

RAISED IN PROMISE

Series: Let All Things Rise
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Resurrection, Life, Crucifixion
Matt 28:5-7

Welcome to Easter at Trinity. There was nothing pretty or neat about the death of Jesus on the cross. Crucifixion was brutal and ugly. The Romans Killed revolutionaries and dangerous criminals in that way.

So this was not a death that was unique to Jesus but only Jesus' death was unique. In the sense that it changed everything.

The night before his arrest, Jesus was under such emotional distress. And being fully human he began to sweat profusely just like we all would under such stress. Jesus was going to pray that night but even before he got where he was going, he fell under the weight of this stress and his sweat is bloody or as blood.

He knows what is coming for him. He feels the weight of the sin of the world on his shoulders. He even makes a prayer asking that if it was possible, the father would take that cup away from him that he would not drink it. Yet he submits to the will of God, knowing too well that from the beginning this is why He came into the world.

A very clear picture of Jesus' humanity and the weight of what was in front of him. God sends an angel to strengthen him, strength that he was going to need for what was ahead of him.

Before any crucifixions, the victim or criminal in the eyes of Rome would be flogged. And flogging by the Romans is really intense form whipping. Because the whip was made of leather had lead weights at the end and on the lead weights were nails, pieces of glass and bones. The idea was to scourge the victim. The flogging was so bad it would rip the flesh off of one's skin. Another way to bring to submission and publicly humiliate the subject and cause fear on all who are watching.

Then Jesus is made to carry his cross possibly a beam of 80 pounds or 36 kilos. Wounded and dehydrated. Along the path, there are people weeping for him and there are people booing and jeering some even spat on him. And all he was seeing is all the people He has come to die for. Still very compassionate over all of them. Under the weight of his cross, Jesus falls. Tradition holds that he fell three times or as we say it here in Kenya thrice. All this an attempt to bring shame to him and cause fear in the hearts of all who were watching. At some point, he is helped by a man from Cyrene.

Now, a little side note, some of you do not know that Cyrene is actually in Africa. This continent has been part of God's story alongside the rest of the world. We are not an afterthought to God. God was here before any missionaries set foot here. When the whole world was gathered at the cross of Jesus receiving both forgiveness and invitation to the Kingdom, Africa was represented so receive freedom from any sense of being less in Jesus name.

Anyway, back to the plot Jesus gets to the place of crucifixion called Golgotha. Literally, it meant the place of the skulls. My guess is being that this was not the first crucifixion the Romans were doing and they liked doing it where people would see to terrify them, that this was a place that was living up to its name. It was a place that represented death. And here was the son of God, life itself, walking towards death straight up. Quite symbolic.

Then at the crucifixion site, they drive a nail through his hands and nails through his heels and hang him on a tree. The thing is this is excruciating. His back has been scourged and is full of open wounds and he is made to rest it on a tree. Most of the weight of his body was being made to hand for his nailed hands.

You cannot do that for too long so the natural thing to do would be to lift your body to try to support the body with your feet. Imagine the pain of trying to support your body weight with feet only supported with nails going through them. That is the kind of pain. Either way, you are in pain. And the motion of trying to give either the hands or the feet some rest is causing him to rub sour wounds against a tree.

Then there is the breathing issue. You cannot quite breathe. With your hands stretched and supporting your body weight your diaphragm is under a lot of stress too and it's pressing up on your lung space. So certainly over time, this would even cause suffocation. Nothing about this whole experience is pleasant to watch, think about and certainly not to experience.

But to this day, there is a big debate about how Jesus died. See strangely 6 hours later, Jesus was dead. See part of the horror of the crucifixion is that you would be left in that agony for days and you would die a very slow painful and shameful death. But Jesus death took just 6 hours.

For this of who do not know the story of the crucifixion, Jesus was crucified alongside 2 other people. But the bodies were pulled down instead of being left there for days as they normally would. The only reason they did this was there were Jewish festivities coming up in Jerusalem and they did not want to offend the Jews and cause a political riot.

