

This is what our world needs: Hope! Do you know how it starts? With a single voice. In the middle of a tomb, a voice started singing. It was the angel. *“Do not be afraid. He is not here; he is risen, just as he said.”* Soon another voice joined in—Jesus himself: *“Do not be afraid. I have risen!”* Then the voices of the women: “He is risen. He is risen.” Even if no one believed them. Even if it sounded impossible: “He is risen!” Finally, the disciples caught on: “He is risen.” And their disciples and their disciples. The Pharisees couldn’t stop it. The Roman government couldn’t stop. All the persecutions in the world couldn’t silence it. The devil himself can’t stop it. For 2000 years, the voice continues. He is risen. He is risen. There is hope in Jesus!

Do you know who that voice is now? You are! The Christian voice in a hopeless world. What did the angel tell those women: *“Go quickly and tell his disciples.”* “What shall we say?” *“He is risen from the dead!”* Go and tell! Hope begins with a voice. “Your sins do not define you. You are forgiven!” “You are so much more than your looks. You are the child of God!” “It’s not about what you do, it’s about what Jesus has been done for you.” “It’s not about how much you love, it’s about how much God loves you.” “It’s not about how much stuff you can get. It’s about how many people you can bring with you to heaven.” “Because Jesus suffered hell, you don’t have to.” “Because Jesus rose, you can face tomorrow and the next day, until you live in heaven too.” Christians are the voice of hope to a hopeless world. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Don’t believe any of the reports around you. God is not dead! He is truly alive. In his Word. In your hearts. In his promises. In our world. God is not dead! Money is dead. It will never satisfy. Power is dead. You will never have enough. Pleasure is dead. It will always fade away. God is not dead! He is truly alive. Because Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen!

That doesn’t mean, “The end.” Remember? Here’s the end: Who in your life needs hope? I know who does. You do! You need Jesus and his Word and his promises. Today. Every day. Who else? Who in your life needs hope? Who is weighed down by sin or by guilt or by worry or by anger or by lust? Who would you love to have sitting next to you next Easter, celebrating the forgiveness found only in Jesus? Start today. Our hearts are hard. Our heads are stubborn. But God is good and God is strong and God’s truth changes lives. Go and tell. Never ever underestimate the power of a voice sharing Jesus’ grace. Jesus’ resurrection stamps an “Amen!” on every promise of God. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen!

Matthew 28:1-10
Pastor Nathan Nass

Easter Sunday
April 1, 2018

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ²There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. ⁵The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.” ⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

The “Amen!”

Throughout the season of Lent, we’ve been talking about the Lord’s Prayer. Today on Easter Sunday, we have one word left. The last word: “Amen.” Do you know what “Amen” means? When I was kid, I always thought it meant “the end.” When the pastor said, “Amen,” the sermon was finally over. But that’s not what it means. “Amen” is a Hebrew word that means, “This is true!” You pray or you preach and you say, “Amen.” “This is true!” Can you try that? “Amen!” It’s the perfect word for Easter Sunday. Jesus’ resurrection stamps an “Amen!” on every promise of God. Does God keep his Word? Yes. Amen! This is true. “Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!”

Except, is it really true? Did Jesus actually rise from the dead? Let’s address the elephant in the room: Most people don’t believe Jesus rose from the dead. Maybe you don’t! At Easter time, the major news sources always come out with their “Who was the real Jesus?” specials. They’re always filled with questions. Filled with critiques. “Maybe there was a man named Jesus once. But rising from the dead? Come on!” This is a big deal. Whether Jesus really rose is a big deal. The whole message of the Bible depends on it. The apostle Paul wrote: *“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins”* (1 Corinthians 15:17). But it’s hard not to doubt. “Amen? Really?” Maybe that’s why so many people are falling from faith. Is it really true?

Yes it is! At the risk of sounding a combative, don’t believe the lies! Did I say that nicely? How about: “You don’t have to put up with this nonsense!” There is absolutely no doubt that Jesus was a real person. It is a historical fact that Jesus lived and Jesus died on a cross. But did he really rise? Let’s start with this: In ancient times, myths never included details. Myths—legends—never started like this: “Zeus and Hermes at 6:00 a.m. on Mon-

day morning..." Never. What about the Easter story? You heard it: "*After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.*" Dates. Times. Names. Places. The Bible is not written like a myth. It's written as an eyewitness account. Make sense?

