

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday After Easter**  
**The 7 FIRST Words of Jesus**

April 19, 2009  
Pastor Mark Nieting

***Christ is RISEN! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Hallelujah!***

This morning we are 7 days out from our celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the miracle of all miracles. As “Easter People” we know, trust and believe that without Easter we would have no Savior, just another tomb filled by another religious leader. Without Easter there would be no hope for any of us beyond the grave. Without Easter we would still be “dead in our sins.” Without Easter we would people with false hope and dead end lives. But Christ was raised....after 3 days in the grave following His crucifixion. He is risen, ascended, and living!

In John Masefield’s drama, “*The Trial of Jesus*,” there is a passage in which the Roman centurion in command at the cross came back to Pilate at the end of the day to hand in his report. Later, Pilate’s wife asked the soldier how Jesus died. He told her, in more detail than was really necessary. Suddenly she asked, “*Do you think he’s dead?*” The centurion responded, “*No, I don’t.*” “*Where is he?*” she asked? “*He’s loose in the world, lady, where no one can stop his truth!*”

We take Jesus’ words as truth. His “seven last words from the cross” have been memorized by most of us as God’s message to the entire world by a Savior who hung there for the sins of all of us. We remembered every Good Friday.

But now....after Easter, Jesus gives a very real and personal message to all of His people who believe, trust, and accept the news of the resurrection: the church. This morning we're going to look at the **First Seven Words of the Risen Christ** and see what they....what HE has to say to us.

**#1: “Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?”** (John 20:15).

The first words of Jesus are spoken to a woman in a garden, a woman who was deeply grieving and overflowing with tears. Think of all the tears YOU have shed throughout your life and why you have shed them! Aside from a few wonderful tears of joy, tears are caused by abandonment, betrayal, pain and suffering....all of these the result of sin manifested in many different ways. Tears are normal, yes, and even necessary, because we live in a fallen world....and we accept them as that. Nevertheless, when we're crying, it's nice to have someone CARE!

The angels were the first to ask Mary WHY, and after she explains the situation to them, she hears the very same question coming from another direction. This time from Jesus, His very presence obscured because of her tears. But He was there, alive in her presence and concerned over her tears. But Jesus had NOT come to wipe away her tears, an imperfect solution to the problem of tears, suffering and sin. Rather, Jesus had come to answer them, words later echoed in John's REVELATION when we are promised that Christ will, *“wipe away every tear from their eyes!”*

**#2: “Mary.”** (John 20:16). Jesus called Mary by name, personally. Jesus knows each of His followers by name, just as we know HIM by name. At the time of our baptisms we are “marked” with the sign of the cross on our foreheads and our hearts and our NAMES are written in the “Book of Life.” God’s promise to us is that Jesus....our “good shepherd”..... knows each one of us just as a shepherd knows each of his sheep. Even the words to “*I am Jesus’ Little Lamb*” include the words “*even calls me by my name.*”

Imagine how Mary’s head snapped around when she heard her name! There’s nothing that touches us more deeply than our name....it’s our very identity. What a wonderful thing faith in Christ IS for us, that no matter WHAT the cause of our tears, Jesus knows us, personally, by name, and responds to our needs!

**#3: “Don’t hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to my Father. Go and tell my brothers that I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God!”** (John 20: 17) These words of Jesus to Mary prompt me to ask you a simple question: if the dearest one in your life has been gone...or in Mary’s case...crucified and buried....and then returned, WHAT would you DO when, believe it or not, He was ALIVE again? Let me answer that for you: you’d want to HANG ON FOR DEAR LIFE! You’d never want to let go again!

I don’t doubt for a moment that Mary gave Jesus a “holy hug” when her eyes cleared and she recognized Him. Jesus’ words weren’t His way of saying

“Goodbye” to Mary. Instead, they were words that assured her that she would see Him again, as well as an invitation to spread the news of His resurrection with His disciples.....because He KNEW that they were huddled in terror for their own lives! And in ONE little word, “*adelphoi*,” (*brothers*), Jesus was asking Mary to reassure His disciples that He still claimed them as “brothers;” brothers who shared the same Heavenly Father and the same God....although in very different ways. It was a wonderful way of Jesus to send His message of life through Mary, one that would have to make-do until late that afternoon.

There may be times in life when it seems like Jesus is far away....and we may end up wondering if He’s simply slipped from our grasp or forgotten us: but His promise...to us as His brothers (and sisters) is that He is ALWAYS with us!

