

## CHRIST IS RISEN – NOW WHAT?

Mark 16:9-20, 1 Peter 2:4-12

April 24, 2022

We have spent the season of Lent at the foot of the cross listening to Jesus' final seven words from the cross, and then Easter Sunday we ended up at the empty tomb declaring victory over death, because Jesus has risen. Now, probably every pastor asks this question after the season of Lent, "Now What?" "Where do we now go as the church?" After Easter the church tends to settle back into normal life until the season of Advent begins again at the end of the year that takes us to the birth of Christ, except for that one Sunday, when we celebrate Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit to empower the church, 7 weeks after Easter. When we look at the four Gospel accounts of what happened after the resurrection, we see how Jesus' Apostles were caught completely off-guard until their eyes were opened and they came to recognize the resurrected Christ, and how this all took place to fulfill Scripture, and it was only then that they stepped into their calling to take the Gospel to all creation!

At that first Easter – Mark's Gospel tells us about Mary weeping at the empty tomb, claiming that someone had stolen the body, thinking Jesus was the gardener, until Jesus speaks her name, "Mary." John's Gospel tells us about doubting Thomas who wouldn't believe until he could see the nail marks in Christ's hands, and put his fingers where the nails were, and put his hand in His side, and about Peter and John, along with five other disciples returning to fishing, meeting Jesus on the beach by the Sea of Galilee and have breakfast with Him. And Luke's Gospel tells us about two disciples leaving Jerusalem, going to a village called Emmaus, meeting Jesus on the way and don't recognize Him until Jesus breaks bread with them, and then can't wait to return and tell the others. In today's reading Mark tells us after all of this unbelief Jesus appears and confronts them about their unbelief – **Mark 16:14, "Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating, he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen."** Why all of this unbelief? All this unbelief shows me how these disciples were very ordinary, like you and me, not super apostles. Like you and I would have been, they were distraught as they mourned the death of the ONE they deeply loved!

They couldn't believe how things had turned out, as they must have been highly disappointed after giving up three years of their lives to serve Christ who is now gone. They were emotionally empty and frustrated, thinking – "Now what?"

Hiding behind locked doors, they were anxious, filled with apprehension and fear, and when they heard that Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene and two other disciples, they wanted to believe, but their anxiety kept them closed to hear the truth. The news was too good to be true, but they didn't want to get their hopes up and end up disappointed once again. Possibly they didn't want to be gullible and foolish – no one rises from the dead, so they protected themselves to the point they had no faith to believe!

Back then Jesus disciples were asking the same question that we would have been asking after Easter Sunday – “*Now what?*” Jesus appeared to them and opened their blind eyes and unstopped their deaf ears to let the significance of what had just happened sink in, because like us, they needed to come to realize that because of Easter their lives will never be the same again. Even though they had spent all that time sitting under Jesus' teachings, plus seeing numerous signs: experiencing miracles of healings, seeing countless demons flee, witnessing the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, the walking on water – they still didn't get it. So, resurrected Jesus had to come and appear to them, plus spend time with them for another forty days before He could return to Heaven. Before Jesus could leave them, He had to make sure they understood the significance of the Easter message and carry out their commission to take the message of the resurrection to the ends of the earth as this new movement called the church!

For His followers to make an impact on society and start a worldwide revolution, they had to come to realize that the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday were highly significant and must impact everything they will now do and everything they will now say – as Jesus tells them in **Luke 24:48**, “*You are my witnesses of these things.*” Plus, Jesus assures them that they wouldn't have to go out alone into that cruel world where people will hate them and persecute them. Yes, Jesus physical presence will no longer be with them, but He will continue to be with them by His Spiritual presence. As Jesus tells them before He ascends back to His Heavenly Father, “*I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high*” (Luke 24:49).