But the critics would say, "That's what the disciples wanted. They made-up this story about Jesus' resurrection and tried to make it sound like real history." That's impossible. Here's why: The Matthew who wrote our Gospel lesson was a disciple of Jesus. If Matthew were to invent the story of Jesus' resurrection, how would you expect it to go? "While everyone else hid in fear, I brave Matthew went out to tomb and found the risen Lord." That's what you'd expect, right? Not how it went. Where were Jesus' disciples on Easter morning? Huddled in fear in a locked room. Why would the disciples write that about themselves? Because it's true! It only makes sense if it's true!

Not only were the disciples locked and afraid, but whom does Matthew credit as the first ones to the tomb—the first to see Jesus? The women. Now let's be honest. Do men like to give credit to women? No! So you're telling me that this man Matthew made up a story in which he was scared and afraid, and the women were courageous and faithful to Jesus? No man would ever invent a story like that! Even more seriously, in Jewish law at the time of Jesus, women were not allowed to testify in court. That wasn't right, but that was the way it was. Women couldn't be witnesses. So if the eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection were women, it would hurt their case. Understand? So why would they write this? Because it was true! It doesn't make any sense unless it was true!

Here's one more proof. In the 1970s, Charles Colson was imprisoned for lying during the Watergate scandal under President Nixon. This man knew what it was like to try to cover-up a lie! While in prison, Colson converted to Christianity. He once said this: "I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, and then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate involved 12 of the most powerful men in the world—and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible." How'd they do it? Because it's true. Amen! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!

Our world makes religion seem so subjective. So touchy-feely... Karl Marx famously said that religion is "the opium of the masses." It's just like a drug—mindless comfort used to dull life's pain. That couldn't be further from the truth. Don't come to Christianity because it's comforting. Don't come to Christianity because it seems relevant. Don't come to Christianity because it's what your mother tells you to do. Come to Christianity because it's true! Jesus really died. Jesus was really buried. The tomb was really empty. The disciples really believed it. The disciples gave their lives for it. What are you going to go with that? Come to Christianity because it's true!

When the Bible says that deep down every human being isn't a good person but a sinner, you know it's true. Because you know what hides in your heart. When the Bible says that our world isn't becoming a better and better place, but a more corrupt and more violent place because there are more sinners with more sin, it's true! You see it. When the Bible says that the wages of sin is death, it's true! But do you know what? When the Bible tells you that Jesus died for you, that's true too! When the Bible promises that you are forgiven, it's true! When Jesus talks about heaven for those who believe in Jesus, it's true! When God says that his love never fails, it's true! Jesus' resurrection stamps an "Amen!" on every promise of God. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

So realize what this means. You can't walk out of here the same way you came in! Do you think those women walked back from the tomb the same way they walked to it? No way! From grief to joy. From fear to courage. From doubt to faith. I've been teaching a Bible class to a couple of Hispanic ladies who would like to join our church. After months of learning about Jesus, one of the ladies suddenly said, "If this is true, it has to change every part of my life. I can't look at money the same way. I can't look at my family the same way. I can't look at my career the same way. I can't have the same priorities as before. If all this about Jesus is true, it has to change every part of my life." Yes! Amen!

So has it? When people outside the church think of Christians, what's one of their favorite words to use? "Hypocrites!" People who say one thing and do another. "Their faith stops at the church door!" What do we want to say? "Nah. That's not us." Is it? You know what the greatest hypocrisy of a Christian is? To hear about Jesus' death and resurrection, and then to shrug your shoulders and say, "That's nice." And then to go out the door and live as if nothing's changed. To keep on pouring your energy into this world. To keep fighting for your position and your glory. To keep treating people like objects to get what you want. To keep on living your way. To keep moping through life as if God were dead. Then you don't get it. If all this about Jesus is true, it has to change every part of my life.

How does that start? Four years ago, the commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command gave the commencement speech at the University of Texas. In his speech he told a story about his time in Navy SEAL training. The hardest months of his life. The goal of the instructors was to break those men's wills so that only the strongest and bravest survived. In the middle of Hell Week—when the sailors went without sleep for a whole week—they went into the mud. Mud up to their necks. And just sat in the mud. For 15 hours. Cold. Exhausted. Groaning. The instructors offered a deal: If just five of you quit, we can stop. The groans increased. You could sense that some were ready to give in. When suddenly a voice in the back started singing. It wasn't singing on key. In fact, it sounded downright awful, but it was singing. And then another voice joined in. And another. And soon every single man was singing. The instructors yelled and cursed at them. They threatened that if they kept singing they'd never get out of the mud. But the men kept singing. And as they admiral described it, he said, "Somehow the mud seemed a little warmer, the wind a little tamer and the dawn not so far away." Do you know what that was? Hope. Hope.