

“I believe in this event!” Acts 10:34-43

“So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.””

Why are we here? It's a holiday, isn't it? And it is quite early, right? Why are we here? Are we here because we want to learn some principles how to lead a better life? Are we here because this is what moral people do, they come together on Sunday mornings?

Or, are we here because something has happened? Something happened almost two millennia ago, that changed everything. Something that hadn't happened before and will never happen again in this age.

Jesus from Nazareth, who was crucified and died on Friday, rouse from the dead on Sunday and appeared to many. We are here because of this event. This is the reason. Because this event changed what we know about this world, about ourselves and about the world to come.

This event is what brings us together in this wonderful morning. And we just heard it read from the Holy Scriptures, how Peter the apostle spoke about this event to the people who had invited him to learn more about what had happened.

“You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.”

Notice, that Peter was referring to something that almost everyone had heard. He spoke about these events as a common knowledge. ‘You know what happened.’ His listeners knew, they had heard about it already.

And it is true about people today as well. How many would be out there who haven't heard about what happened throughout all Judea and in Jerusalem. At least a little bit. Not too many. So what events was Peter referring to?

“Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. [...] They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day...”

What?! This is the first reaction. How ridiculous is that? That’s how the smartest people in Athens reacted when Paul told them what had happened. What do you mean, raised Him from the dead? You know that it is impossible. This is where every reasonable person stops listening and goes away.

Just think what Peter was saying! Jesus was dead on Friday. Not simply dead, but killed dead, crucified dead. And now you are telling that He was raised and was alive again? How can you expect someone to believe this message?

Peter gives the reason why everyone should believe this incredible message. And it is this. “We are witnesses [eyewitnesses] of all that Jesus did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. [...] For Jesus appeared after His resurrection – not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead.”

Peter, and other disciples and all together more than 500 hundred people [!] were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ resurrection. They saw the risen Jesus as we see one another. Most of them were still alive when the gospels were written.

The fact is, that Peter knew as well as we know, that the resurrection from the dead is impossible. Or we could say that Peter believed stronger that we believe that something like that was impossible. As probably did many others of these eyewitnesses. Why would I say that?

See, Peter was brought up hearing and learning about God’s promised Messiah. He knew the prophecies of the Old Testament. Much more, he was one the disciples of Jesus. One of the closest disciples at that. He even believed, genuinely believed and confessed that Jesus was God’s Messiah.

Even more, Peter had heard from Jesus Himself, not only once, but numerous times about what was going to happen. Jesus kept teaching His disciples that He is going to Jerusalem, where He will suffer, will be killed and then... will be raised from the dead on the third day.

Peter even had got into argument with Jesus, rebuking Him for such strange predictions. If anyone had heard loud and clear that Jesus was going to be killed and will be raised from the dead again, it was Peter.

Now, did he believe that Jesus will rise again? No, he didn’t. When his Teacher and Lord was crucified and died, Peter was in despair, as were other disciples. Do you know why? Because they knew what every mature human being in this world knows – when you are dead, you are dead. You don’t rise again, no one comes back from the dead.

As much as they trusted their Teacher and loved Him, they knew that there is no such a thing as the resurrection from the dead. He was gone, as were their hopes for God's Kingdom. They didn't rejoice: "Now we will see Jesus rising again!"

And then it happened. That Sunday. It changed everything. Risen Jesus appeared to them. He stood among them. He conversed with them. He ate and drank with them. 'Come here, touch me, it's me!'

They saw Him, spoke with Him, they touched Him. Risen Jesus. Suddenly everything made sense. His death, His resurrection. They realised that hidden under the humble human form of the man Jesus from Nazareth, it was the eternal Son of God who stood among them. The Lord of everything.

The Lord of entire creation, the Lord over life and death. Suddenly everything was different. The death didn't have the last word anymore. Jesus had. The disciples finally understood that real and possible is not what we think is real and possible, but what Jesus tells us. He is the One who creates reality.

What He says, happens. He spoke the Universe into existence, He has spoken all of us into existence, and He has spoken the future of His disciples into existence. This is, why we are here.

Because this event, the resurrection of Jesus, not only changed everything, it also has everything to do with us. The Son of God didn't become one of us to die and to rise again just to show that He is in control.

He did it for us. He did it so that He could rescue you from under the power of sin and death. So that united with Him we would be where He is. This is, why He sent His apostles, the eyewitnesses of everything that He did, to bring the good news about this event to all nations.

This is, why He commanded to baptize and to teach, to speak His own words to all people. For when we speak Jesus' words, they are not ours, they are His words and they always come together with His Spirit.

And His Spirit is the One, who unites us with Jesus. As we listen to Jesus, as we receive His Spirit, we become one with Him, we become one body of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is who you are. He is the head, you all are His members. And where the head goes, the body will follow.

Jesus has risen, He has risen in new resurrected body, to live forever. He is the firstborn of the dead, and you are to follow Him where He is, for the head can't leave without the body.

This is, why we are here. Because of the resurrection. For it changes everything, past, present and future for everyone who is united with Jesus by means of His Spirit. Our sins of the past are forgiven.

Our present is filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit. Our future is focused on this wonderful hope, – the day when we'll follow our Lord, when we will be free

from these bodies of sin and death and will be raised in new perfect bodies to live with our God, Jesus Christ.

This is, why we are here. Not because we come to learn some useful principles for better life. Not because this is what moral people do on Sundays. But because God in Jesus has made the impossible possible.

Now, what are we left to do? God in Jesus has done everything to overcome our ultimate enemies, sin and death. The victory is won. It is yours. Nothing remains to be done in this respect. Eternal life in resurrected bodies is yours.

What is left for us is to rejoice with heavenly joy. Why? Because Jesus commanded ‘to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.’”

How can we tell about them? It is simple, indeed. When we rejoice with heavenly joy. Just listen to these good news, meditate upon them, let it truly sink in that Jesus Christ has done all of this for you, and that now you just need to wait for the day when you will see Jesus face to face.

And as you do this, the Holy Spirit will fill you with heavenly joy. He will give you joy that overflows and spills on all the people whom you meet. This joy is contagious, for this is the joy of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, rejoice, be glad, let this joy flow over, and when people ask what is this about, why are you so joyful, tell them about this event, the most important event in the history of the world, – Jesus has risen. He is risen, indeed!

And the peace of God that surpasses all our understanding keep your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. Amen.