

We have all been to church at Easter when we celebrate Jesus' resurrection. However, it's hard to celebrate when we don't know why Jesus died. It would be like reading the dramatic conclusion of a novel or witnessing the final scene of a movie without reading or watching the whole plotline unfold that made the final events so gripping. Christians have confessed for centuries that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection saves us and rescues us from sin, evil, and death. Remember, the very name Jesus actually means "God saves."

But saves us from what?



Q1: When you hear Jesus saves, what does that phrase mean to you? What does Jesus save us from?

Q2: How or when have you experienced God's rescue through Jesus Christ?

When we look at the life of Jesus, we see pretty quickly how Jesus saved many people from all kinds of things that reminded God's people of a painful reality: the world God made good was no longer the way God intended in the beginning. Jesus saved people from being excluded from community. Jesus saved people from the fear of not having enough. Jesus saved people from feeling forever abandoned by God and God's people. Jesus saved people from thinking violence and vengeance were the only way to deal with conflict. Jesus saved people from the inability to extend or receive forgiveness. Jesus saved people from the anxiety that maybe the way the world is would be the way of the world forever.

Jesus saved people from sin. Jesus saved people from death having the last word- for anyone and maybe everyone.

All this and more are the marks of Jesus' saving acts. And this Jesus is the central person in whom Christians place their trust. Consider the poetic way Presbyterians have spoken about the significance of Jesus life, death, and resurrection:

We trust in Jesus Christ,
Fully human, fully God.
Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:
preaching good news to the poor
and release to the captives,
teaching by word and deed
and blessing the children,
healing the sick
and binding up the brokenhearted,
eating with outcasts,

forgiving sinners,
and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.
Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition [causing a rebellion],
Jesus was crucified,
suffering the depths of human pain
and giving his life for the sins of the world.
God raised this Jesus from the dead,
vindicating [proving good and right] his sinless life,
breaking the power of sin and evil,
delivering us from death to life eternal.

---Brief Statement of Faith (1983)

JESUS' DEATH

The Christian story is deeply rooted in the Jewish story (i.e. Torah or Old Testament). A major part of this story hinges on how God forgave and saved people from the individual and communal sins that began with Adam and Eve (Genesis 3). In ancient days, the Jewish people used sacrifices as a way to atone for, or make right, their sins. This was a major part of their religious practice, the sacrifice of one life to forgive and save another. In order for us to understand Jesus' death, Christians have leaned on the Jewish sacrificial practices. Christians believe that in a mysterious way, Jesus' death was the ultimate sacrifice and atonement for our sins. Jesus' death makes us once and for all right before God.

"at-one-ment" with God and our neighbors

Q3: Read about the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16. Then read Hebrews 10. How do both passages illustrate how God forgave sin? What about Jesus' death is unique and different from Leviticus 16?

Jesus' death also showed us God was and continues to be willing to enter into the depths of human suffering and injustice, maybe even those very places we think God may be most absent- *like death on a cross!* Jesus' crucifixion demonstrated for us and the whole world God's willingness to die for the very world God is making new and right again. Jesus' death reminds us there is nothing in all of creation that can separate us from God's love and forgiveness (Romans 8:38-39).

Q4: Consider what Jesus' crucifixion and death means to Christians as you engage some of Jesus' final words, write some of the words or phrases that stand out to you on the back of your response sheet:

Matthew 27:1-56 || Mark 15 || Luke 23 || John 19:17-30

The cross has become a sign and symbol of Jesus' willingness to suffer for the sake of the world. We look at the cross as a reminder that God has suffered alongside of and for us in the person of Jesus. Which is not only good news, but also a bold invitation for us to be willing to do the same for others. Jesus said to his disciples, not long before he died, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

Q5: When have you carried your cross and shared in another person's suffering? Share about a time when someone maybe did the same for you.

Q6: How does Jesus' invitation to carry cross help you understand why we serve in particular places and alongside neighbors in great need, both near and far?

WHERE DID HE GO? (JESUS' RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION)

Read About Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension in Matthew 28, John 20:19-23, and Acts 1:6-11

The resurrection of Jesus is one of the most significant events and beliefs of the Christian faith. If it were not for the resurrection the biblical story would be nothing more than an inspiring tale, although a tragic one, about



a significant religious teacher. However, Jesus rose from the grave; it is the resurrection of Jesus that serves as the basis for all Christian hope and activity in the world.

We could even say that Christians are *people of the resurrection*. We believe death does not have the final word, but trust God will one day make all things new, right, and whole again. You can even say what was and is true of Jesus will one day be true of us all, especially those who place their faith in Jesus this side of eternity. And just before the Ascension, when Jesus left this world until he would return once and for all, the disciples were given a charge, “you will be my witnesses...” (Acts 1:8). That challenge is for disciples like us, still.

Q7: Why do you think Jesus’ resurrection is so significant to the Christian faith?

Q8: What does the angel tell the women to do when they discover that Jesus has resurrected? What does Jesus say to the disciples in Acts?

Q9: How does the resurrection and ascension relate to the mission of the church? How can you be a witness to the good news of Jesus?



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Image to Ponder: Consider the image on the first page of lesson. What do you notice? Can you identify any of the people or symbols? Who is the focus of the piece? (*Note: this image is known as the Grunewald Altar Piece, of which a replica hung above Karl Barth's desk. Barth is considered the greatest reformed theologian of the 20th century.*)

The Apostle's Creed was adopted by the early church in efforts to convey what they believed about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the church, and other elements of the faith. It is a *creed*, or confession of faith, which we still recite today. Throughout the year we will work on understanding this beautiful tradition within the community of Christian faith.

Read begin to memorize the first and second portions of the Apostles Creeds which describes what the church believes about Jesus.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
He descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty,
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.