Like those very first disciples – the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday should impact everything we say and do as believers, plus how we work, how we spend our money, our leisure time, and especially how we treat others. Like Jesus' early disciples, we don't have the good fortune of the physical presence of the resurrected Christ appearing to us, we can't see Him or put our hands in His

wounds or eat with Him as they did; however, we still have God's gift of the spiritual presence of Christ with us, as the Holy Spirit clothes us with power, boldness, and courage. So, during the season of Lent as we have once again met Jesus at the foot of the cross and listened to His final words to us, and experienced the risen Christ on Easter Sunday, our lives should never be the same. Like the early disciples we also need to be totally sold out for Jesus, and if those around us don't notice a difference in us, then there's a problem! Just maybe, we also need to hear the words Jesus spoke to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and have Him open our mind as well so we could understand the Scriptures, ***"This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and will rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations... You are my witnesses of these things"*** (Luke 24:46-48). We as well need to turn our world upside-down for the commission continues!

This first Sunday after Easter – before we move on to other things, maybe we should stop for a moment and ask ourselves two questions: 1) *"What is the church?"* 2) *"How does the church relate to those outside of its doors?"* There are numerous churches all across Canada; however, are they the kind of church Jesus died for; do they preach repentance and forgiveness of sins; are they His witnesses, and are they committed to the Gospel being salt and light in their community like the first century church that turned the world upside-down?

To help us answer these questions I want us to hear the Apostle Peter's words as he describes Christ's victorious church in **1 Peter 2:4-12 (NIV)**. According to Peter this is what Christ's church looks like and acts like.

The first thing I want us to realize is that every member of this congregation has a vital and important part to play; Peter calls each one of us a *"living stone"* who God is using in building a spiritual temple, a sanctuary of God – built upon Christ, the *"Living Stone,"* who is the cornerstone of this spiritual house called SCCC. The cornerstone is the most important stone in the construction of any building, as it is the stone the builder will use to make sure all the other stones line up properly; thereby, making sure the building is being built square and true on the solid foundation that has already been laid. Being called *"living stones"* means that God inhabits us, we are a temple housing the Holy Spirit that He is using to build His spiritual house, and this spiritual house will not be completed until Christ returns, so as God continues to build His church, row-upon-row, each row depends on those *"living stones"* that were laid before those people of faith of our previous

generations as God builds His spiritual house stone-by-stone and cements us together with the mortar of His Word. And He can only build a strong stable structure when each individual “*living stone*” does their part. For the structure to endure over time, each stone needs to be in place, doing their part right where God has placed them.

Unfortunately, many Christians in today’s culture, especially with our modern technology, are not connected – they can attend on-line and even in-person without allowing God to cement them into the spiritual house He is building. If every member is not fully committed to what God is building, the building will collapse when times of testing come, when the gale force winds of persecution blow against the structure. And if the individual stones are not strongly cemented into the structure, the other stones around them will be affected as well, leaving holes and weak areas within the structure. The only church that will stand in these end times is where each member is interlocked together in unity with the other living stones to become a strong solid unmoveable body, standing strong regardless of what Satan brings against us. Many Christians today live too individualistic of lives, which was never what Jesus taught, or what the early church looked like. Only a group living in deep community can grow to be mature in Christ – living as a close knit group that need each other and feel each other’s pain and celebrate each other’s triumphs. That is the kind of church Christ is building today that will endure until Christ returns!

The best description of the importance of each individual within the church body is found in Paul’s teaching on the body of Christ in **1 Corinthians 12:4-7**, “*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*” Paul says each one of us here is an important and vital part of the body, and we all have been given gifts and talents to be used to make this spiritual house that God is building strong and resilient to outside influences. So, if you are withholding the spiritual gift that God has given specifically to you to build up the body, right where God has placed you, the body will remain weak and ineffective. Now I don’t have an issue with God closing the doors of dead ineffective churches, because from the discarded stones in the rubble there are always stones which are still useful, and God can use these useful stones at another location and incorporate those useful stones into another new structure or patch up an existing structure to

make it stronger. Building something that will endure and be salt and light within the community. Church buildings may not prevail over time; however, individual “*living stones*” can prevail and be used by God to build a new structure that can carry on the work of the kingdom. SCCC is a good example of reclaimed “*living stones*,” being re-purposed to build His church in Sombra. We need to be thankful for the reclaimed stones God is bringing here and the new stones God is bringing with their gifts, service and working!

