

EASTER LIFE

What is it that you believe about God – about Jesus? What do you believe about the cross – about the empty tomb – about the resurrection? When Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them told the apostles about the empty tomb the *words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.*

If you asked people on the street or in the coffee shop or in the mall or at your senior's centre my guess is that many would say that they believe in God.

Most people believe there was a man called Jesus – one who lived a life of integrity – one who encouraged relationship with God – one who died on a cross.

But when it comes to the empty tomb and resurrection many people draw a line and refuse to traverse it. They begin to speak about what is possible and what is impossible – about what is real and what is not real – about what is believable and what is not believable.

And yet, it is the concerted witness of the New Testament that the women told the truth about the empty tomb – that Paul's confidence in the resurrection is to be trusted. Common sense is wrong – being realistic is wrong. Jesus is alive. It does defy all our attempts to adequately explain it. Our Easter faith may always look foolish in the eyes of many, but with one voice the witnesses cry out: *Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!*

This is the key to our faith and to our hope. This Easter nonsense is central to everything that Jesus taught concerning himself and the kingdom of God. Easter Day – resurrection – is the crux and pivot point.

Hear again what Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is a delusion and you are still lost in your sins. It would also mean that the believers in Christ who have died are lost. Indeed, if our hope in Christ is good for this life only, then we deserve more pity than anyone else in all the world. But the truth is that Christ has been raised from death, as the guarantee that those who sleep in death will also be raised.*

Christ is risen – is here among us. Here in our hearts – in the words we speak – in the love we show – even in our questions and our doubts. Christ is here to share his power – his truth – his love – his strength – his faithfulness – his glory – with all who would receive it.

Christ is risen – and is here in our midst to do what we can not do for ourselves – to open us to God’s desire – to lift us up when we fall – to forgive and to heal – to transform and make new.

If the Gospel story tells us anything, it proclaims that we need to get ready for a God who does the unexpected – the ultra-extravagant thing. Don’t try to confine God to human notions of what seems like common sense – break out from what seems reasonable. God is unreasonably extravagant, gloriously unpredictable. The holy, saving nonsense of God is mightily at work in the story of Easter!

Such is the heart of the Easter message – unpredictable and prodigious.

Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth conveys the struggles evident in that community. There was confusion and division – people were in legal battles, boasting about their spiritual gifts, urging sexual promiscuity, claiming apostolic status and participating in pagan festivities. The people had heard and accepted Paul’s message of new life because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus but they had somehow distorted the idea of “living in the spirit” – Easter life – to mean that their physical life was no longer important and so they could live however they wanted. They began to say that there was no resurrection of the dead and Paul at this point verbally throws up his hands in frustration:

“No! No! No! That isn’t what I meant at all! The new age is yet to come even though we live now in the Holy Spirit. How you live in your body matters – your relationships with one another matter. Body and soul are one – as they suffer under sin, so shall they be raised by the grace of God. If the dead aren’t raised then Christ wasn’t raised and if Christ wasn’t raised then everything you have been told is a lie and your faith is a lie. But,” says Paul, “in fact Christ has been raised from the dead...”

The resurrection affirms that even though the world – the powers and principalities that make up our common sense – threw everything they had at Jesus – killed him on a cross – even so he is not defeated. Victory is assured in the resurrection. We participate in that victory as we seek to live an Easter life – a life where death and suffering and pain and evil do not prevail – a life that may seem like nonsense according to the way of the world.

Resurrected life – Easter life – is about how we live each day – dependent upon God and participating in what God desires for all creation

We know that Christ died – a cruel, painful death in full view of many – a spear stuck in his side – a stone rolled in front of the tomb. Death is all too real. We know also that Christ was raised from the dead – Cephas saw him, the apostles saw him, Paul saw him, people to this day continue to speak of encountering the risen Christ. Resurrection is also real. And that resurrection is God's promise of your salvation – your resurrection to come. The promise is here – now – breathed in the spirit as we live each day in the hope of God's grace – Easter life.

Paul would say – that as we see what God has done in Christ – see the resurrection – now we see the new creation – now we see its ultimate end – now we see what is going to happen – and now, and now we can live in hope.

Victory is attained by our convictions which lead us in the resurrected life. In our culture we tend to analyze problems and move toward solutions – even death becomes a problem that must be solved. But Paul asserts that we must start from the point of victory – we must begin at salvation – we must move from solution to plight. If our conviction is that salvation is in the resurrection of Jesus then our victory comes as we embrace the new life we have been offered.

There is no need to fully explain or understand Paul's argument in his message to the Corinthians. It is enough to know that we must not keep God's mystery at arm's length – demanding signs and proofs. If we do that we will be disappointed – we will see nothing. But if we open the eyes of faith, the world is full of resurrection light, and we will see signs everywhere of Christ's victory over death.

Paul's theology of the resurrection always drives him back into how we live in our world each day. For Paul our resurrected life begins in our discipleship – that is the victory that can inspire our Easter lives. Paul wrestled with these questions and so must we all – especially today as we celebrate our Easter hope.

"How can some of you say there is no resurrection from the dead?" Paul wants to know.

Behold, I tell you a mystery, Christ has been raised from the dead. Open your eyes to see – open your hearts to receive – your faith is not in vain. **Amen**

This Sermon Copy reflects the style of the spoken word rather than the written word. Allowances should be made for grammatical style and sentence structure that are characteristic of the spoken word. ©Rev. L. T. Kavanagh 2010