The governor of the place knew that the emperor of Rome would be so mad if there was yet another riot in Jerusalem so he tried to coexist with Jewish tradition where he could. But because it was not enough time for someone to have died from crucifixion they broke the knees of the other two so that they could not hold up their

body weight with their feet and suffocate to death. Hasten the process and get them out of there.

But when they came to Jesus, they found him dead already. How? Why? This one question that has troubled scientists through generations. Some try to point out everything Jesus had gone through from the dehydration of the sweating to the falling with his cross as things that caused his early death on the cross. But the thing is, all the other two had been given the same treatment. It was a standard crucifixion ritual. But why had Jesus died in only 6 hours?

Well, maybe because they never could kill Jesus instead Jesus chose to die. He embraced the cross for our sake. Hanging from that cross, Jesus said something that echoed what he had said before. One day teaching his disciples Jesus said,

John 10:18

My life cannot be taken away by anybody else; I am giving it of My own free will. My authority allows Me to give My life and to take it again. All this has been commanded by My Father.

He is saying that he is the author of life, that is part of His authority and no one could take his life from him. So, he is preempting this point in history. That the world will see him die, but it will be a choice. Death never had victory over Jesus, Jesus embraced death to give us life. Even before he is actually arrested. Answering the question that Jews asked in those days and people ask today, how could God die? Is God not eternal? Well, by choosing death.

Then at the cross. Jesus in pain yet full of faith speaks the following words

Luke 23:46

Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit. And with those words, he exhaled and breathed no more.

Literally translating to Father, I give you my last breath. Jesus worshipped the father, even with his last breath. John tells the same story but he writes it as and he said, "It is finished" He chose the end. He chose his last breath. It was an appointed time. He had accomplished his work, our salvation. And he died.

But the thing is death is a weird thing. Even when we are most expecting it may be out of old age or painful sickness when we lose people we love our Souls let out a cry. Even when say people choose to turn off machines at a hospital after supporting life longer than it is helpful. We talk about it and we think we are ready but when we finally see our loved ones laying lifeless it hits our souls hard. Maybe because our Souls know that death was never part of God's plan. It might be our reality now but it was never part of God's plan.

And as characteristic of God, in everything that the enemy and sin corrupted he always leaves the signs of His goodness. A promise of wonder. And when death hits much think it is finality but God leaves seeds of promise.

Have you ever noticed, that it is when people die that we finally see the life they actually had? In Swahili, there is a proverb that translates to everyone has his person. Because even the worst of us is such life to someone.

Funny thing is that when even the worst people die, at their funerals people start seeing how lovely they were, how kind they were. Finally, people start pledging their lives to carry on their legacies. It's like the life he really lived bursts out and cannot be retrained. So when death thinks it has victory the life that was in us is released unchained to the world. The thing is death can never contain or silence life.

True to what Jesus said that

John 12:24

I tell you the truth: unless a grain of wheat is planted in the ground and dies, it remains a solitary seed. But when it is planted, it produces in death a great harvest.

Death never wins, cannot contain life. In a twisted way, life becomes visible. Because God leaves seeds of promise in all brokenness.

Here is a recent example. Diana Princess of Wales died and hundreds of years of British Tradition were changed in a week. The Union Jack had never flown over the Castle but that week it did in honour of the departed Princess. And to this day, when the Queen is not in residence it does. To this day, you have countless documentary series paying tribute to her. As I was watching one two weeks ago, I could remember myself as a young boy following the funeral of the Princess I never really knew. And from then on I have studied about her with so much interest and curiosity.

She was not even Royal anymore but in her death, she was honoured as the People's princess. The beauty of someone whose life might have been controversial for many was seen its beauty. You know why?

Despite her brokenness, Diana loved boldly. When Aids was still a death sentence, Diana moved and touched victims with her bare hands.

When to be Elite meant you did not mix with commoners, she was found among the ordinary people.

When to be a princess meant you hide your humanity she was seen trying hard to find love and face her weakness every day.

When she finally died all her life in its beauty burst into the world untamed. Finally, people could see the beauty God had put in her without being blinded by her brokenness. She was sown in weakness and we could finally see the seeds of promise.

If that was just Diana, what would happen when Jesus died? The man who touched lepers at a time when lepers were literally kicked out of cities and made to shout their name and status when passing the streets?