**#4: “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”** A few hours have passed and two of Jesus’ followers are leaving Jerusalem for a small village named Emmaus. Perhaps they hadn’t been able to walk home on the Sabbath, maybe even helping with Jesus’ burial. Their “travel talk” was not just the trivia of the day....it was the events from the arrest, the trial, the crucifixion and the burial of their dear Lord Jesus, who, seemingly out of nowhere, came walking up to them on the road.....unrecognized! His question stopped them dead in their tracks. After Palm Sunday’s “hosannas” and Good Friday’s cries of “crucify Him, they couldn’t imagine ANYONE in Jerusalem who hadn’t heard of what happened to Jesus!

Yet this Poor Traveler on the road obviously hadn't, because He asked them again.....so in the marvelously ironic way that God sometimes works, these two men tell Jesus all about what happened to HIM, right up to the rumors of His resurrection! Imagine the smile spreading on Jesus' face as He listened!

Word #4 ends with another wonderful twist: Jesus picks up the story from Cleopas and company and proceeds to tell THEM everything the prophets had said that He...Jesus...would need to endure for their salvation! After they arrived at Emmaus, Jesus joined them in the house and broke bread with them. At that very moment of blessing, He disappeared, leaving them SO excited they ran several miles back to Jerusalem, found the disciples and shared their news!

**#5:** Back in Jerusalem, the disciples were still digesting their dinners and the shocking news of the men from Emmaus when Jesus appeared, even though the room was locked because of their fear. Jesus said: **“Peace be with you!”** (Luke 24:36) Isn't that just like Jesus! He suffers, dies, is buried, proclaims victory over the evil one, is raised from the dead, and worries about how His disciples feel!

I can understand some of their fear: the Jewish leaders had crucified Jesus so they well could have been next. Jesus had been their leader for 3 years: who was their leader now? If we could place ourselves in their shoes, I

think we'd feel many of the very same things. Out of love for them, our Risen Lord Jesus tells them...and us....NOT to be afraid. If HE can conquer even death itself, that, my friends, HAS to bring us a peace that NOTHING else can give us. Christ has power over death so what can touch us? It's news that we are well blessed to remember each time we just KNOW that life is treating us worse than anybody has ever been treated....to know Jesus, and Jesus alone can bring us peace.

**#6: Look at my hands and feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have. Give me something to eat. This is what I told you when I was still with you: everything written about me must be fulfilled.**" (Luke 24: 36-49) It was only a few weeks until Jesus would give His disciples the entire Great Commission to "*make disciples of all nations,*" but from Easter evening onward He began to connect His life, death and resurrection....and therefore forgiveness of sins, life and salvation..... to every single human being who would hear...and believe.

*"Touch me!"* Jesus said. *"Watch me eat real food!! I am not dead. I'm not a ghost. I'm alive, just as I said I would be!"* Then Jesus went on, connecting His suffering, death and resurrection to all the prophetic words of the Old Testament so that they could be better equipped to "be" witnesses....and spread the news starting at Jerusalem and reaching the entire world!

Now we come to **#7**, and it's here that I had to make some choices. It's obvious from Scripture that Jesus' appearances weren't limited to Mary and

the Disciples. He had spoken more than just 7 brief phrases, as He had from the cross.

By His ascension He had shown Himself to over 500 people (Acts 15). He spoke words of reconciliation and mission to Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, but those came later. He gave the Great Commission at His ascension, but again, those come 40 days later and we'll speak of them in a few weeks. I'm sure we all remember His words to "Doubting Thomas," reminding us how much we miss when we aren't in church every single Sunday, as well commending words for those who believe without seeing.

But for Jesus' "Seventh Word" after the resurrection, I chose these words to His disciples: **#7: "Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. You are WITNESSES of these things. 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: 48)

These words are crucial to all of us. Without the impact of these very words, you and I wouldn't be sitting here this morning. We wouldn't be known as "Easter People." It was these same disciples, cowering in this upper room in fear of their lives, who, when they had been filled with the Holy Spirit, changed the world! The same words apply to us today:

- God the Father HAS called us to be **witnesses** of Jesus Christ to the world.

- The Holy Spirit HAS filled us with **power**, so that we can witness without fear!
- Jesus has promised that He will be **with us always**, and because of His resurrection, we know that to be true.

These, my friends, are the SEVEN FIRST WORDS of JESUS, spoken after His resurrection.....words that are caring, comforting, life-giving, challenging, and world changing....and to them, the Easter People of God say **AMEN!**