

**Easter Sunday**  
**March 27, 2016**  
**“Walking with Hope”**  
**Central Presbyterian Church, Montclair**  
**David Noble**

**1 Corinthians 15:9-28**

<sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. <sup>11</sup>Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

<sup>12</sup>Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?

<sup>13</sup>If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; <sup>14</sup>and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. <sup>15</sup>We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup>For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. <sup>17</sup>If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup>Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup>If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

<sup>20</sup>But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. <sup>21</sup>For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; <sup>22</sup>for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. <sup>23</sup>But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup>Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup>For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup>The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

**Luke 24:1-12**

<sup>24</sup>But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.

<sup>2</sup>They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they went in, they did not find the body. <sup>4</sup>While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. <sup>5</sup>The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. <sup>6</sup>Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup>that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” <sup>8</sup>Then they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup>and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup>Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup>But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. <sup>12</sup>But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

1.

Not an “Alleluia” to be found. Jesus dies and is laid to rest in a tomb. Three days later the women come to properly anoint his body for permanent burial. But the stone in front of the tomb is rolled away and there’s no body. Is there an alleluia? Do they celebrate? No, there is perplexity. They are baffled by the absence of Jesus’ body. Suddenly two angels appear and the women are afraid. “Remember?” the angels say somewhat judgmentally. “Remember what?” “Oh yes, Jesus told us this would happen.” The women go home and tell the apostles. Is there an alleluia? Do they celebrate? No, they call it an idle tale, nonsense, unbelievable.

That’s how the Bible reports the first experiences in this world of a new reality called resurrection. And it doesn’t get any better.

The Apostle Paul writes a letter to his congregation. Remember, he says, remember how we used to share alleluias over the resurrection of Jesus? But now your alleluias are muted, uncertain. Let me tell you again, he says.

It's worth noting that this is the same Paul who during the first half of his life also did not believe the resurrection. Back then the resurrection was, for him, a dangerous idea that had to be snuffed out, so he hunted down Christians to put them in jail, to stop the spread of this disturbing nonsense.

What a kick off for resurrection.

2.

Not that it's any easier today. "I heard someone interviewed on the radio the other day who had just attended a town hall meeting with presidential candidate Bernie Sanders. This person was actually supporting a different candidate but wanted to attend this town hall in order to ask a question of Sanders. The question was asked and an answer received. The radio interviewer said, "How did it go? Did you get your question answered?" The citizen said, "Yes I did, but I don't believe it. There's no way I will believe anything he says."

Sometimes it's hard for us to believe what we are told, especially when we've already got an opinion. Some people in Jesus' day did believe in a resurrection but one in which everybody was resurrected all at the same time. No one expected just one person to be resurrected while everyone else kept on living just as they always had.

If I write a book someday, I'm going to title it, "Assumptions Can Kill You." We don't even know we have them until something happens that shakes us awake.

Resurrection these days is no different. There's an assumption that resurrection is spiritual, that the body dies and the spirit lives on, and that is what resurrection is about. But what the Bible talks about, what the women and the apostles and Paul and the Corinthians were talking about was bodily resurrection. That means the physical body is transformed by God after it dies into a new body. The old body doesn't just vanish, it isn't a throwaway, God uses it to create something new and mysterious and remarkable.

I was talking with a funeral director about this the other day. I said I wanted to accompany a friend's body to the place where it would be cremated. That body was what made my friend who he was. It's a gift from God and one day God will resurrect it into a new and glorious body, I said. It deserves some respect and some attention, all the way to the end. So there I was ready to go with him. Did the funeral director say alleluia? No, he said he had never had anyone ask to accompany a body to cremation.

I don't think my friend has arrived at the end just because he died. I think I will see him again one day. And I want to say I was with you all the way.

3.

Resurrection is brand new to the women and disciples and to Paul. It takes time for them to adjust, to see, to realize what they are dealing with. They may not be able to explain the

resurrection, but they are slowly beginning to see how it is working in them and around them already.

The women at the tomb, for instance. They're shocked, but they remember what Jesus had promised. Now they begin to put the pieces together. They go to "tell the eleven and all the rest" the gospel says. The family is growing. The apostles, the women, and all the rest will number over a hundred in just a few days. A new community is being formed through this resurrection. New life is being created.

Peter had just denied even knowing Jesus three days earlier, but this resurrection, perplexing as it is, gives him a new life. He becomes a leader of the disciples. Within a few weeks he is boldly preaching in the streets. He and the rest of the disciples who had been clueless about Jesus gradually grow stronger and bolder and set out into the world at great risk to themselves to spread the good news for the rest of their lives.

And the church in Corinth was a mess. Arrogant church members were tearing the congregation apart. So Paul reminds them to remember the resurrection. Through it, he says, "all will be made alive in Christ." There are no divisions in the resurrection, no partiality. All will be made alive. So, get along, Paul says.

4.

If God can raise Jesus then anything is possible. There are no limits on our life as a church, no boundaries for our living as Christians. We may not be able to explain the resurrection but we can celebrate it and tell about it and live out of the confidence and courage that resurrection brings.

God has raised Jesus from the dead and we can trust that God is determined to renew all of creation. So we can join in, throw ourselves into the work of renewal that God is doing.

Didn't we catch a glimpse of that resurrection courage this past Christmas as we hosted the IHN guests for a week? 90 adults and youth and children from our congregation and from our community came together to declare that homelessness will not win. So we hosted four families here for a week. If there is no resurrection, it doesn't make a lot of sense to do that. We are motivated to do it because God has acted, the world is headed somewhere with God, and we want to join in.

There is an insert in your bulletin that invites every one of you to a gathering here at the church after worship on April 10. We want to make a bold decision as a congregation to partner with an agency in this community that will make a difference in the lives of our neighbors. We want to have courage to redefine our purpose and our place in the community.

We can do that because the resurrection has knocked down barriers, especially our assumptions about what is possible. Jesus was just the beginning. Paul says Jesus was the "first

fruits”, the “first crop of the harvest.” There is more to come, more resurrection on the way, so we confidently lean into the future, giving ourselves to the work of renewal.

So look around. What is ailing that needs support? Who is afraid that needs courage? What is dying that needs new life? Take the opportunity with both hands, do what is right with courage for Christ has been raised and will come again to redeem us, all of us, and the whole world.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!