

The Sermon for Easter


Texts: 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11; John 20: 1-18

“Easter in the Age of Social Distancing and Fake News”

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Sychar Lutheran Church - LIVE feed

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Beloved in the Lord...

Christ is Risen!! It's Easter!

Ever had Easter in a vacuum? I guess we have now. I actually looked that up in a search engine yesterday - Easter in a vacuum - I got a video done by a fellow who sounds very Russian that put Peeps in a vacuum. You know, Peeps? Those nasty sugar bombs that are shaped like little yellow chicks and pink bunnies? (The video's actually rather amusing - check it out....LATER) Anyway - Easter is meant to be lived in community!! What is Easter without Kathy or Eugenie at the organ blasting out our Easter Hymns “Christ the Lord is Risen To Daay, A a a a le lu ia!”?? I've missed the pastor proclaiming into the semi-darkness of the sunrise service, “CHRIST IS RISEN” and eagerly await the congregation's response.....(“He is risen indeed”) - ugh! This is so hard.

Is there anyone within the sound of my voice that has not heard the term “social distancing”? Two months ago it was an unknown phrase. Now those two words have become a way of life. There may well be other instances of “social distancing” in Scripture - but we have an example right here today. Jesus used it with Mary Magdalene just outside the tomb on Easter morning. His words could be translated to mean “Don't touch me!” When Mary realized it was her Lord she immediately reached for him and he “distanced” himself right away. Why do you suppose? Well we know it wasn't the Coronavirus as that is “novel” to our day. Was it a Good Friday virus? Was it a virus at all? Many have wondered about Jesus putting Mary off from touching him - it clearly wasn't due to the “social distancing” to which we have been sentenced. When Jesus says, “do not touch me/do not CLING to me” he is telling Mary there will be other chances - but right now he wants her to go to his “brothers”. She has work to do. She has a message to deliver, a story to tell.

Mary has come to the tomb very early in the morning - to weep - to grieve in private. When she arrives the stone is rolled away and the body gone. She fled back to the home where the disciples were staying to tell them. They ran to the tomb to see for themselves - much as you or I would, right? They wanted to know the truth. This was too big to just take the word of another - they had to see for themselves. When it was obvious that what she had told them was true - they went home....but Mary stayed.

Truth. Do we know what it is anymore? The world wants us to believe that we have our ‘own truths’. That everything is relative. We can't trust much of anything anymore - videos can be faked,

lies told often enough become some form of “truth” in themselves; even the media and social media supply “fake news” in order to satisfy some agenda or other.

I still recall a newspaper article when the Fargo Forum still had a “faith page”, “Scholars still debate. *Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?*” The article questions of course whether or not Jesus Resurrection at Easter is a myth. There are many in our era who disavow the church, Christianity and all its trappings. Believing that “organized religion” is irrelevant is becoming the norm and we are becoming a minority.

I chose the text from 1 Corinthians this morning precisely because of all of the writings in the New Testament, the book of First Corinthians is **the oldest**. My dear friend and mentor Dr. Gerhard Krodel writes that Paul received the text in AD 33. The latest he could have gotten it was when he joined Barnabas in Antioch in AD 41. The very simple fact of those dates means that the argument that Easter is a myth falls to pieces. Paul says, “Thus we received . . .” ‘We’ is all of the apostles - Paul included - though he was the last - he was one of them. Many scholars feel that the account of the resurrection in today's reading from 1 Corinthians may be the first written proclamation of the resurrection. In the first chapter of Galatians Paul speaks of his visits with Peter - Simon Peter. So often we think of Paul as having arrived on the scene long after the Apostles had died off. Actually they were contemporaries - peers to one another. What we hear read in worship and what - hopefully - you read of Paul's writings in the New Testament were not invented by Paul. Paul RECEIVED what he preaches and what he writes FROM THE APOSTLES

Today's epistle was written to a church that had many struggles. Paul has dealt with several of the dividing issues in the congregation. At various points in this letter, he has encouraged, scolded, warned, and guided. Now, as he nears the end of the letter, he gets back to the basics. “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth that the most important teaching is that Christ died for our sins and rose on the third day.

Today there are many false scholars who insist that Christ's resurrection was a spoof, a scam, a fraud. They insist that the either the disciples or the early church fabricated a resurrection in order to jump start this new religion called Christianity. Sadly, there are millions who buy into this false scholarship. Paul's words to the Corinthians not only tell us that Christ has risen, but they also challenge those who say He has not.

