

A Gift To

From

My Redeemer Lives

LUKE 24

The flowers always drew my attention first. When my family went into church on Easter morning, I would notice the strong but beautiful smell of the Easter lilies. I would stare at them, noting that some blossoms were still green, others were just opening up and white, and still others had those little yellow flower parts—that’s how I thought about them—sticking out. After church I would sometimes dare to touch those yellow parts, and my mother could always see where on my clothing I tried to wipe my fingers.

But pollen was not the only thing that stuck with me after those Easter services. I was impressed that the church was always full. I was fascinated by the special hats that girls wore. And I loved the extra music, especially the trumpets that went along with my favorite Easter hymn, “I Know That My Redeemer Lives” (CW 152).

That hymn took on even more meaning for me when I sang it at the funerals of my grandparents. Now when I sing it, I often get so choked up

that it's difficult to continue. I know that the words of the title are a direct quote of Job 19:25, but I still sing them as my words, my own personal confession of faith.

When I was a child, I sang the words of that hymn with a child's unquestioning faith. Now that I am an adult, I think it is fair to ask, "But how do you know? How do you know that your Redeemer lives?" As an adult, I still sing these words with faith, but I've been alive long enough to have had my faith tested. My adult powers of reason have kicked in, and I've had to think deeply about the basic things I believe along with other Christians.

I've noticed that whenever I try to get back to the basics of the Christian faith, I always come back to Jesus rising from the dead. "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (1 Corinthians 15:14). But since Christ has been raised, preaching is useful, my faith is useful, and Luke 24 is one of the most precious passages of the Bible.

The Resurrection Is Real History

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they

entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words. (Luke 24:1-8)

Some mornings it's no use trying to sleep. I wake up with the persistent thoughts that I tried to get rid of when I first went to sleep. I recognize that as a sign of stress. So I don't have any trouble relating to the women who were wide awake before it was light out, getting ready to take care of the body of Jesus. For a lot of people, the death of a loved one causes the most stress they will ever try to handle, and these women were dealing with the death of someone who had loved them with a perfect love. The events of the past few days were so vivid to them, so raw and unprocessed that they probably didn't sleep much at all that night. In their grief they had taken on the task of properly preparing Jesus' body for burial, a task very important in their culture. This gave them something to do, allowing their

minds to dwell on something other than the sights, sounds, and smells of Mount Calvary. Also, it gave them something else to worry about. They had heard about the heavy stone that sealed the entrance of the tomb, and they worried about being able to roll it away. They undoubtedly knew that what they were doing had legal and political implications. I'm sure that their minds were racing a mile a minute when they left their houses in the dark early morning and met with others in the group just as the sun's first rays peeked over the horizon.

The women seem so real to me that I have trouble sympathizing with those who think that the four accounts of the resurrection in the four gospels are made up. I've read all four many times. They are clearly four eyewitness accounts from four slightly different perspectives, which is exactly what you would expect from real history. If the story of the resurrection were made up, people would have worked hard to get the story straight, saying it in exactly the same words. Real history from real people trying to describe how they felt and what they saw—that's what we find in Luke, who said at the beginning of his gospel that he had done careful investigation from eyewitness accounts (Luke 1:2,3), all under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The women found the stone. (I wonder whether or not they had time to think about how it got rolled away from the entrance to the tomb.) They ran in. The burial linens of Jesus were there too. To have real history, you need real artifacts. But there was no body! I can imagine my own bewilderment if I would ever show up at a funeral home, expecting the body of a member of my family, only to find the body gone. I think I would be surprised and sad and angry all at the same time. Seeing no body had to have taken away the breath of anyone who arrived at the tomb that Easter morning. But before the women could express anything but confused wonder, two angels startled them.

There was really no time to think. They just had to listen. They weren't going to figure out what happened on their own. They needed it explained to them in clear and simple terms.

What those angels said gets to me every time I hear it: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!" These words changed the history of the world. These words are the difference between eternal life and eternal death for every person who's ever lived. I hear these words, I read them for myself, and I think, "Nothing more important has ever been spoken."