

SPECIAL FEATURE

The Empty Tomb and Resurrection Power: A Holy Land Experience

As we prepare for Easter, I wanted to share another story from my trip to the Holy Land in January 2020. On Day 3, we visited the Old City of Jerusalem. As we walked the old cobble stone road, we passed through the Lion's Gate, one of the city gates. Inside were shops selling all kinds of wares and tourist souvenirs. I also saw some residential buildings and businesses. I noticed some people walking on the streets appeared to be Muslims, while some looked like Orthodox Jews. It was a Sabbath Day, so some shops were closed for the day.

We walked along the "Via Dolorosa" or "The Road of Suffering." It is a road that has "13 stations of the cross" to commemorate the events that took place as Jesus walked from Antonia Fortress (Pontius Pilate's judgement hall) to Calvary where He was crucified. (The scriptural accounts can be found in Matthew 27 and John 19.) We also visited the Pool of Bethesda where Jesus healed a paralyzed man (John 5:1-15).

After visiting the Pool of Bethesda, our group continued walking on a narrow street in the Old City. It was interesting to see some cars and small trucks driving the narrow alleys! After some twists and turns, the alley turned a corner to a narrow passage which led to a small square park. Right in the middle of the square was another historical, grand cathedral, called "Church of the Holy Sepulcher." Tradition says the cathedral was built around the 3rd to the 5th century by Queen Helena, the mother of the Roman emperor Constantine. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher is the site where some Christian groups believe Jesus was crucified and buried.

After visiting the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, our group moved to a nearby site, a small park called the Garden Tomb. This is another site many Christian groups believe to be the traditional site where Jesus was buried. Adjacent to the park is a hill that looks more like the description of Golgotha. In the Gospels, it says, "*And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center*" (John 19:17-18).

Inside the park was a nicely landscaped garden of beautiful and colorful plants, flowers, and trees. I enjoyed the peaceful, serene atmosphere, and it was

not too crowded. In another corner of the Garden was the Tomb which was cut from a rocky hill. Inside the tomb were two chambers with an iron fence between. The inner chamber is the main tomb in which the body of Jesus was laid to rest after He was crucified. The tomb was believed to be owned by Joseph of Arimathea.

"Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid" (John 19:38-42).

As I entered the empty tomb, it was an awesome experience seeing and touching with my bare hands the rough and cold stone where Jesus was laid some two thousand years ago. It was a surreal moment to be at the empty tomb where Christ arose from the dead—a foundation of the Christian faith.

"And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! ...But now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." (I Corinthians 15:17, 20)

For many years I have read the story of the crucifixion and resurrection of the Jesus but to see, touch, and feel the actual place where those events happened made my faith more real. I became more certain that those stories were not just fairy tales, legends, or myths. They were true accounts of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul said, "*But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*" (Romans 8:11)

Christ is risen, and Christ will come again! Thus, with these words, amidst the crazy things going on in the world, we followers of our Lord Jesus Christ have all the reasons to have hope and to rejoice!

In Matthew 28, the Apostle Matthew wrote the account of the resurrection of Jesus:

"Mary Magdalene and other women came to the tomb and found the tomb empty. An angel spoke to them and said, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not



here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you." So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."" (Matthew 28:5-10)

Here is a poem inspired by Matthew 28:1-10

Rejoice!
Rejoice! Rejoice, rejoice!
For the Lord is risen
He is risen indeed!
Death has no more dominion
Death and sin have lost its power
Because the Lord has overcome.
Rejoice!
People of God rejoice!
The battle has been won!
Christ has won the victor's crown.
Rejoice for the Lord has overcome!
Rejoice for the Lord is risen,
He has risen indeed!
Rejoice for the battle has been won.
Rejoice!
For Christ is coming back soon!
Rejoice,
For the Lord will be here soon!

All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version, NKJV.

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Vicki and husband David Creel published their first book, "Jesus' Call To His Harvest Field- Adventures in the Mission Field," available in most online bookshops.