What would happen when Jesus died? The man who saw a burial procession and was so moved by compassion for the widow that he stopped the whole caravan raised the boy back to life.

What would happen if Jesus died? The man who embraced little children at a time when children were considered less than slaves yet slaves were nothing more than property.

What would happen if Jesus died? The man who ate with sinners just like you and I. A man who loved the losers and the winners, a man who had compassion on hypocritical Pharisees and prostitutes alike. Even allowed one to anoint his head.

What would happen if Jesus died? Allowed himself to be sown in weakness? The weakness of death. The man who said he was the way, the truth and the LIFE.

Like all deaths there was an outburst of life when Jesus died on that cross. Everything was hit by a wave of true life from people to nature.

There was a Roman soldier who was watching all these things unfold and had been part of the team that had nailed Jesus on the cross when he saw Jesus dead, He knelt down in conviction and realization saying

Luke 23:46

Surely this man was righteous

That is why it is so important for the church and believers to be filled with God's life because when people encounter it, just like the Roman soldier, they will be convicted. They will not be convinced by great arguments or anything superficial. But by experiencing an outpouring of the life of Jesus in us.

Or pure or just. At the moment of Jesus death as His life, again because death can not silence life and certainly not eternal life, the true life of God bursts out of Him. Even nature recognized what had happened and there was an earthquake that shook the ground. And in that middle of the afternoon darkness covered the earth. Because at the experience of true life nature and the hearts of human beings cannot deny God. All of creation at the point of Jesus' was getting the ripples of the outburst of the life of God himself.

But even better there was a symbolic curtain at the temple that seemed to separate God from folks like us, unholy and impure and weak and broken and at that moment that curtain was torn in two. Literally there the presence of God came rushing out to meet us, to meet you, to meet the word because God so loved the world.

Could God have been doing some of His best work in the ugliest of human experiences? Could God bring beauty from ashes? Could God be placing treasures in jars of clay? Could God in your brokenness and the areas where you have been sown in weakness be moulding you for true life? Could God in death be bringing life?

That is probably why Paul said that he boasts more in his weakness because it is in his weaknesses that God shows his strength.

But what happens if the one who lives forever chooses death? Is a great question. But the picture is incomplete without the question, what happens if the son of God is raised to life? On the third day, A Sunday morning which we now celebrate as Easter Sunday the burial site of Jesus was empty. Again just like he promised.

And it startled the whole city. Because some people saw the loved ones they had lost come back to life. When Jesus picked his life up again. When death has done all it could do and is still defeated. When the world has received the outburst of true life then death really loses its sting. The shame of our weakness and brokenness has no more power over us. Because all that was sown in weakness is raised in promise.

When He is resurrected, death loses its power. The ugliness of death is no longer a threat. Because we get the hope that we will be raised in promise even though we are sown in weakness. We no longer have to work hard to put our best foot forward

because we can come before God knowing that all things will rise, and in Jesus, we will all rise again. That our brokenness, our sin and our death has no victory.

That we can endure pain and perhaps even expect it. That we can hold on to hope even when it seems like things have been eroded away because there is the promise of resurrection. The Hope that all things will rise and bless his name.

You know what happens when the son of God comes back to life? The Holy Spirit as poured out on all flesh and now we can all be part of true life. And now we do not have to wait for death for us to see true beauty, we can live in true beauty and power each day in obedience to the Holy Spirit.

So on the morning of Resurrection Sunday, some ladies who had followed Jesus went to the tomb to anoint his body and they did not find it because He had risen from the dead. Risen with life for us all. I want us to together read that part.

Matthew 28:5-7

The angel spoke to the women, to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary.

angel: Don't be afraid. I know you are here keeping watch for Jesus who was crucified. But Jesus is not here. He was raised, just as He said He would be. Come over to the grave, and see for yourself. And then go straight to His disciples, and tell them He's been raised from the dead

Call: He is Risen!

Response: He is risen indeed

There is no more life in the things you have lost. There is no more life in who you were. But because of the resurrection of Jesus there is so much promise and hope that even in the ugly places God is doing His Best work.

Let's Pray