

**Raised With Christ**  
Matthew 28:1-10  
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24 April 2011

Today I stand here proclaiming to you that God raised Jesus of Nazareth from the grave.

Let's back up and set the stage.

Since 63 B. C. E., the Jews had been governed by the Romans. The reign of Caesar Augustus and his immediate successors had instituted an era known as the Pax Romana, because unlike the centuries which preceded it, which had been torn apart by major wars between empires and dynasties, the period of the Pax Romana saw no major wars engulf the Mediterranean. This was, therefore, a time of relative peace and great prosperity, but the prosperity was primarily for the few. The Pax Romana also had its dark side. It was a false peace imposed upon the Mediterranean and Europe by an autocratic, imperial government. Even the Roman historian Tacitus described it negatively: "they make a desolation and call it peace."

One group of people who clearly suffered was Jewish peasants. In this period, life suddenly became worse for the common people. The Jewish peasants were heavily taxed and were falling deeply into debt. The peasants would borrow money but in most cases would be unable to pay it back because of the high cost of living and the high tax burden. The peasant's property or land, which had been given as collateral, was then seized. The peasant then became a servant or sharecropper on the land he had once owned.

Now, Jews viewed land with a religious significance. Land had been promised to them by God during the Exodus. Land had been promised to them as part of Israel's return from exile in Babylon. The loss of land, therefore, was a theological as well as an economic issue.

Government, religious authorities, the courts, and the economic forces all conspired in a system that led to the further degradation of the lowest classes of Jewish society. What was the result of all this economic and militaristic oppression? Growing unrest. In this period there were five revolts whose leaders claimed to be Messiah. These rebellions, insurgencies, and messianic movements eventually led to the Jewish War of the sixties and the destruction of Jerusalem.

It was in this climate of unrest that Jesus of Nazareth appears proclaiming that the kingdom of God is at hand. God's reign is coming and will be ushered in by a radical new community committed to the way of God. Jesus then proceeds to give glimpses of the reign of God.

One glimpse is when he heals those who are suffering physically.

Another glimpse is when he includes those who are mentally ill.

There's the glimpse of the kingdom that comes when we touches lepers – those

outcasts of his society.

Or when he says about the woman taken in adultery – “the one who is without sin, cast the first stone.”

Or when he welcomes all to the table.

The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who come as children.

To those willing to give to the poor.

To those who have ministered unto the least of these.

Blessed are the peacemakers, he says.

From Nazareth comes this young man, an outcast of his own people. God’s reign, which he proclaims, is a complete reversal of the status quo. It is an assault upon the religious, political, and economic authorities. The peasantry are drawing together to listen to and follow this one who is announcing that God’s reign has begun. This one who claims to be God’s anointed one and is challenging the power of the Caesars and the legitimacy of the religious authorities.

Finally, Jesus comes to Jerusalem, and is welcomed by the people like the political radical that he is. He cleanses the temple, announcing that this is to be a house of prayer for all nations and not a den of thieves. And as a result of these challenging actions, the powers-that-be seek to kill him.

This is the simple truth of the crucifixion -- it was the result of a life lived according to the way of God. And as the way of God confronts a violent world -- that violent world will often crucify the messenger of God.

In this moment the sin of the world was revealed. Sin is a condition of the creation, it is structural and systemic. We all participate in sin even when we do not intend to, simply as participants in the social system. This is part of what the Bible means when it refers to powers and principalities. Sin isn’t so much about individual choices and actions but is about the corrupted institutions and structures of human society; structural aspects of human society that break relationships, thereby defying God’s will for creation.

Sin breaks relationships. It alienates us from ourselves, from God, from other people. It ruptures the creation, because God’s desire is for creation to be a communion of self-giving love.

The crucifixion of Jesus exposes all this corruption and failure of humanity to live according to God’s desires. That alone could have been the end of the story. Another noble young radical cut down in his prime. But that is not where it ended.

Matthew tells us:

Suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. . . . the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised.”

In this Easter moment, God vindicates the way of life of Jesus of Nazareth and, in doing so, God proclaims that God’s way is

inclusion of the outcast  
freedom for the oppressed  
justice for the poor  
healing for the suffering  
humility and self-giving  
compassion for all in a  
community based upon forgiveness and reconciliation  
and peace in a world of violence.

By this very act, the way of life of the powers and principalities has been defeated. We know that there is another way. That their way of doing things is not the way we have to live, should live, or will live.

In this very moment the authorities were put on notice that their attempts to divide, exclude, and violently oppress are judged by the creator of the universe. Yet, the powers-that-be continue to challenge the way of God in this world. They continue to sow darkness, doubt, and injury. They continue to preach that the way of God is division, exclusion, and violent oppression of those different from themselves. The Risen One stands to rebuke them. This is not the way of God. It is the way of Caesar. It is the way of sin. It is the path to hell.

We will not be thwarted by their failed philosophies and false doctrines, because we share in the power of the Risen One. We are ransomed from the power they had over us. We too have been raised with Christ.

The goodness and the beauty of this creation has been spoiled by violence and evil, but the Easter story is God's promise to recreate this fallen world. All creation will be transformed by divine power and glory.

This is the opportunity for spiritual awakening. Once we have encountered the Risen One, like Mary Magdalene, we are never the same again. We have a new vision, looking at the world with the eyes of hope. With this new vision we can go into the world, proclaiming the way of God.

Let us make a habit then of ourselves  
including the outcast  
liberating the oppressed  
seeking justice for the poor  
healing the suffering  
giving of ourselves with humility  
being compassionate toward all in a  
community based upon forgiveness and reconciliation  
and being the instruments of God's peace in a world of violence.

For when we do these things, we are assured that we are living according to the will of God.

It is with passionate faith that today I stand here and proclaim to you that when God raised Jesus of Nazareth from the grave that God raised you up to a new life.

With courage and hope let us go forth and bear witness that we are alive!