

## Second Sunday of Easter – 2018

Happy Easter!!! OK, here's what I'd like you to do...Think about how you would answer this question: Why are you a Christian... I'm sure if I took a poll, I'd get a lot of different answers. ...But there's one answer that should be at the top of the list...Why am I a Christian?...Because Jesus Christ rose from the dead. ...He was dead & buried...sealed in a tomb...then, He got out of that tomb & rose to a new & glorious life,...a life like no other...not as a ghost or spirit. ...He had a physical body, with wounds & scars that His disciples could see & touch on that 1<sup>st</sup> Easter Sunday,... to be sure it was really Jesus standing in front of them....,yet He somehow materialized in the middle of that locked room where His disciples were hiding in fear...There He was, ...Jesus Christ alive in that room!... If that hadn't happened, ...If Jesus - in spite of all the other amazing things that He said & did - ...did not rise up & come out of that tomb & appear to those disciples & – the Bible tells us – to over 600 others,...if that hadn't happened, ..you & I would not be here as Christians in this place today worshipping our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because they could see & touch the risen Jesus on that 1st Easter, those disciples finally understood what He had been telling them over & over,...that He was truly the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God, ...When Jesus showed Thomas His wounds & scars,...Thomas spoke for all of them when He addressed Jesus with those immortal words: "My Lord and my God!"... What took place after that was a remarkable transformation that wouldn't have happened if Jesus had stayed dead....Because Jesus came back,... those discouraged,...defeated, ...deflated disciples...who had let Jesus down so often, ...had denied knowing Him,...had run scared when Jesus was going through His passion,...those men Jesus had chosen to go & bring His Gospel out to the world,... suddenly got the guts to go and do it...And because they did, you and I and over two billion others are Christians today.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of our faith...Without the Resurrection., our faith would not stand...St. Paul put it bluntly in 1 Cor15: "If Christ has not been raised, our faith is worthless." ...If Jesus did NOT rise from the grave,...our faith would be based on lies...The Good News of Jesus Christ would be the "fake news." of Jesus Christ... But we DO believe He rose from the grave,...don't we?...If you believe it, raise Ur hand. ...OK, but how many of you have seen the Risen Jesus?...Me neither... ....We're the ones Jesus was talking about when He said: "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." ...That's us...We have not seen... yet we believe..

We believe Christ is Risen, He is alive...We believe what the Bible tells us...We believe what the Church has believed for over 2000 yrs...We celebrated it last Sunday...We celebrate it every Sunday. ...OK, but,...so what?...What does it mean for me?...Does it affect how I live my life?".. Before I give you MY answer, this is how a little 6-yr old girl answered it when her religion teacher asked her to tell the class what happened on Easter & what it meant for her...The little girl boldly stood up in front of the class and told them,...

"After Jesus died on the cross, they took Him down & put His dead body in a cave...They rolled a great big stone in front of the cave, & a bunch of mean, tough soldiers were there to guard it... Then after three days,...there was a big earthquake & the stone rolled away Then, all the people came to watch Jesus come out of the cave, ...and when He came out and if He saw His shadow, ...they knew it would be six more weeks of winter."...Well, she had the most important part right.

OK, back to the question: "How does Jesus rising from the dead affect how I live my life?"...I can answer that in one word: HOPE...Hope....Listen to the words from 2Pet: "Blessed be the God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in His great mercy gave a new birth to living HOPE thru the Resurrection of His Son."...**Living hope!**...Life-giving hope.... God, in His Divine Mercy - which we celebrate today - sent His Son to take the punishment for our sins,...to die a horrible death that He **didn't** deserve...And by raising Jesus from that death to a new & glorious life, God has given us the true living HOPE that you & I can be raised from the death that we **DO** deserve...to a new & glorious life...And when we let this living HOPE shape us to live our life believing in Jesus, following Jesus,...striving to be like Jesus, ...He will take us to be with Him forever.

That's HOPE we can take to the bank!...That's HOPE we should thank God for every day, like right now. Let's do it... THANK YOU GOD....THANK YOU LORD JESUS...Let's hear it for **OUR G!** (*applause*).

Wait, there's more to this living HOPE...It's not only that God has something wonderful waiting for us when we die...Of course, that's a big deal,...but it's also about this life...It's about living every day with the HOPE that comes from believing that this same God who turned the tragedy of Good Friday into the victory of Easter,...can take our Good Fridays & change them into glorious Easter mornings... All of us over time will face some difficulty, some crisis, some trouble where we will feel that we have no control over what's happening...that there's little hope of it getting better...It may be a serious health issue...It could be a failing marriage...trouble finding a job...a problem pregnancy...living in the strong grip of an addiction...It could be the loss of a loved one that has left us devastated...Being a Christian doesn't exempt us from our own Good Fridays,...but as Easter Christians...as Resurrection people, ...we know what our God can do. ...We live with the hope that "Yes, it may be Friday,...but Sunday's comin'." ...Things may look bad..."It's Friday,...but Sunday's comin'"...It is this living hope that keeps us going...that will take us through those dark Good Fridays to bright & glorious Easters.

You know, most of the time the word EMPTY describes an unhappy situation...Like an empty cereal box or empty milk carton...an empty bank account...an empty gas tank....an empty chair at the table... But there's one empty thing that makes us very, very happy...Can anyone guess what it is?...It's that EMPTY TOMB on that 1<sup>st</sup> Easter morning...It's that empty tomb that reminds us that God is in charge,...God is in control, ...there is nothing to fear...No matter how dark things become...we have the God of Easter...We have reason to HOPE because we have a God who can change that darkness into light...We have a God always right there in the middle of it all, ready to give us what we need: strength, courage, faith, patience...He told us He would

Listen to His words from Isaiah 41:10: "Do not fear , for I am with you...Do not be dismayed, for I am your God...I will strengthen you and I will hold you up with my right hand."...It's right there in Isaiah and many other places in the Bible...You can look them up,...stories of God leading hurting, troubled people to something better...When we place our hopes & our faith in God,...He will lead US to something better...Sometimes that something won't be what we ask for or what we expect,...but it will be what God knows is best for us...& best for His grand eternal plan.

To sum it all up,...the Easter event...the Resurrection,...the empty tomb...assure us that we have a God who will make all things right...We have a living HOPE that better things are coming...if not in this life ...for sure in the next...When we let this living HOPE drive us to keep on going, ...to keep on believing even though we have not seen,...then – as Jesus said -...we are blessed. AMEN