Another hindrance I see to the spread of the Gospel is that churches want to be safe and secure from any suffering or persecution from the secular ungodly culture around us. Safe churches that want to stay comfortable and keep doing what they have been doing without having to change with the times or get out of their comfort zones will also eventually disintegrate into ruins or become museums of past glory. And that brings us to the second question: “*How does the church relate to those outside of its doors?*” We all realize that there is this ongoing tension between the church and the world around us, but how do we deal with that tension? Whenever I look at the church today, there are different ways that believers can react to this tension:

- 1) The church that wants no part of the tension – is the **exclusive church** stays distinct and separate from the world around them. The two circles never touch each other in any way! This group usually follows very strict and legalistic rules and guidelines, maintaining high standards, setting the bar so high that they keep others out that are not like them. They avoid being contaminated by the outside world at all costs, and as a result they remain a safe haven for their members but have no Biblical influence on those around them. They avoid suffering and persecution from the outside world because others find them unapproachable. They are not salt and light within their community. They are not going into the world to preach the Gospel as Christ commanded!
- 2) The church that embraces the tension – is the **inclusive church**. The church that embraces the world around them so that they blend in so much with society that you can no longer see the church, there is only a sliver still visible, as this church looks much like the secular society around them; thereby also having negligible Biblical influence on their community. This group tries to conform and assimilate with society by constantly adjusting and relaxing their Biblical standards so that everyone is included, no one is excluded no matter what they believe. And YES, the church needs to love

everyone within society and welcome everyone to come and worship with them (remember Jesus welcomed and ate with prostitutes and tax collectors); however, we can't skirt around the obvious sins in our lives, because eventually every sinner need to repent and leave their sinful life behind. So, this group as well avoids suffering and persecution because they fit right in with society and keep changing as society changes. They are also not salt and light within the community, because they have embraced society.

Now, what does the Bible say? It says we are to be not like these two groups but like a third group. **1 Peter 2:11** describes this third group, ***“Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul.”*** Peter says that when we become a Christ follower, we become a resident alien within our current culture; we become a completely different person but one who still overlaps with the rest of society and remains distinct and recognizable as set apart. A resident alien is one that comes to realize that they can't live like the rest of the world, doing the same things they used to do in their sinful past, or hang out with the same old friends and go the same old places. However, even though we have made a complete break with the world; Peter says we still need to live in the world by remaining in all areas of society and touch all areas of society, becoming a positive influence in bringing God's kingdom into all areas of society. We are to be like a city set high on a hill, shining His light into the darkness, and like salt that prevents the world from going completely rotten!

The Biblical church lives within the ongoing tension that exists between the church and secular society and speaks into that tension the truth of God's Word. We don't fit in and yet we are still a vital part of society! Thereby, a Biblical church isn't called to judge the secular world around them, but gives them a good model to follow, showing them how the people of God behave by our example as we live among them, having an influence in politics, business, medicine, science, education, arts and entertainment, bringing the truth of the Gospel message in all areas of culture.

**1 Peter 2:9** describes our identity as Christ followers: ***“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, declaring the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light...Now you are the people of God.*”** As the people of God we are part of a counterculture, a counterculture that is seen as different and yet appealing in many ways, because they will notice how we treat each other, how we love each other, how we are good

employers and good employees, and model citizens. Others may not want to become one of us, but they would want to hire one of us and have one of us as their neighbour. And then **1 Peter 2:12** describes our influence as Christ followers: ***“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they may accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he returns to judge the world.”*** We live such good lives around unbelievers that they can’t find any fault in us!

Now, we also need to be cautious here – being a Biblical church is not necessarily a safe place. When Roman Emperor Nero set fire to Rome, he had to blame someone, so he blamed the group that stood out in the crowd as being different, Nero blamed the Christians! So, if you want to play it safe as a Christ follower – the Biblical church is not for you – as Jesus was persecuted and hated, you will be persecuted and hated. However, if you want to maintain your Biblical values and yet still serve your community, you will have to live within the ongoing tension between the church and society, and the world will most likely reject you as it rejected Christ. Yet at the same time, they will recognize you for your faith, your good work ethics, your integrity, and the compassion you show towards others, especially the poor, and they will see the beauty in how you reach out generously in serving others with your time, talents, and wealth. Christians will always suffer in some way if they stand up for their Biblical values, so we need to accept the fact that we are called to be resident aliens within our society when we choose to live in the centre of the ongoing tension between the church and state, as we are in the world, but not of the world!

