthew 28:1-10

Prayer: Holy Father, glorify yourself and your Son in our hearts and minds through the preaching of your glorious Gospel, both here and all over this city, nation and world. Declare with loudest voice the truth of your Son’s resurrection. Preach the truth of the Gospel to us so clearly that we are changed, transformed, conformed to the image and likeness of our risen Savior. Grant us a fresh vision of your glory. Merciful Father, grant to me now thought and expression that is worthy of the clarity and excellency of your Word. In the name of Jesus our risen Savior and Lord. Amen.

Introduction.

There is a word that has snuck into our vocabulary over the past couple of months. We are hearing this word used a lot lately by politicians, the news media, medical people. In fact, you could almost say that the frequency of the use of this word is unprecedented.

That’s the word, *unprecedented*. And of course, what is being called unprecedented is the Covid-19 pandemic. The word means without precedent, unique, unparalleled, without previous instance. Nothing like it before. Cancelling the CRC Synod meeting is unprecedented in our 160 year history.

Now there is some truth to that. None of us in our life time have experienced anything quite like what we are going through now. It has some of the financial implications of the great depression, some of the life restrictions like the rationing and blackouts during WWII, some of the fear of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, some of the long school closures like the blizzard of 1950. But when you put all of that into one event and then spread it all over the globe it can certainly have an unprecedented feel to it.

This will go down in history as a recognizable seismic event. One for the history books. One you young people will tell your kids and grandkids.

But any student of history will tell you this pandemic is not so unprecedented in human history. There have been countless plagues and pestilences, epidemics and pandemics. Millions of people died in the Spanish flu and in various bubonic plagues and many others.

Scripture says there is nothing new under the sun, except one thing, one truly unprecedented event, one event like no other before it or after it. One event without parallel.

God taking on human flesh and nature humbling Himself to the point of death, to be unjustly sentenced, and tortured, and suffering the horrific pain of Roman crucifixion, and actually physically dying and being laid in a tomb. And then on the third day rising from the dead to live forever.

As worldwide events go this is virus has nothing on the resurrection. The resurrection is an event of not just worldwide significance, but cosmic significance. And not just in time, but in eternity.

The physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the most significant event in the history of the universe. It was planned from before the foundations of the earth, from before time began, and it will play out in importance for the rest of eternity, forever and ever.

Believers were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), their names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8), and in the coming ages and for all eternity God will reveal the immeasurable riches of His grace toward us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:7).

From eternity past to eternity future, forever and ever, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is the central fact of creation and history, and is utterly unprecedented. So next time you hear that word on the news, think Jesus and His resurrection.

Paul sums up the magnitude of the importance of the resurrection:

I Corinthians 15:14, 17-19 If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain [...] And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

On the morning of that first day of the week the women came to an unprecedented empty tomb. 2000 years of church history, 2000 years of Christianity comes from an empty tomb. The joy of an empty tomb should overcome any sadness about an empty church.

If the tomb had not been empty, there would be no churches to be empty, there would be no Gospel, no forgiveness, no reconciliation, no hope of eternal life, only death and hell.

In the face of all the bad news, and no matter how bad the bad news gets, the best news the world has ever heard overcomes it all. The resurrection is true. Christ is risen, He is risen indeed.

Just as He said.

I love this phrase in our text from the lips of the angel. "He is not here, for he has risen, *[just] as he said.*"

For months now we have been talking about Satan's lies, did God really say. Satan tried to bait Jesus, are you really the Son of God, prove it. Don't just say it, show it.

The resurrection is God's greatest, "God said." The resurrection is Jesus showing Satan He really is the Son of God, and because He suffered and died first, so now all glory is His and Satan is utterly defeated.

Satan makes promises he never keeps, he promises and never delivers.
Jesus makes promises and then does just as He said.

Seven times before His death, Jesus predicted specific things about Himself that become the proof of who He is. He said He would suffer many things at the hands of sinful men, that He would be killed and that on the third day He would rise again.

He said it would happen in Jerusalem, it would start with the Jewish leaders and carried out by the Gentiles, that He would be mocked, flogged and crucified.

Who can do that, who can predict the future, who can say exactly will happen and how and when and where?

Jesus is risen just as He said. Just as He told you. This is the proof. This is His authority. This is His chief credential. He is risen just as He said.

And it is true because Jesus said it would happen before it happened. Jesus proves He is a true prophet. Every word He speaks is true and comes true.

John 14:6 Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

The whole point of knowing the truth is that we are changed by the truth, transformed by the truth, purified by the truth. That we live our lives according to the truth.

John 8:32 You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

III John 1:4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

The angel said come and see for yourself, see the proof, see the truth and believe the truth.

Go quickly and tell.

Then the angel tells the women to go quickly and tell the disciples the news. This news is truly unprecedented, utterly unexpected even though Jesus had told them. No one saw this coming, no follower of Jesus would ever say, "See, I told you so."