You see, Paul followed his proclamation of the resurrection with a list of witnesses who saw Jesus alive after He had died on the cross. When Paul states that these people saw Jesus, he does not

mean a glimpse out of the corner of the eye. He is not talking about the kind of witness who says she saw Elvis or Bigfoot. He is talking about witnesses who had conversations with Jesus, who ate with Jesus, who touched Jesus. He is talking about first class, reliable, credible witnesses - the kind of witness that you can put on the stand at any trial. Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth that they could talk to Cephas or any of the other twelve apostles. Then there is that group of five hundred who saw Jesus. How many witnesses do you need?

People who study mythology say that you have to get far away from a subject in order to start a myth about it. You have to be far enough away so that no one can say, "Hey, I was there and that is not how it happened," or "My Grandfather was there and this is how HE said it really happened." You need a great distance in time or space so that no one can check your facts.

Christianity does the exact opposite. If you were going to start up a fake religion that depended on a fake miracle, you would not start it up in the very city where this fake miracle supposedly took place. And you don't start it up less than a generation after the miracle was supposed to have happened. You just can't do that with a fake. You can only do that with the truth - in this case, the truth that the resurrection is real.

The witnesses of the resurrection are not just credible witnesses because their accounts of the resurrection line up and make sense. They are also credible witnesses because they were willing to die rather than change their story. Who in the world - assuming they are sane - would die for a story that he/she knew was false? The fact that many hundreds of thousands of martyrs gave up their lives - continue to give up their lives - demonstrates that the resurrection is the truth.

What does it mean that the resurrection is the truth? It means that when Jesus was on the cross and said, "It is finished," then it really is finished. He has taken all your sins away from you and made you righteous - whole - forgiven before God. The resurrection means that faith in Jesus Christ transforms your past, your present - - and your future. It means that every promise He made will come true - for you: forgiveness of sins - life and salvation. It means that when you believe in Him for the forgiveness of sins that your life is transformed to find life abundant here and now. And as for your future... you can count on life forever in the joy of His presence. This day is the linchpin of Christian faith - without this day even Christmas is meaningless. All of life - yours - mine - all of creation is changed because the resurrection is truth.

What does it mean that the resurrection is the truth? It means that the loved ones that you have buried in death will not remain that way forever. It means that when you buried them, you experienced a different kind of grief. You do not grieve as those who have no hope. Don't misunderstand - the grief of a Christian is just as real and painful and suffocating as the grief of someone who does NOT believe, but you can take to the bank the promise that death is not the

end. The resurrection means that the day will come when you will be together again. The resurrection means that this life is NOT all there is.

The resurrection means that in the face of a pandemic of global proportions - well...I guess that's the definition of a pandemic isn't it - in the face of all that life throws at you that hurts and wounds and depresses - that you are living in Holy Saturday. Yep - every day of this life is like the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter. Evil has indeed come into the world. It works its mischief and destruction and it looks as though it has won. We live in the wake of Good Friday - but at the same time you know what tomorrow means. You know how the story ends - not with Good Friday - but with Easter. The victory is won - Christ has won the battle AND the war - but we live - on this earth - in the in-between. The day will come when we will walk away from the sheltering-in-place of this life...into the glorious company of the saints in light. Into the Presence of Our Lord and Savior - and the hugging and the rejoicing and the trumpets and the organs will be amazing. No social distancing there!!

And that's your clarion call! You don't need to cling to Jesus! It's the same message for you as for Mary Magdalene. There's time for us to be together - right now this can't be it. The truth of the resurrection is REAL - and it's a story that needs to be told to our brothers - our sisters. This isolation is hard. Heck...LIFE is hard. Is it not crystal clear to you now that the absence of faith in our land has left our society more vulnerable? But Christians are uniquely prepared for these times because we know the end of the story. When a ship sinks whose better prepared, people who have spent their life practicing how to swim or those who don't know how to swim? People of faith know how to swim. We trust in the truth of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. When the world is thrown into the deep end of the pool as we all have been in these weeks - it's the Christian who can show the way to the life boats, who can deliver the life preserver that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We do not - we must not live in fear. And for your secular friends - maybe the best life preserver you can throw them is not to attempt to convince them of the existence of God - but rather of the necessity of God.

The resurrection means that the day will come when Jesus will raise all the dead and will give eternal life to all believers in Christ. It means the day will come when there will be a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell. It means that all those who wait with the Lord in heaven and all those who are still alive on the earth will be changed.

The Apostle Paul describes it this way: [1 Corinthians 15:51-57] 51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is

swallowed up in victory." 55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

A blessed Easter to you all. Christ is Risen!.....He is Risen Indeed!

Amen.

Solí Deo Glória