

He is Risen Indeed!
Easter Sunday 2009

Today the Alleluias return to our worship. Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia!

What difference does the resurrection of Jesus Christ make in our lives? To the apostles it made a huge difference; and for more than two thousand years it continues to matter. Christ's deliverance from the tomb is cause for the Christian faith's relevancy and rejoicing. On Friday, sin and death was center stage. On Sunday morning in Jerusalem, the curtain went up and new life became the main act.

On that Sabbath day, the first day of the week, the rock was rolled away; Jesus of Nazareth rose from death and made history. On this Sunday morning we remember that historical moment as if it were yesterday. God's loving act of salvation froze time in a spiritual sense. From this date in human history, we see our future today as God's people.

The good news of this extraordinary event is that Christ beat the devil, 7 to 0. It took only one touchdown! That winning goal, that victory continues through every generation that receives the benefits of His transforming power.

In the readings from today, the legacy of the resurrection resounds in the lives that Jesus touched. Like the ripples of water made by a sudden impact, the shock waves are felt on every shore and by every nation and every people. Peter the apostle speaks to this as he talks of Jesus' appearances after death to the first witnesses. Luke, the author of the gospel and the book of Acts records Peter's proclamation that God ordained Jesus to be the judge of the living and the dead. Peter proclaims what all the Jewish prophets bear witness to as well, "that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name."

Paul the apostle adds to this proclamation and gives us a careful record of the disciples that saw Jesus in His new life. In no other place in the New Testament do we have a record of such witnesses. Paul did not see the need to record their names outside of Peter (Cephas) or his own. He wants the church to realize that they are not alone in their belief that Jesus rose again from death.

He makes such a tight case that the Corinthian church was being saved through the message of Jesus' life. He urges the church to hold firmly to this message so they do not believe in vain.

The apostle elsewhere mentions about vain belief if Jesus had not risen from the tomb. If there was no historical resurrection from sin and death; then Jesus is just another victim of torture and terror.

All we would have left then is to believe in just another man that lived a "good life".

One can find many examples of people that have lived well and they may live such a life without Christianity. Many a religion produces a moral life. Even those without religion may also live a "good life". And we should strive to do the same. Yet if that alone is the end result of Christianity then it adds nothing new or unique to the

hope of humanity. For without the resurrection, my life and yours ends just the same no matter how moral we are – we still die as sinners. The Christian faith would then be just another religion.

However, the gospel forces us to reconcile living a moral life within this mystery of Christ's resurrection; we can not please God unless we believe there are things that only He can do for us. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. Earlier I said that Christians believe there are things that we cannot do for ourselves. Overcoming the futility of death by faith is what we can not do, except through the author of our salvation. Faith in the risen Christ assures the believer that death is not the end. Christ risen is evidence of new life that awaits us much like a rainbow that is often invisible until light is bent and broken to reveal its beauty!

The evidence for the Christian faith was overwhelming in Paul's time. Lies had been spread to cause disbelief in the people to whom Paul bore witness. But the truth of Jesus' words and the willingness of His disciples to teach, to baptize and to die for Him lives on.

This is the only message Paul will preach to the church. There is the good news! Christ has come back from the dead! We put our faith in the testimony of what is written on behalf of hundreds of eyewitnesses.

The ripples and aftermath of this day made its impact first among Jews and Arabs; and the influence continues today in the lives of billions.

We wonder at how that impact and the words Jesus taught could so easily have been forgotten or taken for granted. It takes time for such a fantastic story to sink into our consciousness. We struggle to make the story real in our minds. Because faith based on emotion alone is unstable.

This was the case at Jesus' tomb. The women did not expect the tomb to be empty, and are fraught with emotions. A messenger from God reminds them of Jesus' words. The witness of Mark's gospel contains a believable account of astonishment and fear. These first witnesses are rightfully fearful, because from now on life is going to be different. When we encounter the empty tomb, and it no longer holds what we once loved, we can never be the same. It may send us running. It may lead us to pray. It can make us Christians.

This mystery of the resurrection cuts across the grain of modern sensibilities. I must conclude as a Christian and as a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ that Jesus of Nazareth alone is Lord. He alone was God in the flesh. He alone bore the weight of sin and death by His own pierced body. He alone is worthy to be worshipped and glorified. He alone did what I can not do for myself. Alleluia, Christ is risen. By His resurrection power may all Christians hold firmly to this faith and live not for themselves but for Him who loved them and gave Himself for them. Amen.