Matthew 28:6b He has risen!

I don’t know about you but over the years I have seriously tried to put myself in the shoes of the various followers of Jesus. Just what was it that they were going through as the events of the Passion were taking place? Let me give you some of my thoughts on what some of them might have been experiencing.

The easiest one of course is Judas. Judas from the moment Jesus is arrested and he perceives that Jesus is going to be killed, Judas is nothing but despair incarnate. He is filled with sorrow for what he has done, because evidently things were not going to work out as he has planned. Unfortunately Judas does not believe there is any kind of hope or peace going forward in life and for that reason Judas then determines to end his life. Filled with unbelief and despair he can find no relief or even hope for relief and in total foolishness hangs himself. Judas is the one who disturbs me the most because I often just think, “Man, if you could have just held on until the resurrection and then just gone and spoke to Jesus the whole history of your end might be entirely different.” Just as disturbing is the fact that Judas heard all the promises of Jesus just like the others. But did not believe!

Peter I think is pretty easy to figure out. Peter is in despair because of his cowardly act of denial. I am sure that Peter relived those denials and the curses and swearing in his mind again and again. But here is what we can say of Peter. Peter held on to hope. Peter remembered what Jesus had said and promised and Peter still had trust and confidence that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. I believe Peter spent Friday night and all day Saturday with the other disciples talking about what Jesus taught and helping each other try to come to grips with what had happened and what they hoped would happen. Honestly, I don’t think Peter slept very well at all during the past two nights.

John, I think John was just waiting things out. John is the one disciple that I think may have actually understood what Jesus said and what was going on. That’s why John was the lone disciple at the cross, because John knew this death had to be and John knew that everything about Jesus was going to hinge on whether or not Jesus could fulfill his promise for the third day. John was just waiting.

Now as to the other disciples, we don’t know anything about what they were going through. I think that most of them were just shell shocked, in a kind of stupor because of what had happened. And yes, I do believe that most of them suffered from tremendous guilt too, because after all, each one of them had promised they would die with Jesus but then they desert him. Yep, they all deserted him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Where they went, what they did we don’t really know. Again, John was the only one at the cross. I can imagine that the rest of the group was somewhere together, with Peter, in hiding, most probably holed up in that locked house, the very place Jesus would find them tonight.

The women. It is clear that the women do not grasp anything. Remember, they were headed for the tomb on that Sunday morning because they were hoping to do a better job of burial for Jesus. They had seen Jesus buried, seen how his body was quickly prepared and they wanted it done better. So on this morning they are headed to the tomb with more spices and perfumes for the body of Jesus, to make sure the job was done properly. Remember, the women even wondered who was going to move the stone for them. So the women had no clue as to what was coming. Just women mourning the loss of their friend and teacher and hoping to do one final act of kindness and love for Jesus.

The Pharisees and teachers of the Law? They are worried. They are worried about the impact killing Jesus will have. I think there were some of them who were in the Temple when that curtain was torn from top to bottom were greatly disturbed. Most important though, is the fact that they were worried about the resurrection of Jesus. Remember how they had Pilate post a guard and seal the tomb? They did that so that the disciples could not steal the body and claim a resurrection! Now why would you be worried about a resurrection unless you knew Jesus was not a phoney? If you want my opinion, these men have had a very restless few nights because they fear the resurrection might be!

And then here comes Sunday morning. As planned, the women are headed for the tomb to fix up the body of Jesus better. If you look carefully at the Scripture I think there were at least 4 women, but possibly as many as six women in the group. We are told it was early, indicating is was at or just around sunrise as they were on their way. Since the tomb was outside the city gates, they needed to make sure the gates would be opened, usually such things were done at sunrise. It is clear they are talking about who will move the stone, which tells us they did not know a guard had been posted and they did not know the tomb had been sealed. But as the tomb comes into sight they can see that the stone is rolled away.

At this point I can imagine some hesitation on the part of the women on what to do. It is possible that some of the women bothered by this, head away and some of them go right to the tomb. What I can tell you is that at this point the greatest thing to ever happen in this world is going to take place. They come to the tomb and there is seated an angel. His message is simple: **“Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.”** Dear people, with those words spoken, please note that the world will never be the same again! Our theme: **HE HAS RISEN!**

So as we did with our Lenten sermon, let’s break down what this “three words of truth” means for us. Let’s just start with that first word: He. The he is a pronoun and there is no doubt that this pronoun is going back to the nearest antecedent and that is Jesus. The he is Jesus! The Angel is talking about Jesus. To make it clear, the Angel says **“for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.”** Again, those are rather important words and clearly tell us what we need to know.

We are talking about Jesus. Jesus from Nazareth who had conducted a three year ministry in this tiny nation of Jews and who had done amazing and wonderful miracles such as the world had never seen before. Miracles so in your face, so undeniable, that the best Jesus’ enemies could do was claim that he had done them by the power of Satan! They could not deny them or pass them off as phony and trickery, they could only claim an alternate power, an evil power through which Jesus was healing the evil of the world. But this gives us good indication of the religious hatred held for Jesus. He is not what the Jews were hoping for in a Messiah so they simply and blindly reject him. Well, actually, they do one more thing. They manage to arrest him, and then get him put to death.

