

Easter April 4, 2021 | Cor 15:1-11; John 20:1-18

Jesus is Alive! Hallelujah!

Many households that like to share in the tradition of new life and the blessings of spring will report that the Easter Bunny has come to visit them. Depending upon who tells the story of what the Easter Bunny has brought there is much wonder and joy about how this rabbit produces eggs and delivers them or hides them so that the children must go on a hunt. There is not one clear choice of the kinds of eggs the Bunny brings- cream filled, hard boiled, or chocolate. But one thing is certain the egg is a key symbol of Easter. But what does the egg symbolize for those who are interested in finding out connections to the real meaning of Easter?

The egg is often described as a symbol of new life and fertility. Many creatures begin as eggs and thus it symbolizes new life. Eggs are thought to be good luck gifts to young couples who marry as eggs indicate that the couple will be blessed with children. But in the Easter story, eggs are also often used to represent the stone which covered the entrance to the tomb of Jesus at the time of his burial. Another ancient tradition saw the dying or staining of Easter eggs with the colour red so that all would remember the blood of Christ, shed as at that time of his crucifixion. During the season of Lent, many people refrained from eating eggs or using eggs in recipes. So in order not to waste the eggs, they were hard boiled, coloured and preserved until the days of Easter feasting. But no matter your understanding of the Easter egg- there are many types, flavours and even recipes for what to do with all the hardboiled ones! And there are many choices as to what to do with each kind of egg.

This is the case we each experience when something new or profound or a matter comes to light from a different perspective with new insights. When we face new realities, we have at least three options for how to respond. Most of the time it is certain that you will opt for one of these three possibilities! First, you can stay bewildered. You can let this event knock you flat on your back and then stay there. Second, you can engage in world-class denial. You can look at the facts and ignore them. Or third, you can, slowly perhaps, assimilate this new information. You may get knocked as flat on your back as the next person by this new realization, but eventually you pick yourself up. You embrace this new truth and then go through the long, sometimes painful, process of re-assessing life in the light of this new evidence.

This is also true with regard to the choices we can make regarding Easter. When faced with the incredible proclamation that Jesus rose from death. 1) you can be agnostic and cynical by saying that you don't know what to make of this but then neither are you going to try. Who cares anyway? 2) Or you can fully deny it. The whole thing is fiction, fantasy, a pious wish but something that could never really happen- a person dead and comes back to life! 3) Or you can move past the shock of the resurrection itself and move toward acceptance and what this means to you as an individual. But there is also a warning for this==if you are going to accept the truth of Christ's bodily resurrection, you need to let it change you totally.

This is the Easter choice. For many of us Easter comes every year and when it occurs, the problem which arises is that we are not surprised enough by it to realize we face a choice. We have heard the story for many years and it becomes a part of the background scenery of our lives. We've never been afraid of Easter, never been bewildered by it and in some ways we have not faced what life, death and resurrection really means. Believing that Jesus rose again from the dead becomes a little like believing the earth is round and that it orbits the sun. Or even that people can develop a probe that can record images, sounds and take photos of Mars! For centuries people thought the earth was flat and that the sun orbited the earth. It caused quite a stir when this view had to be revised, discovered, and reframed as the new way of thinking. To even think it possible that people walked on the moon! Broadcasters were brought to tears in that moment. And even today when the probe actually landed on the surface of Mars and is now exploring the planet in ways not thought possible before. There is much emotion. Maybe it does not mean a lot to you on a personal level, but think about this in the course of human history! And what those who developed the technology are thinking for the future. This is innovation and future thinking combined. But does it change what will happen to you tomorrow? Easter for some people is just another reason to spend money on gifts and candy But what is needed is the willingness to let the celebration of Jesus' resurrection have meaning for your life. Enabling Christ's resurrection to touch our lives is what is needed for people today—because Jesus was dead and rose to life; through this transition from death to life== hope is reborn, new life is offered and we should be excited that He arose from death for us.

In contrast to Christmas, Easter seems to have always been a low key kind of celebration in the midst of the Christian year. Yet when we think of Jesus on the cross and dying for our sakes we realize that this was his purpose and how he came to earth showed us how he would die- humbly, simply and before all. And maybe this is what we need right now- a simple humble recognition of what Jesus' resurrection means for us to choose our path in truth and sincerity.

