

Easter Sunday April 17 2022 Eternally New in Christ

Isaiah 65:17-19 John 20:1-18

Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed! This statement has been shared for hundreds of years as generations of faithful people gathered to worship and praise God on Easter! Recently I was asked how big of a deal is Easter? Does it compare with Christmas? To faithful Christians, Easter is a big deal. The words of Isaiah 65 state this succinctly—This is the day that God has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day that we remember the ultimate act of Jesus after his self sacrificing death on the cross- he rose to new life. He was not the same Jesus who died in agony and pain on the cross but the divine Son of God seen by many people.

Easter is the celebration of new life—it occurs in spring usually when the snow has melted, and signs of spring abound. Here in Southwestern Ontario daffodils are in full bloom, grass is green and birds are singing loud songs every day and the weather is unpredictable with rain, sun and snow sometimes in the same day. Trees are starting to blossom and the insects like spiders and ants which have been dormant over the winter are marching out into the spring sun. New life is springing up all around us.

This is Easter Sunday- the day that we celebrate new life. So I ask, is there new life in you? Have you experienced the wonder that is Easter-in that we are made eternally new through Jesus? Maybe yes, but are you sure of this new life in Jesus?

Our culture likes to advertise everything as “New and Improved” from the taste of bread, laundry detergent or tires. More often now, this advertising idea is wearing kind of thin because one might ask, if everything is new and improved how awful bad was the old? We might even question how anything “new” can be improved let alone last longer. How often have you heard seen the Eveready Bunny battery ads say their brand is new and improved, and will last longer? Why did not they make them last longer in the first place?

New and improved often calls the consumer to get the latest in computer or cell phone technology. When we think of these items so often that in six months they will be obsolete because of the next new item. No wonder it is difficult for people of different ages to believe that anything new can have eternal value. We might even resonate with Ecclesiastes 1:9 that “there is nothing new under the sun.”

However there are new things occurring on this Easter day- new life is springing up around us and the Good News is that there is new life in Christ Jesus because of his resurrection. On this first day of the ‘new week’ we proclaim Christ Jesus is alive because this is

what the New Testament of our Bible tells us. The New Testament story is about Jesus the promised messiah of the Old Testament who was born to bring hope to the world not just the generation of people who were living at the time he was teaching and preaching, but for all of eternity. It is this promise which is difficult to accept because nothing in our human experience is eternal, that is, we just don't fully understand eternal- forever. But by faith we remind ourselves that what God creates anew remains evermore .

The prophet Isaiah stated that Jesus resurrection is the first result of the new heavens and earth which is yet to come. It is up to the Christian church to proclaim the newness of God's grace and forgiveness made possible through Jesus. It is also our responsibility to tell others that Jesus will return. In Lamentations 3 we read that God's love and mercy are "new every morning." And a beloved hymn of our Christian faith, states the promise of God's love. *"New every morning is the love our wakening and uprising prove; through sleep and darkness safely brought, restored to life and power and thought"* We may tire through the day, but the love that we receive from God restores us to new hope and new possibilities.

As Christian believers we believe that all things are possible with God. And on this Easter day we rejoice because of what occurred that morning. Our reading from John 20 tells what happened on that first day of the new week. It was still dark when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. She went to grieve and mourn Jesus' death. She knew what to expect because she had been there when Jesus' body was laid to rest. She knew that the entrance was blocked by a huge stone and she also knew that guards had been placed there to ensure no one stole the body. But when she arrived at the tomb, she saw that the stone had been removed and was upset. She ran to where Simon Peter and the other disciples were and exclaimed, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid him."

Mary thought the worst—they that is those who had Jesus crucified- had now taken his body and she couldn't grieve his death the way she needed to. Peter, the other disciple (John) and Mary go back to the tomb. Mary and Peter ran together but the other disciple arrived first. He looked in and saw linen wrappings there but didn't go in. He waited for Simon Peter to come and Peter went in together. Peter and John saw linen wrappings lying there and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head all rolled up and placed by itself. They believed but were not sure what they believed. Then they went home. Mary was distraught at not knowing what really happened. She is crying for she is grieving Jesus' death, but now without his body present she is facing more trauma in her life and she needs to know.

Mary goes towards the tomb and looks in. She saw two angels in white sitting where Jesus' body had been. They ask her, "Why are you weeping?" She answered them as she sobbed, "They- have take away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him." As she spoke aloud her fear, her feelings and her thoughts she has lost what was keeping her focused in life. And she has lost even the place where she can mourn or put spices on his body. So he cries. As she explains her tears to the angels, something new happens. For some reason she turns around and as this occurs the angels leave. She sees a man whom she presumes is the gardener standing there. This stranger asks, "why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?"

She is upset and states, "If you have carried him away tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away". She is pleading with this person whom she perceives is a stranger and asking for information. As she does so, she is breaking all sorts of social norms—speaking in a gravesite garden with a man early in the morning, and asking him he took Jesus' body, or know who did. This was not an ordinary encounter. This was something new.

Then Mary's life changed again. Jesus says her name, "Mary". Instant recognition comes to her, she calls him Rabbouni – Teacher." She is filled with joy! Here is Jesus her Lord alive and in front of her. She probably ran up to him, hugged him and wanted to hold him. But she is told, by Jesus, "Don't hold on to me, I've not yet ascended to the Father." But go and tell my brothers that Jesus is ascending to God the Father. Mary sees Jesus alive and he is present with her in the garden. Mary leaves Jesus in the garden, amongst the tombs. She runs to tell the disciples, "I have see the Lord." Jesus called me by name! She then tells the story to them and they are filled with awe.

Mary's new life began when Jesus did not condemn her but set her free from her sins. And on this day when Jesus calls her name, she is greeted by him and told to go tell others that he is alive. Her life now has a new purpose. First to tell the disciples and then to tell others. As we gather to celebrate Jesus. Jesus called Mary by name. We are in need of Jesus in our lives and in our world because we need the hope and security and the gift of eternal life he made possible. IF we listen carefully God's Spirit in Jesus Christ will call each person's name and we will then see for ourselves how our lives will be made new.

But we must hear Mary's story of the resurrection of Jesus; be willing to acknowledge Jesus' death and resurrection as part of human history and yet that is it more than this. Jesus' resurrection makes our lives eternally new. Are we wiling to celebrate this? Are we willing to receive God's grace to know that Jesus died and rose for your sake?

IN these next seven weeks we will be exploring what transformation means for our lives as we integrate the promise of God's coming kingdom with the realities of our present world. It also means how we will become eternally new and improved because Jesus calls us by name.

Are we willing to stop and listen? To see Christ for who he is and know that he died for you?

Let us rejoice this Easter day; let us celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is foundational to our faith belief and purpose. Let us share and show our gratitude and praise as we pray together:

God we praise you that in Christ Jesus you continue to shape new relationships of love for all creation. Help us to trust in you and accept the gift of your grace with love, hope and joy. Call us and enable us to live this Easter life now and always. Amen