The angel acknowledges that truth, doesn’t he? He says: “**who was crucified.”** On Friday morning that is exactly what happened to Jesus. He was crucified. A terrible form of capital punishment meant to inflict pains and agonies and normally a slow death. The end result of crucifixion is death. So notice the verb tense the Angel uses. It is a perfect tense which indicates a completed action. The crucifixion is done, meaning that Jesus was dead. Let’s make this clear. At least 12 soldiers were witnesses to the absolute death of Jesus. And then Joseph of Arimethea and whoever helped him prepare the body of Jesus for burial were also witnesses to the fact that Jesus was dead. He wasn’t pretending. He wasn’t anything but genuinely, catastrophically and perfectly dead! But the angel is there because something wonderful, as promised, has taken place.

The Angel begins gently, don’t you think? **“He is not here!”** The tomb is empty of the body of Jesus, just an angel or two hanging around for now. The angel does not tell us where Jesus is. What he does proclaim is **“He has risen.”** Jesus has risen. He has risen from death, has left the tomb and is alive.

That is, of course, the meaning of the word for risen. We could translate with other words: “cause to stand up, stand up, cause to wake up, cause to exist, raise to life, restore, heal.” It is a great word and becomes especially important when applied to someone who was crucified and dead. Because this word tells us he is no longer dead. He is no longer laying dead but is now standing up and moving. That’s why **“He is not here.”** He is awake. He exists, he is restored, he is healed….yes, Jesus has been raised to life!

Please don’t miss the importance of this wonderful and awesome pronouncement. Jesus is alive. He who was dead is now alive. Not pretend alive! Not alive in the imagination of the disciples. Not alive in the sense that “he is now spiritually remembered by those who loved him.” Those last things are all the things that modern liberal false theology likes to proclaim and say about the resurrection from the dead. They come up with every excuse for denying and ignoring what God’s Word and this Angel of God clearly and adamantly say: Jesus has risen. He is no longer physically dead but is now physically alive and because he is physically alive there is a message that all the world now needs to hear. The world needs to hear this message because without this resurrection, without this Jesus being alive, really, truly, physically alive then we got nothing!

I cannot emphasize that enough. Scripture makes it clear throughout that the resurrection of the Messiah, of Jesus is a must. He must die and then he must rise from the dead. He must because that is exactly what God the Father said would happen through the prophets. If it is not true then the prophets are not true. If the prophets are not 100% true then God the Father is not true. If God is not true, then there are no true promises of heaven. There is no afterlife, no heaven or hell, no God to answer to, no right or wrong, no good or bad, no nothing!

Nothing! There is no power of prayer. There is no power of positive thinking. There is not a single religion in this world that is worth anything. In other words, this life is a free for all. Do what you want. Abort, murder, steal, disregard and disrespect. It makes no difference because if there is no resurrection then you and I are just lucky blobs of tissue that somehow have life, whatever that is, and once our blobs run out of whatever it is that makes us see, hear, think and feel, we will just stop and never be again. That’s right, in a generation or so, no one will care that you lived or died or how you lived or died. It doesn’t matter if Jesus did not rise from the dead!

But, did I say that big enough? BUT the angel has just told us that Jesus has risen, that Jesus who was dead is now alive. In a couple of minutes Mary will see him, touch him and hear him speak to her. A few minutes after that the other ladies already on their way back to the disciples will also see Jesus and touch him and talk to him. And a while after that Jesus will appear to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus and talk and walk with them for a couple of hours before disappearing from their sight. And later on this night Jesus will stand in the midst of those disciples who were listening to what the two who ran back from Emmaus were reporting about seeing Jesus. Jesus will stand in the middle of them and invite them to touch, to poke, to experience that it really is Him. And why? Because Jesus has risen! Jesus is alive! Jesus has been shown to be undeniably and categorically the Christ, the Son of God and our Savior from sin.

Because He has risen! This resurrection is the heart of our faith. This resurrection proves beyond any doubt that Jesus is God’s Son. God had told us in the word that His Son would die and come back to life. That was the sure and absolute sign of the Messiah. You know there is more. This resurrection proves beyond any doubt that Jesus is our Redeemer. Jesus told his disciples that he was going away and that He would come back. He told them their righteousness, their salvation, their eternal life would hinge on this rising from the dead. Don’t believe me, then go back and carefully reread the long discourse found in John 14-17. It is all there. Jesus lays out that what is coming is about his glory, about righteousness and eternal life. It is all wrapped up in the promises of Jesus and comes true only with the resurrection from the dead.

And yes, this resurrection then tells us that because He lives, we also will live. Jesus himself gave us those wonderful words of hope and peace. John 14:19, **“Because I live, you also will live.”** Do you grasp that in those words is found all the hope and wonder of heaven, eternal life, peace, and joy forever. In those words is the promise of forgiveness and being clothed with the righteousness of God. There is a God. There is a heaven. There is an eternity and you and I get to be a part of it just because Jesus lives and we hope and trust in him.

There it is, dear people, the wonder of Jesus proclaimed in those three words of truth. He has risen! Amen.