

The Words of the Risen Lord

I like to go to old cemeteries in various parts of the world. When we wander through a graveyard and look at the tombstones or go to a church and examine the old monuments, we see one heading on most of them: "Here lies ... " Then follow the person's name, date of death and perhaps some praise of the qualities of the deceased.

But how different would be the epitaph on the tomb of Jesus! It would neither be written in gold nor cut in stone. It was spoken by the mouth of an angel and is the exact opposite of what is engraved on other tombs: "He is not here; for He is risen" (Matthew 28:6).

The most important events in human history were the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, "If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. ... If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17).

In reading about the early church, we find the central theme of the early Christian witness to the world was the fact that Jesus Christ, who was crucified, had been raised from the dead.

Today we usually hear a sermon on the resurrection every Easter, but that is about the only time. However, in the preaching of the apostles, the cross and the resurrection were constant themes. The cross and the resurrection were linked together; they are supposed to be linked. Without the resurrection, the cross is meaningless. Apart from the resurrection, the cross is a tragedy and a defeat.

If the bones of Jesus lie decayed in a grave, then there is no Good News, and the world is still in darkness. Life has no meaning at all. The New Testament then becomes a myth and

Christianity is a fable—and millions of people, living and dead, are victims of a gigantic hoax.

However, the New Testament teaches that Christ is indeed risen from the dead. The greatest and most thrilling fact of human history is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Just before Easter we normally concentrate our thinking on Christ and the cross. We remember the words He spoke as He met His bitter death for our salvation. As we celebrate Good Friday, the seven phrases from the cross are in our minds. We try to understand and to fathom the experiences of our Lord as He went to His death.

I do not know who first gathered those seven phrases from the four different Gospels and put them together for a Good Friday meditation. What astonishes me, though, is that few people seem to have made a similar collection of the words that our Lord spoke to His followers after the resurrection. What a great thing it would be if, after our Good Friday meditation on what the crucified Lord said, we would turn to what the risen Lord said!

After His resurrection, Jesus visited ordinary places and spoke to ordinary people. He came to some in a garden, to two on the road to Emmaus, to others at the lakeside. He met a group in the Upper Room and others on a hilltop. He shared their meals and their walks. He came to them when they were working and when they were waiting. He came to them when they were afraid and when they were hopeful, when they were doubting and when they were certain. He came to ordinary people just like you and me.

There are three things that Jesus said after His resurrection.

First, He said, "Fear not." Certainly our world needs to hear that message from the resurrected Christ. He said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me" (Matthew 28:10).

He came to the Eleven on another occasion and said, "Peace to you" (Luke 24:36). This was more than the conventional salute of those days; it was the assurance of the deep peace Jesus had promised them at the Last Supper. He then asked, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?" (Luke 24:38). His words, repeated again and again, were, "Fear not" and "Do not be afraid."

And why not? The answer is simple. It is because He lives! They no longer need to fear death or disaster. They could be assured that just as Jesus triumphed, they, too, would triumph. They could be confident that God's purposes were not thwarted and that He Himself was with them always, unto the end of the world. The disciples could look forward to the fact that they, too, would be resurrected.

Today, in our world filled with its dangers, hate and war, the words of the Lord Jesus are more relevant than ever before. Once again He comes to those who love Him and says, "Fear not."

That is the message He would give to people in parts of the world where there is turmoil and strife—or into our own hearts and lives, our families or whatever we are connected with that may be undergoing turmoil, strife and tension.

The second thing that Jesus said to His disciples was, "Bear witness" (Cf. Acts 1:8). He came to the disciples as they cowered behind locked doors in the Upper Room. When He had challenged their fears and quieted them, He said, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21).

He came to them on a hilltop in Galilee and said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19).

And His final words before He departed from them, as Luke records them in The Acts of the Apostles, were: "You shall be witnesses to me ... to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Jesus was telling them that they could not know Him to be alive without also wanting to proclaim that news to others. He sent them out, through the locked doors and down from the hilltop, into all the world with the Gospel.

There should never be any doubt in the mind of any Christian that the Lord has given us an order. To fail to heed this command is deliberate disobedience and sin. We are told to go to the entire world with the Gospel.

The Bible says, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me ... to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This command is all-inclusive; it embraces evangelism in all possible circumstances.

If there were no other reason for going to the end of the earth proclaiming the Gospel and winning souls, the command of Christ would be enough.

That is why we go from city to city preaching the Gospel: because Christ commanded it. This is not an option. It is something that we have been commanded by Jesus to do. We are ambassadors under authority.

I am convinced that if we really believed that men and women are lost apart from Jesus Christ, it would become a burning incentive to evangelize with a zeal and a passion that we are in danger of losing.

The third thing that Jesus said was "receive power" (Acts 1:8). The Apostle John told how Jesus came to them, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22).

Luke tells us that Jesus said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). That was enough—more than enough—for any contingency and for every emergency that the disciples would ever face.

Certainly the church today needs God's spiritual power. Too

often we try to do the work of the Kingdom of God in our own strength. We use the wrong kinds of weapons.

The greatest need in the church at this hour is not organizational union. Our greatest need is for the church to be baptized with the fire of the Holy Spirit and to go out proclaiming the Gospel everywhere on every continent. What the church so desperately needs cannot be organized or promoted by human means.

The two symbols of Pentecost are wind and fire. Both of these speak to us of the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in revival. The meaning of the Hebrew word translated revive in the Old Testament is “to recover, to restore, to return.” The Greek word translated revive in the New Testament means “to stir up or rekindle a fire that is slowly dying.”

Even the members of the early church needed fresh renewings. In chapter 2 of Acts we learn that in the Upper Room the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit. Yet in chapter 4 we read of their being filled again: “When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).

It is my prayer that we might witness in our generation a mighty spiritual awakening. There are evidences that it is taking place right now in many parts of the world.

May these words of the resurrected Christ—“Fear not,” “Bear witness” and “Receive power”—burn in our hearts today as they burned in the hearts of the disciples so many years ago. I pray that this thrilling knowledge will sink deep into our hearts, that Christ is indeed alive and that He is coming back to this Earth again someday.

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