

Second Sunday of Easter – 2011

Delivered by  
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Happy Easter!!! OK, here's what I'd like you to do...Take a moment...just a moment and ask yourself this question: Why am I a Christian?...Think about it... Why am I a Christian?...*(pause 10s)*... I'm sure if I took a poll of everyone here, I'd get a lot of different answers...but there's one answer each of us should have at the top of our list...Why am I a Christian?...Because Jesus Christ rose from the dead. ...He was dead and buried...sealed in a tomb...yet He rose up from that death, from that tomb to a new and glorious life,...never to die again...A life like no other...not as a ghost or spirit...He had a physical body, with wounds and scars that His disciples could see and touch in that room on that 1<sup>st</sup> Easter Sunday, to be sure it was really Jesus standing before them...A physical body, yet He miraculously materialized in the middle of that locked room where His disciples were cowering in fear...Jesus Christ alive in that room. ...Jesus Christ alive TODAY!... If Jesus, in spite of all the amazing things that He said and did ...the teachings...the healings...the miracles...the unbearable torture and brutal crucifixion. ...In spite of all that,...if He did not rise up and come out of that tomb and appear to those disciples and - according to the Bible – to over 600 others,...if that hadn't happened, then you and I would not be here today...We would not be Christians here in this place worshipping our Lord today.

Because of what happened on that first Easter, Jesus' disciples finally understood what He had been telling them over and over,...that He was the Son of God, one with the Father...When Jesus showed Thomas His wounds and 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,...disillusioned disciples...who had let Jesus down so often,...had denied knowing Him,...had run scared when Jesus was going through His passion,...the ones Jesus had chosen to go out and bring His Gospel to the entire 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 is the foundation of our faith...Without it 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...It would be worthless, it would make no difference in our lives....But we DO believe He rose from the grave,...don't we?...If you believe it, raise your hand....OK, but how many of you have seen the Risen Jesus?...Me neither...So why do we believe? ...We have been blessed with the gift of faith...We're the one's 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..

Alright...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...So we have to ask ourselves this question: "So what?"...So what if the Resurrection did happen?...What does it mean for me?...Does it have any effect on how I live my life?"...Before I give my answer to this question, let me tell you how a 5-yr old answered it when her religion teacher asked her to tell the class what happened on Easter and what it means for her...The little girl – without any hesitation - stood in front of the class and said, "After Jesus died on the cross, they took Him down and put His dead body in a cave...They rolled a great big stone in front of the cave...and a bunch of soldiers were there to guard it...Then after three days,...there was a big earthquake and the stone rolled away, ...And 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 6 more weeks of winter."...Well, she had the most important part right.

OK, back to the question: “What does Jesus rising from the dead mean for me – for my life?”...I can answer that in one word: HOPE...Hope....Listen again to the words of St. Peter in our Second Reading as he praises God: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in His great mercy gave a new birth to living HOPE through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”...Living hope!...Life-giving hope....By raising His Son from the dead, God the Father has given us a sure and steadfast hope that can affect everything we do, every situation we are in,...every trouble we face...every part of our life.

My friends, here’s the thing...God hates sin. Our sin offends God. Our sin hurts God...Because of our sin, God could have cast us off forever...We would have no HOPE of anything after this life. We would live, then die,...and that would be it...But for some reason, God loves us wretched creatures and wants us to live with Him forever....So in His Divine Mercy –which we celebrate today, Divine Mercy Sunday - God sent His Son to take the punishment for our sins...atone for our sins...by dying on the cross...and then coming back from death...By raising Jesus to new life, God has given us HOPE that we too can be raised from the death we deserve to a new and glorious life...If we let this HOPE shape our life so that we live for God, follow God, try to be all God made us to be, then He will take us to be with Him when we die...Now that’s HOPE we can take to the bank!...That’s HOPE we should thank God for every day, like right now. Thank you God...Let’s hear it for God! (*applaud*).

Wait, there’s more...there’s more to this living HOPE...It’s more than the hope that God has something wonderful waiting for us when we die...That’s all great,...but what about now?...It’s also about this life...about living with the HOPE that this same God who turned the tragedy of Good Friday into the victory of Easter, will take our Good Fridays – those trials and troubles we all suffer through - and change them into Easter mornings...You know, there are two types of people in the world: those who’ve had troubles...and those who will have troubles...We will all have times in our life when we face a crisis, a challenge, a problem that leaves us feeling that we have no control over what’s happening...It may be a serious health issue...It could be a damaged marriage or relationship...It could be abt finances or losing our job...It could be the death of a loved one that has left us devastated...or any of a number of things,...and we don’t see any hope of it getting better. Being a Christian doesn’t exempt us from troubles...but it does give us reason to hope when troubles come.

I heard a preacher talk about a painting he’d seen that had a powerful impact on him...I’d like you to close your eyes and visualize this picture in your mind...He described an old burned-out shack on a mountainside in Appalaccia...All that was left was the chimney...and the charred remains of what had been a poor family’s home...In front of this destroyed home stood a bearded old man dressed only in his grimy underclothes...Next to him was a dirty little boy clutching a pair of patched overalls...The child was crying....Focus your mind on that sad scene...(*pause*) Listen to the words the artist felt the old man was speaking to the boy...Simple words, yet they spoke a profound truth: “Hush child,...God ain’t dead!”...The preacher said that that vivid picture of the burned-out mountain shack, the old man, the weeping child, and those words, “Hush child, God ain’t dead” kept working on his mind...Instead of it being a reminder of the tragedies of life,...he saw it as a reminder of HOPE!...We all need mental pictures to remind us - in the midst of our troubles and heart-breaks - that all is not lost...because God is not dead. ...Yes, God died on that cross...But He came back. He’s alive and in control of His world...our world, our lives... and that’s great reason to have HOPE.

You know, most of the time the word EMPTY describes an unhappy situation...Like an empty cereal box or empty milk carton...an empty wallet or empty bank account...an empty chair at the table ...an empty life...But there’s one empty thing that makes us very happy...Can anyone

guess what it is?...It's that EMPTY TOMB on 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 for 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, giving us strength and courage...He told us He would be....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 help you...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 'em up,...stories of God leading 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, ...and it might be hard for us to accept,...but it will be what God knows is best for us...and for His grand eternal plan.

To sum it all up,...the Easter event...the Resurrection,...the empty tomb...shows us we have a God who will make all things right...It gives us HOPE that better things are coming...in this life ...and in the next...When we live in this HOPE and let it guide us and keep us going,.. when we believe even though we have not seen , then....we are truly blessed. AMEN.