

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

April 4, 2010

“Easter – Past, Present, and Future”

1 Corinthians 15:19-26

The story is told about an elderly pastor who had conducted Easter services for 50 consecutive years and who was asked by a young pastor, fresh out of the sem, which one of those 50 services gave him the biggest thrill? “The first one,” replied the old pastor. “Why the first?” asked the young pastor. “Because it was all so new to me then,” said the old pastor. And then he went on to say, “You know it’s regrettable but true – many of us miss the real joy of Easter because we’ve heard the Easter story so many times before that after a while it can go in one ear and out the other with little, if any, effect on the head or the heart. Would that every time we heard the story of the Resurrection of our Lord it would be like we were hearing it for the very first time.”

And that’s my prayer for all of us this morning – that God, through the power of the Holy Spirit active in Word and Sacrament, would enable each and everyone of us to hear the story of the Resurrection of our Lord again this day as if it were for the very first time.

It goes without saying that that was the way it was for those who were there on that first Easter so many years ago – that Easter past. Now Jesus, much like a parent who tells his or her children that something is going to happen before it does so that when it happens they won’t be surprised or afraid, had told his first disciples a number of times that he was going to die and that three days later he would rise again. But like children who, when hearing that something is going to happen that they don’t want to happen, often just close their ears to the news and pretend that it’s not really going to happen at all, Jesus’ disciples just didn’t listen and if they did, they just didn’t get it. It was necessary, Jesus said, indeed it was the will of his Father and in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy that he go to Jerusalem and that he suffer many things at the hands of sinful men and that he be killed but that on the third day he would be raised to life.

“May this never be,” Peter once said. After all, he must have thought, I expect more from a Savior than suffering and death. And frankly, it looked like it wouldn’t be when on that first Palm Sunday Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem and was hailed by many as the “one who comes in the name of the Lord” – that is, the Messiah. Little did he suspect that events would turn as they did just a few days later. Betrayed by one of his own, Judas, Jesus did indeed suffer many things and on Good Friday he was indeed put to death – death on a cross – just as he had said.

But in spite of his prophetic word, his disciples were still shocked. All that they had believed came crashing down around their heads. The one they thought was sent by God and was indeed God himself come to save them had not even been able to save himself. And now he was dead. And so it seemed for Peter and all the rest that it was all over.

But lest we be too hasty to condemn those first disciples, we too need to recognize how often we, like them, ignore God’s Word as well – sometimes because it goes against what we want or sometimes because, like the Easter story itself, we’ve heard it so many times before it seems to

just go in one ear and out the other and then things happen in our lives and we grieve and we mourn and we doubt and we wonder. But as God would do for us in Easter present, so he did for those in Easter past. He broke into their lives with the incredible Good News of Life in Christ Jesus – Life that conquers even death.

For as the women came to anoint Jesus' body on the first day of the week and discovered he was not there, that he had risen from the dead just as he said he would, so also the word comes to us once again today and says, "Into the midst of your life, into the midst of whatever doubt and despair and discouragement and defeat you may be experiencing right now comes the Risen Christ. And with him comes forgiveness for all that is past, a new life filled with love and joy and peace and victory for the present, and hope for the future. You see, Christ's resurrection is not only what that first Easter was about, it's what today is all about as well, and it's what tomorrow's going to be about too.

I once read the following: "Ever feel burned out, wiped out, kaput? Troubles, kids, parents, others, getting to you? Where is that rose garden? You ask. And so you plead to God for relief. You ask for the burdens to disappear. You're tired and you've had it. Make my life a little easier, you say. Is that too much to ask, Lord? And God responds by crossing out the "I" at the center of the word "easier" – the "I" stands for our iniquities, our sins – and he offers us "Easter" with the "T" where the "I" used to be – a "T" that represents an empty cross. From easier to Easter! And that makes all the difference in the world to those who believe."

It sure made all the difference in the world to those first disciples. Easter turned their lives upside down. It turned their despair into joy, their discouragement into hope, their doubt into faith, and their defeat into victory.

So, too, the good news of the Resurrection of our Lord comes to us again today – the old but ever new story of God's love for a sinful people and how he gave his only begotten-Son into death for the sins of the world and then raised him to life once again confirming him to be the Messiah indeed, and how all who now believe and trust in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

You know, that life begins in the present for all who believe. It begins today with a life that's filled with the presence and power and peace of the risen and reigning Christ. But it doesn't have to end today. Rather, it can continue forever. The risen Christ is proof positive that God's Word is true and that it endures forever and that His promises of forgiveness, life and salvation are as good today for people like us as they were for those first disciples so long ago on that first Easter and that it will continue to be good for all future Easters whether in this world or in the world to come.

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. Amen.

Let us pray: Almighty God, through your only Son you overcame death and the grave and opened for us the gate of everlasting life. As we celebrate Easter past again today may it be an Easter present for all of us who believe and may it assure us of Easter future when we shall be with you forever in heaven. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.