

Sermon Draft for August 3, 2025

Text: Colossians 3:1–11

Sermon: “He Is Risen, He Is Alive”

Do you remember the movie El Cid about a Spanish knight who almost single-handily saved the kingdom of Spain from Muslim invaders. The story of this remarkable leader is based on truth. The movie told the truth in recounting his many victories. The movie told the truth when it showed his death. The movie told the truth when it depicted his generals, desiring to stop panic among the troops, pretended their leader was alive, dressed his corpse in armor, strapped him to a horse, and tied a sword into his lifeless hand. All of these things happened. The rest of the film, unfortunately, is fiction. The movie ended with the horse-carried-body of El Cid routing the frightened Muslims. History says it didn't happen that way. The corpse fooled nobody. The Muslims didn't buy it, the Spanish soldiers didn't follow, and the attack failed. That's because the body of a dead man is a poor leader (1 Corinthians 15:14).

As Christians we know that even as the body of a dead man cannot lead men into battle, so also a dead Savior cannot lead souls into heaven. As Christians, we know that we do not follow a dead teacher. As Christians we know that Christ is alive. He has risen from the dead, and because that is so, the Holy Spirit has given us new hope and new lives. When the angel rolled the stone away from Jesus' empty tomb on Easter Sunday, everything was changed (1 Peter 1:3).

How tragic it is that the stone remains in place for so many whose political leaders have tried to keep Jesus in the grave. From the time of the Roman emperors until now, atheistic and idolatrous rulers have tried to quiet any talk of an empty tomb. Not so many years ago in Egypt, Christians at worship were machine-gunned for their faith. In Pakistan, thousands of Christians lost their homes and were denied shelter, food, and water.

In Kuwait Americans have died for the cause of freedom, the government forced a Christian to divorce his wife, confiscated his property, and threatened his life. All because that man believes in an empty tomb. For that man, the tomb is empty and Jesus is alive. But, for millions, the stone remains in front of the, tomb.

Even in our own country, where freedom of religion is acknowledged, where the Bible is freely distributed, and where the church has access to radio, press, and television, the tomb remains firmly sealed for many. True, politicians roll out religious references when it is expedient or it's time for people to cast a ballot. After the winner has been installed in office, it becomes painfully evident that in many a political heart, the stone stays in place. In our land where mothers conveniently abort God-given children, the stone is in place. In this land founded upon the ethics of Christianity, drugs are in demand, drive-by shootings frequent, pornography prevalent, morality maligned, values valueless, and religion often a way for hucksters to separate people from their cash.

If we were to judge our living Lord by how many Americans lead their lives, we would be forced to confess that the stone remains in place.

In the business world, Christianity is often brushed to the side. The principles of Christ may be good for presidents of Synod, popes, and pastors, but they appear meaningless to many in the dog-eat-dog business world (Luke 16:8). “Out there,” so some think, “you can forget Jesus’ words of love because it’s every man for himself” (Matthew 5:43–45). Out there one can forget giving to others, because the job says “get all you can” (Matthew 6:19–21). Out there one can ignore feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the imprisoned (Matthew 25:41–45). Out there one has to watch out for “number one.” In much of the business world, the stone stays in front of the tomb.

But in the church, surely in the church, the stone must be rolled away. Surely, in the church, we who know the glorious resurrection story are raised with Christ and have our hearts set on things above (Colossians 3:1). Sadly, it is not always so. All too often churches and pastors, modifying the message of a living Christ, bow to modern thought. Too few pulpits publicly proclaim, “Christ crucified and risen.”

As Christians we rejoice that we do not depend upon a dead body to save us. Because of a risen Christ, we know that we, too, have been raised and are not alone. For four years, Frank Reed was held hostage in Lebanon. He was chained, lived in darkness, and seldom heard another human’s voice. He was beaten, deliberately made sick and tortured. As terrible as these pains were, the hardest thing that Reed faced was loneliness. Upon his release, he said, “I learned one overriding fact: caring is a powerful force. If no one cares, you are truly alone.”

With conviction we say today: “Jesus cares. He cares so much the tomb could not hold him. He is raised, and we are raised, too. We are not alone.”

Our presence at worship says that we know the facts. Our presence in church says that we have heard that God sent his Son to live, suffer, and die for us. Our presence says that we know God rolled the stone away from the tomb so that all might see Jesus is alive. But do we truly believe?

I pray we are not like the elderly man who, while carrying a heavy load, was overtaken by a stranger driving a wagon. Seeing the man’s plight, the driver felt sorry for him and offered him a ride. The man climbed aboard and off they went. After ten minutes or so, the driver turned around to see how the man was doing. To his surprise, he found the man sitting, but still stooped under the weight of his pack. He had not removed the load from his shoulders.

Similarly, too many Christians believe in a risen Lord, but they continue to walk under the burden of sin and guilt. God wishes to comfort us, but so often we hold on to the grief. God has forgiven us but some continue to wallow in fear and shame. God wants to lift us from the gutter to new life in Christ, but we have an unnatural longing to return to the “old self,” the old nature.

Thankfully the stone is rolled away from the tomb. Jesus is alive, and because of his blood and the healing which takes place through his sacrifice, our lives are changed. Jesus has come so we might have a new life, a better and fuller life (John 10:10. Because of Jesus’ substitution, God brushes aside a Christian’s old nature and recycles him into something usable and new. Paul talked about that change when he wrote, ***“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will”*** (Rom 12:2).

Where we were was death, but in following God we have a new nature and a new life.

That's what an English minister, W. E. Sangster, discovered. Noticing an uncomfortable feeling in his throat and a shuffle when he walked, he went to the doctor. After a battery of tests, the physician told him that he had a disease that atrophied the muscles. The prognosis was that, someday, Sangster would be unable to talk, walk, smile, or sing. Rather than bemoan his fate, the preacher threw himself into missionary work. Countless hours were spent in writing and in prayer. With a new nature and a confident spirit, he could pray, "Let me stay in the struggle, Lord. I don't mind if I can no longer be a general, but give me just a regiment to lead." Sangster wrote books, articles, and organized prayer teams throughout the country. When people came to him with pity in their words or eyes, he replied, "I'm only in the kindergarten of suffering."

Eventually the pastor's legs did fail him and his voice disappeared. However, he could still hold a pen. On Easter Sunday, just a few weeks before he died, he wrote his daughter, "It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice to shout, 'He is risen,' but it would be still more terrible to have a voice and not want to shout." We, the members of Peace have the voice. We have a living Lord. We have a living hope. Since this is so, let's join with Paul and proclaim for all to hear, "We have been raised with Christ, who is our life." Let this be our message to the world.

Amen