It takes a mature confident believer who is well rounded in God’s Word to live within that tension. So how do we do that? We can only do that by claiming Jesus as our cornerstone, the true Foundation we build our lives upon, and the One who we find to be priceless and precious, according to **1 Peter 2:6-7**, ***“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame. Now to you who believe, this stone is precious.”*** To live within that tension between the church and society Jesus needs to become the most precious thing in our lives, the One we build our entire identity upon, so when suffering and persecution comes from our pagan society and our building starts to shake, it will not crumble and fall!

Living in these end times the church is being shaken, and it’s only going to get worse. Satan wants the body of Christ to crumble and disintegrate before His end

comes. And Satan will never give up, he will keep throwing all kinds of situations Like COVID against us, he will keep shaking our faith to cause us to give into and conform to society, so that we would no longer be salt and light within our communities. Satan wants society to continue to rot and disintegrate as darkness covers our land; thereby, preventing others from coming to salvation. Satan wants to destroy our witness because He knows what Peter was talking about when he said this about the true Biblical church: ***“they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he returns”*** (1 Peter 2:12). Satan knows the power of the church when it acts like a Biblical church and hosts God’s presence, bringing Heaven down to earth. Satan is not concerned about an exclusive church or an inclusive church, but fears a Biblical church!

Our perfect example is Jesus – who was the ultimate foreigner and alien within society – he was hated, despised, and rejected. Yet He never gave in but followed through to the end by suffering and dying on the cross, all because we are precious to Him. We are so precious to Christ that He died for us. In return, is Christ precious to you? Is Jesus precious enough to you that you are willing to surrender everything to Him, and serve Him by becoming a *“living stone”* within the spiritual house that God is building right here in Sombra called SCCC? Your answer cannot come with head knowledge, but only with heart knowledge. What does your heart tell you? Is Jesus so precious that you are willing to be the church He has called you to be, by willing to be a foreigner and alien within this society, willing to stand up for what you believe and not conform to but influence society from within?

Think about it this way – what if you became sick and after a battery of tests your doctor gave you the bad news that you only have one week to live unless you take this pill. You say, YES, give me that pill; however, the doctor says that it’s very expensive. To buy the pill you will have to sell your home and move into a tiny apartment; you will have to sell your car and walk or take the bus; you will have to cash in all of your savings, all of your RRSPs and empty your bank accounts, and live day-by-day for the rest of your life. What would you say to the doctor? Of course, we would all say to the doctor, give me that pill, what good are all those material things if I’m dead! That pill would become precious to you, and everything else in your life would be expendable, and that’s exactly what it means for Jesus to become precious to us as Christ followers! Jesus becomes precious only when everything else becomes expendable! What good is it if we gain the whole world yet forfeit our soul!

The disciples forfeited everything to follow Jesus, and even though they doubted Christ's resurrection at first because they were overcome with grief and disappointment. When the risen Christ appeared to them and rebuked them for their unbelief, He gave them their commission, ***“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned”*** (Mark 16:15-16). I want you to notice that this verse indicates that God not only loves mankind, but also values this planet – the gospel is not only for mankind but for all creation as well – God's desire is not to destroy this planet but to redeem it. We carry the message of healing to God's planet as well as to those around us as stewards of His good creation. As we celebrated earth day on Friday, we are to be champions of our environment – and example to those around us!

Did Christ's disciples sit around saying *“Now what?”* **Mark 16:19-20** gives us the answer, ***“After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then, the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.”*** The disciples were no longer confused, they knew exactly what God required of them, and they went out and preached with boldness and courage because Jesus had risen from the dead, and nothing would stop them – prison, torture or death are not deterrents when you believe in the resurrection! Because Jesus is alive, our calling is also to declare to anyone that would hear us that Jesus is alive and along with His disciples we are to confirm this truth with signs!

You are so precious to Christ that He died for You? In return, is Christ precious to you? So precious that you are willing to become a *“living stone”* in the church He is building here at SCCC that is in the world but not of the world! Salt and light dispelling the darkness right where He has placed us!