

FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“IT IS FINISHED”

Scripture Lesson: Luke 24: 1-12

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling Jr. on Sunday, April 20, 2025
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

Luke 24: 1-12

The Resurrection of Jesus

1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in, they did not find the body. 4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5 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. 6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” 8 Then they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 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.

It Is Finished

Leader: The word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

St. Augustine once wrote: “Imagine the end of your life. What do you want to find when you come to rest in God? Begin now to live the life you hope to die with.”

Now, I don’t know if Tim McGraw had that quote in mind when he sang his hit song *Live Like You Were Dying*, but I do know that the theme of St. Augustine’s words has come in many forms and has rung true for many years. It has functioned as a kind of compass—a reminder for us to begin now to live the life with which we hope to die.

And I bring that up because ministry, like discipleship, isn’t built solely upon mountaintop experiences. Life is not so easily comprised of those “parting the Red Sea” moments. Life is not all thunderclaps and burning bushes!

No! Our lives are often forged by those smaller and yet faithful steps that we take—those prayers offered behind closed doors, those kindnesses left unseen.

But oh, how they make a difference! I'm reminded of the words from the beloved disciple John, who said in the Book of Revelation, *"Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord."* "Yes," says the Spirit, *"they will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them."*

Or, as the actor who played Maximus Decimus Meridius once said, *"What we do in life echoes in eternity."*

Will the big things we do in life be remembered? Probably so—at least for a while. But this morning, we are talking more about the small things—life's building blocks, as it were—those things that we do, day in and day out, that might not show up on a résumé, but which follow us nonetheless and endure long after we are gone.

I dare say, whether our journey is 9 or 90 years, the question remains: What story is our life telling? What will be etched not just on our headstone, but on our life?

That's a good question for Easter morning. In the light of the resurrection, in the shadow of the cross, and in the radiance of the empty tomb, what will be said about us—as a resurrection people, a people whose life has been profoundly shaped by the assurance of life after death? What will be remembered about us after we are gone? What legacy will we leave behind?

Some of you will see—or saw—our children release butterflies this morning. It is one of our favorite traditions here at First (Scots)! Those delicate wings beating against the spring air remind us of a new life breaking free. They are not just symbols of spring; they are signs of resurrection—small, fluttering reminders that death doesn't have the final word.

Because Easter proclaims what the prophets foresaw and what the women discovered at the tomb: *"He is not here, but has risen."*

And because of that truth, we can say with confidence what Jesus declared from the cross: *"It is finished."* Not *"it's over,"* but *"it's complete."*

Jesus' messianic mission—his sacrifice, his love for this world that he came to redeem—it is beautifully, powerfully, and eternally fulfilled.

That is the legacy Jesus has left—a living legacy, for sure! What's more, it is a legacy that, by the grace of God, gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

But what does that look like? I have found that far too often we chase significance in the world's mirrors. *"Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?"* How do we measure our worth? Do we do it by achievements, success, or recognition?

When it comes to what really lasts, our legacy is often revealed in the quieter, more sacred moments that end up telling a much deeper and richer story—not only of who we are but also whose we are.

Ours often ends up being a story made of whispered prayers over sleeping children, a held hand at a hospital bedside, forgiveness extended again and again, a casserole baked, and a note written.

Our legacy is often comprised of pews sat in Sunday after Sunday, scriptures passed down from one generation to another, and baptismal promises made and kept.

Our life's story includes bedtime stories—sometimes the same ones read night after night—bike races, wrestling matches on the living room floor, BBQ events, graduations, late-night conversations, gardens planted, and tomatoes harvested.

Those are the kinds of things that form a legacy. Our life is not the homes we build or the tasks we complete, but rather the families that are shaped, the faith that is passed on, and the love that is made visible.

And praise be to God, when the shadows lengthen and our work is done, our garden continues to flourish. It does so precisely because, in another garden nearly 2,000 years ago, the world's central miracle took place.

A stone was rolled away, and Jesus, who was dead, got up with life in him again. And those words, *"He is not here. He is risen,"* believe you me, they continue to flourish! They continue to break ground in even the hardest human heart. They bear the fruits of repentance—they build the Church!

In that way, we don't just look back this morning at what was done. We marvel at what God continues to do. We stand at the entrance to the garden and we hear what those women heard: *"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here."*

Centuries before that first Easter morning, the prophet Isaiah envisioned this historic day: *"On this mountain,"* he said, *"the Lord will prepare a feast for all peoples... he will destroy the shroud that is cast over all people... he will swallow up death forever."*

Consider that: the God who prepares a feast—the one who wipes away tears and removes disgrace—the one who swallows up death—the one who will one day come again in glory.