Two years ago our choir sang beautiful anthems, we ate chocolate eggs and treats together in the parlour and we visited freely with all who came to worship. We did not know about a global pandemic, covid19, or the terms of social distancing and how to make and wear a face mask properly. Life was somewhat predictable and we met people face to face.

When we remember Easter 2020 took place not very long after the world was locked down and there were many unknowns about the virus which has since lead to the death of many people. We honoured those essential workers and what we lost was in the gathering of family and church family at this holy time of year. The hope was that the lockdown would be over in just two weeks and the pandemic problem would be resolved quickly.

However, here we are in 2021 amidst another lockdown period but there is a difference, many of our citizens over 70+ years have received one dose of the vaccine to combat the covid19 virus and the call has been made for those over 55 to register for it. Last year we livestreamed our worship services from my office and living room; this year we have been able to develop the technology in order to share worship from our sanctuary with the ability to include more people in worship. So what is routine about Easter?

Many had a holiday on Friday, and we might eat chocolate but what is the underlying meaning of this Holiest of weeks in the Christian calendar? Are we so detached from the story of Jesus' death that telling the story becomes routine or because we as a death denying society don't talk about it? Are we so used to seeing violence in our tv programs, movies and entertainment that we see what happened to Jesus was not that bad? Has Easter lost its shock factor and we are just going through the motions? Do we believe in Christ's resurrection or it is a choice?

Jesus died a painful death, was buried and three days later he left the tomb and his grave clothes. He appeared to Mary then to the disciples and it was angels who told others that Jesus rose from life. If we can believe in the resurrection at all, we need to state that this is a gift of faith granted to us by the prior gift of grace. But if we have received that grace and accept the truth, that gets proclaimed from every Christian pulpit in the world each Easter Sunday morning, then we have to know that this truth changes everything. And what this truth does, is bring hope where others never thought it to be possible. This hope comes from the fact that when Christ rose from death, he rose with new life within. Christ beat death- death is dead. There is no more. And yes we know that over 2.84 million people died because of the pandemic in 2020-2021 but what must be realized that this number of people is not all who died an earthly death in this period. Natural causes, heart attacks, cancer, blood disorders, accidents, traumas of different kinds—these are all causes of death, but when we remember those who are no longer in our midst, we need to have faith that there is life beyond death. Because those who died knowing Christ live still in his heavenly presence. Christ conquered death. Yes we will live and die and be separated from our loved ones for an interim period of unknown time, but we will never be separated from Christ. This is his promise to us—never will I leave you. You are with me always. And one day I will call you to come to me and we will be together forever.

When we think about Easter we think of songs with life and energy, with joy and laughter and wonder and hope. We know that this pandemic has given us many sad days, with many losses. Social distancing has left us lonely and even afraid to go outside for a walk. This has been and continues to be a difficult time—the pandemic has left its mark in every country and the repercussions will be felt for years to come. But through faith we believe that what we choose to know, acknowledge and take upon ourselves as truth and belief, is that Easter is not something we can ponder just once every twelve months. We can eat chocolate any time of the year. But what need to remember is that Easter changes everything.... and on EVERY day. Because of Easter, we have hope for tomorrow and the tomorrows yet to come. Because of Easter, we know that when one we loved dies or is told that there is nothing more to be done, or that life will not be as it once was, there is still hope. There is still light in the midst of these

dark moments. There is light because the tomb is empty, because Jesus spoke Mary's name and he now calls out to you- believe- I am the resurrection and the life. Believe and tell others of this good news. Believe and know that because Jesus lives- you can live. Because Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again and death gives way to something new and exciting which calls us to live= fully live! This is the why we make the choice as faithful Christians, I believe that Christ arose. He is alive and within each one of us!

Each time we gather for worship it is a little Easter which draws us in from where we are, and transforms our dark, gloomy moments into a shining doxology. We say with all the faithful of all of the ages, "blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" Because of God's great gift of grace, we can say at the gravesite of loved ones that "we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead". This living hope is God's gift to us which is an inheritance that is imperishable, unfailing and undefiled. And this hope is what sustains us here as we live for Christ and prepare for that time when we will be in His presence in heaven. This is the Good News of Easter. Let us rejoice and praise God! Amen.