Have you ever been the bearer of great news, something no one else knows? Announcing an engagement or a pregnancy or a big life altering event. It's a joy isn't it. It has been for us in spades the past couple of years, engagements, weddings, pregnancies, births.

Friends, right now is the Christians moment. This is our time, the churches time.

We have the truth, the world doesn't. The world doesn't have answers. We have the truth **and** because we have the truth we have hope and can offer hope. You are salt and light, you are beacons of truth, you have the words of life.

This is our time, this is Christian's time to shine the light in the darkness. Ours is the victory. Easter is the death of fear, the death of hopelessness, the death of death.

This is our opportunity to bear witness to the sovereignty of God in the midst of this global upheaval, to share the secure hope He provides to all who turn to Jesus Christ in true faith.

Our world lives life horizontally, they have no vertical reference point, no north star, no fixed point of reference to give stability and direction and meaning to their lives. So they end up wandering and lost.

God is shaking the world that has been living horizontally. Give people a vertical reference point. Speak truth to someone, show them the truth by your trust in nothing but Jesus.

This is our time, the churches time. We aren't called just to attend church, we are called to be the church, to reflect Jesus to a hurting, broken, dying world.

The best time to be a Christian is in hard times. That is when our witness and our example shines clearest and brightest. That's when people notice. Notice our Christ-like love, our Christ-like generosity, our Christ-like **lack** of fear.

God brings trials and afflictions so we can see His grace and His glory (Susie/Cheryl). All things really do work together for good for those who love God and who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). And that all things includes the time of COVID-19.

The sting of death is gone, our hope has walked out of an empty tomb.

If someone were to ask us if we were sad or disappointed not to be able to gather in our churches on Easter, I suppose we could acknowledge that briefly, but only for a second or two, then we should say we rejoice Easter is a reality no matter where we are. Let there be no sadness here.

Easter doesn't happen in lily-filled sanctuaries with organs and trumpets blaring. It happens first of all in our hearts, when fear gives way to faith, when sinfulness turns to repentance, when we receive a risen Savior as our Lord and Savior, when we die to ourselves and serve others.

That's Easter. And in fact if you have your beautiful sanctuaries with lilies and organ, but don't have Jesus in your heart then you don't have Easter.

Easter isn't a holiday, Easter is an *unprecedented* life-changing, life-transforming reality.

This week, may your heart be so filled with the hope and joy knowing Jesus walked out of a tomb victorious over death, that it spills over in conversation with others.

All we really have to say is, "have you heard the good news? Christ is risen just as He said, and He loves you." What kind of person has the best news ever and doesn't tell anyone?

Christ is risen just as He said. He has come and forgiven us and has said He will be our God. Urge your neighbor or friend or co-worker to love Him.

I John 3:16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

Implications and application.

Jesus is alive and well and on His throne.

The church of Jesus Christ, His body, is also alive and well and His kingdom is growing and advancing today as always, and maybe more than ever. Christ's bride has always flourished in times of persecution and trial.

Where is the power in this story? The Roman guards, the government, the lies and coverup? Or with God and His angels?

Where is the truth in this story? The religions establishment that bribed the guards to lie? Or with God and the angels and the women and the apostles?

What do their completely transformed lives testify to? A dead Jesus or a risen Savior?

The resurrection reminds us that God has not forsaken us or abandoned us even in our darkest hour. Yes, sin and sickness and death are real threats in our world, ***but God*** has overcome and defeated sin and sickness and death, and His perfect love casts out all fear.

Whatever situation you are facing right now, whatever trial or tribulation, know that God has the keys, the power, the authority, the control, and He controls the outcome, and for those who know Him and love Him and trust Him, He will cause all things to work for the very best good.

God's wrath is removed, the curse is gone, the debt is paid, Satan is destroyed. Christ is risen and enthroned. Christ has done it all, there is nothing more left undone.

Our lives are not measured by what we have accomplished but by what Christ has accomplished.

Our lives are not measured by how long we live but by how long Christ lives.

Our lives are not measured by our worth, but by the worthiness of Christ.

Our lives are not measured by our power and strength, but by the power and strength of Christ.

We are the people of the empty tomb, we are the people of the resurrection, we are the people for whom death has lost its victory and its sting. Our victory is life in Christ for eternity.

To God alone belongs all the glory in Christ Jesus forever and ever. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah and Amen.

Prayer: Holy Father, you have destroyed the last enemy death, you have defeated Satan, you have vanquished hell, you have raised to life your Son whom you crucified. Enable us, to live and to love in the light and truth and promise of the resurrection. Reorder and reorient our lives around this one center, around this one central truth, the reality of Jesus' final and decisive triumph over death. Make this reality real and practical in all our daily lives, in all our daily interactions and relationships and conversations, to the glory of Jesus Christ, in whose mighty name we pray, Amen.