Easter declares loud and clear that we are no longer talking about prophecy; we are talking about fulfillment! We are talking about the very reality of the resurrection and the promise of life—life abundant—in Jesus' name.

It wasn't just Isaiah's dream that was to be revealed in the fullness of time. This is our graceful inheritance as the children of God. It is God's promise to us—that the tombs of life, whatever they may be, cannot infringe upon the power of God. That stone—those stones—anything that would seek to thwart the grandeur of the risen Christ—they have been rolled away!

Sometimes that is difficult to see, even harder to experience at the core of who we are. But perhaps we can take comfort in knowing that we are not alone in this.

After the crucifixion, the disciples scattered. Locked doors. Quiet whispers. Disillusionment. The disciples felt like their team had lost and there was nothing they could do. They were afraid and confused—and nothing was going to change that... unless Jesus was actually raised from the dead.

To those who question the resurrection, I say: look at the disciples. If Jesus wasn't raised, would they have reinvested themselves in something that wasn't true—something that had left their spirits crushed and sent them into hiding? Friends, no one does a complete 180 and eventually lays down their life for a lie.

Until all hope wasn't lost, it *was* lost. Death had seemingly won the day. But then came Easter morning, and on that blessed day, the lives of those who followed Jesus were changed forever. When they heard "*He is not here, but has risen,*" the cement that had begun to form the inscriptions of their lives began to crack, and the stone that was rolled away from the tomb was also rolled away from their hearts.

Peter—the disciple who had denied Jesus three times—would soon stand before thousands and declare, "*This Jesus is the stone you rejected—and now he is the cornerstone!*"

The Apostle Paul—the one who once hunted down believers—would write: "*Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!*"

And John Calvin, the great reformer, near the time of his death, would whisper: "*Let me be found busy at God's work until my last sigh.*"

These were people transformed not by lies or fleeting things. No! They were transformed by the resurrection, and they were living proof that what we may think is the end is never the end with Jesus.

That's what Jesus' life declares. So what about us? What will be said about us after we are gone? To what will our lives have testified?

Will they say that we were men and women of faith, hope, and love? That we poured ourselves into our families, our church families, and our communities? That we bore witness to Christ—not just in what we believed, but in how we lived?

At the end of the day, that is our epitaph. That is our legacy. It is what we actually did. It is not what we thought was important, but what our lives demonstrated was important to us.

Each Easter, one of our joyful traditions here at First (Scots) is to invite members and guests to join the choir in singing the *Hallelujah Chorus* at the end of the service. Sometimes there's a lot of folks. Sometimes it's just a brave few. But however many come, it is always a beautiful sight—to see the different faces and the voices lifted in proclamation: "*He shall reign forever and ever!*"

This living God of ours—he does indeed reign omnipotently. God's is a spiritual legacy that endures from before we were born and never ends.

This we know in part, but then we will know fully—not unlike those who have gone before us.

If we were to walk through our church graveyard, we would find it is more than old stones. More than magnolia and oak trees and a few late-blooming azaleas. It is a testimony.

Each name and date—each marker—points not just to a life that *was*, but a life that *is*. They point to a resurrection of the body that is to come.

Our friends and loved ones—they are not gone. They are not sleeping. They are waiting. Waiting, not unlike us, for the consummation of God.

The very fulfillment of all that was begun at the dawn of time. The love of God fully revealed in God's Son. That love will one day come again and call us to glory in ways we can scarcely imagine.

They, like us, are part of that great cloud of witnesses—the Church visible and invisible. And what we sing, we sing with them. One day, by God’s grace, we will join them—in feast and fellowship, and in song—a hallelujah chorus throughout eternity.

Easter is not the finish line in the sense of a surprising and happy ending. It is not the bow on top of God’s greatest gift. It is really more like the beginning.

The resurrection is not the period at the end of the sentence. It is the comma—the turning point. It is God’s sacred and eternal “yes.” Yes, death has lost its sting. Yes, there is so much more yet to come. Yes, ours is a life whose purpose runs deeper than any human accomplishment.

When Jesus said, *“It is finished,”* he was more right than we will ever comprehend on this side of heaven.

Lord willing, something about our life will testify to that. Looking at us, perhaps someone will say, *“You know, something about them has been raised.”* Does anything in our life testify to the fact that the story wasn’t over on Good Friday?

I pray so, because our life has been redeemed. Jesus didn’t escape suffering (and neither do we), but through his suffering we have been transformed. And our suffering, though it may last for a night... joy comes in the morning.

Like butterflies set free, our life is to be lived as a new creation—one where the past is finished and gone, and the future is fresh and new.

For he is not here—not in the grave that is—for he has risen, just as he said.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.