

+ Luke 24:36-49 + The Risen Savior Responds to Grief + 3rd Sunday of Easter + 22 April 2012 +

When you're faced with grief or someone you know and love is grieving, how do you respond? A comforting word? A hug? A little humor? Sadly grief isn't something unfamiliar to us. In fact, at some point it affects every one of us. You lose a loved one. You face a devastating loss. You mourn over sins of the past, poor decisions made, or the guilt of a lifetime of sin. Tears of grief can be some of the bitterest tears we shed.

So how do you deal with grief? What do you say as you walk through another line at someone's calling hours? What do you say when tragedy strikes close to home? How do you respond when grief wells up in your own heart and memory? Often you simply don't know what to say or how to respond to all the questions that come when you or another are grieving. It was no different for Jesus' disciples when they were filled with grief—so many questions and what seemed like so few answers, but this morning listen closely because **THE RISEN SAVIOR RESPONDS TO GRIEF.**

It was a roller coaster of a day. The day started with grief, yet ended with joy. When the disciples awoke on Sunday morning, they were sure Jesus was dead and they still couldn't understand why. Just a week before, the crowds had welcomed him into Jerusalem like a conquering king. They praised him as David's son come to save, but everything changed on Thursday night. After celebrating the Passover, Judas, one of Jesus' own disciples, betrayed him with a kiss to a mob of soldiers and servants brandishing torches and weapons. The disciples ran for their lives while Jesus was hauled away in chains. Peter tried to follow Jesus, but was soon running away himself after publicly denying Jesus three times.

The disciples hid in fear behind shuttered windows and locked doors as the tragedy unfolded. Abandoned by his followers, Jesus endured beatings, ridicule, flogging, and injustice. Soon he was standing before the Roman governor, while the crowds cried out for his death, **"Crucify him! Crucify him!"** (Luke 23:21) The disciples cowered in fear as their innocent Lord carried his cross to the place of execution, where his hands and feet were nailed to the beams of a rough, wooden cross. For several hours, darkness blanketed the land in the middle of the afternoon and an earthquake announced the most tragic news of all—Jesus was dead. With nothing to lose two of his followers quickly took down his body and buried him in a borrowed tomb.

The tragedy of Jesus' death crushed his disciples. It dashed all their hopes and dreams. Some had hoped Jesus would deliver Israel from the oppression of the Romans, while others had put their trust in him as God's Anointed One sent to save his people from their sins, but none of that mattered anymore. Jesus was dead. Only the emptiness of grief remained.

Along with grief came a bitter mix of emotions. Fear controlled them as they wondered how long before the mobs would come after them. Doubt filled their minds. They were without answers, without purpose, with nowhere to go. They felt hopeless. Despair crept into their minds as guilt gnawed at them. Every disciple had abandoned Jesus in his hour of need. Except for John and a handful of women, no one else had even bothered to go out to the cross. Such a tragic end to their beloved Teacher left them devastated.

Then Sunday morning arrived. Early that morning some of the women went out to the tomb to finish Jesus' burial. The others hid behind shuttered windows and locked doors. Soon they heard banging on the doors. Out of breath, the women had run back from the tomb to report what they saw. **"Two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning"** had asked them, **"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen!"** (Luke 24:4-6) The grieving disciples dismissed the news as nonsense.

Peter and John went out to the tomb to investigate, but found no answers in its emptiness. Meanwhile two disciples had left for Emmaus, a day's journey from Jerusalem. With heavy hearts, they tried to get on with their lives. They tried to make sense of everything that had happened. On the way, a stranger joined them. **"What are you discussing together as you walk along?"** (Luke 24:17) The disciples were shocked that he was so ignorant of the public death of their Master, but the stranger responded, **"How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"** (Luke 24:25-26) The stranger, then, proceeded to show how all of Scripture pointed to...himself. When the disciples finally recognized Jesus, he disappeared, so they hurried back to Jerusalem, but the heaviness of grief was so great that it still clouded the disciples' hearts and minds as they discussed these strange things. They desperately needed the comfort of their risen Savior.

"While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'" Of course, when their once-dead friend appeared in their midst, **"they were startled and frightened thinking they saw a ghost."** Surely they were seeing things! No one comes back from the dead,

especially one who died such an awful death, yet there was Jesus in the flesh. He said to them, ***“Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”*** The disciples hesitated as they slowly reached out their hands to touch him, to put their fingers in the nail marks on his hands and the spear wound in his side. Moments before, they had been grieving, but now this, yet ***“...they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement...”*** So Jesus gave more proof. He ate a piece of broiled fish in their presence. Their grief started to disappear.

Jesus really was alive, but he had even greater comfort for the mix of grief and fear and joy they felt. Jesus reminded them of what he had told them before. ***“This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”*** So quickly they had forgotten what Jesus had taught them. So quickly the dark pale of grief had covered their hearts and minds with hopelessness and despair. Just as quickly, however, Jesus responded with the one message that breaks through all that darkness. ***“He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”*** The clear light of God’s Word shattered their darkness. Christ had died. Christ had risen. Christ brought forgiveness and comfort for their hurting, grieving souls.

Really that’s how Christ has always responded to grief ever since our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed our holy God and tragically ruined everything. With that one act of disobedience they brought grief over sin and death into our world and into our lives, grief that robs you of hope, of purpose, of true joy, and leaves behind despair over the condemnation of hell you deserve for your own disobedience. How often haven’t you and I been where those disciples were on Easter Sunday morning, whether grieving the loss of a loved one or grieving the pain and guilt of sin?

Even in spite of all that causes you grief, the risen Savior still responds to your grief with his comforting Word! See how Jesus dealt with the grief of his own disciples. He didn’t share some nice comments about the deceased or some shallow, wish-washy hope of a better place. He didn’t even send flowers. No, Jesus gave them the comfort of the resurrection just as he comforts you and me. When Jesus came back to life, he destroyed the power of grief. He robbed grief of its purpose. He took your sin and guilt and fear and doubt and death, and overcame them all by his victory over death.

Now, in his grace, Jesus shares that good news with you through his Word. Through that Good News of life and light and hope and forgiveness, Jesus responds to your grief. Through the Gospel, he comes to you with the only real source of comfort when life seems to be in a tailspin and you’re left with nothing to say. Through the Gospel, he comes to you with peace for your heart when life doesn’t make sense. He wipes away your tears with the reality that he lives, and therefore you and your loved ones in the Lord will live. His death seemed so tragic, but his death and resurrection were the only way to bring peace to your troubled life, comfort to your sorrowing soul, hope in the midst of your uncertainty, and life in the midst of death.

Now Christ sends you out to respond to grief with the only message that matters. Jesus told his disciples, ***“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.”*** Fifty days later, Jesus sent his Holy Spirit to empower his disciples to bring his comfort to our grieving world as they took out the only message that matters.

Through the Word, the Holy Spirit empowers you too. You can share the only message that comforts grief—the good news of your crucified and risen Savior. When someone you know and love bears the gloomy burden of grief, as witnesses of what Christ has done for you, you can share the comfort of the risen Christ. When grief comes into your own life, cling to the risen Savior who cuts through all the darkness and brings you his light of comfort and peace and hope. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Through his Word, Christ comes to wipe away your tears and silence all your fears, and Christ will come again! You are witnesses of this risen Savior! May he shine through you when the darkness of grief comes into your life or the lives of others! Thanks be to God! Christ is risen indeed! Amen.