

## Death Is Swallowed

Texts: Acts 10:34-43

Colossians 3:1-4 (Series A, Resurrection Sunday) Ps. 118:1-2, 14-24

Matthew 28:1-10

Prayer:

**The tomb is empty and Christ is alive in us. "  
... while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb"**

There is nothing quite like the joy with which Christians celebrate Easter. What is it about Easter that causes believers to celebrate with such irrepressible joy, whether in Victoria, BC, New York, Senegal, Frankfurt, Moscow, Lagos, Seoul, Yokohama, or Sydney?

For a start, Christ came. He visited planet earth like a meteor from outer space that struck with such an impact that the world has never been the same since. But that was only the beginning. Our world brought death down on Him, but He rose from the dead.

Yes, He blasted it open, brushed it aside, and now the entire universe will never be the same. Where once it was a death-locked cell, a gaping hole for freedom has been torn by the resurrection. Those two events, the *crucifixion* and the *resurrection* of Jesus, have changed everything....

The very same power that raised Jesus from the dead, that made the amino acids rekindle and the corpse sit up, that revitalized dead cells and restored breath to empty lungs, is the same power that is given to us when we receive Christ as Lord. Everything about the resurrection speaks of empowered newness; dry bones coming to life.

As Eugene Peterson wrote, "*The Bible is not a script for a funeral service, but it is the record of God always bringing life where we expected to find death. Everywhere it is the story of resurrection.*" With the past forgiven and the future opened with a cross-shaped hole blasted through the grave, the stress is on the present as it stretches through the future into eternity.

"If death ends all, then evil must be good, Wrong must be right, and beauty ugliness. God is a Judas who betrays his Son, And with a kiss, damns all the world to hell -- If Christ rose not again." *That haunting*

*poem was penned by an unknown soldier killed in WWII.* Its' tone almost reminds us of Paul's reasoning in 1 Cor. 15:12-19 which begins, "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" and closes "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."

The resurrection enables us to live differently because we are given something permanently that we did not have before. The agent of our transformation, and the One who energizes us, day by day, as we grow in God, is His Holy Spirit. Because we have been united to Christ in a living, vital way, we receive life and power through the Spirit.

Believing and Living out the New Way will shape everything about us. It will slowly transform our values, our attitudes, our perception of self and others. The reality of our new life with Christ must begin to seep into our consciousness and penetrate everything we do.

What enables us to live this new life, and to benefit from these means of grace, is the power unleashed by Christ's rising from the dead. He did more than die and pay the penalty of sin.

He was raised from death itself, and the very power God used to raise Him is the power made available to us. Through the Resurrection God now offers us new life. Eternal life is the life of eternity. Living the resurrection is living in the old world by the energy of the new world to come. One thing is clear from Christian testimonies; different things change people at different times and in different ways. Some people meet God and are changed dramatically; they are so transformed that we can hardly believe the difference when we see in them.

Others experience change more like a refinement that takes place slowly over time. Only God knows the reasons why that is so, and to pretend otherwise is presumptuous and cruel. But what of situations where there seems to be no change at all, and we are completely in the dark?

Christianity is predicated on the Resurrection; without Christ being raised from the dead, our faith is baseless. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"If Christ had not been raised ... we are to be pitied more*

*than all men"* (1 Corinthians 15:17-19). He was addressing the central question of life: what does life mean if the end is death?

Writing to the Thessalonians about loved ones who have died, Paul tells us, *"We do not ... grieve like the rest of men and women, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him ... and so we will be with the Lord forever"* (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, 17).

We are Easter people! If there is nothing beyond the grave, then life on this side is meaningless, too. Life amounts to nothing in itself. It provides no redress of injustice, no fulfillment of joy, and no reason to forfeit instant gratification.

If this is all there is, then our attempts to give life any significance merely seems like chasing after the cloud. But the Bible insists that we have significance, that life means something, because even after death we still are, and to the point, we are what we have chosen.

The Bible affirms that each person has eternal significance in God's sight. We will all live eternally. The issue is whether we live eternally in relationship with God or if we choose to live without Him.

That is why the resurrection of Christ is so important. He conquered death and in doing so offers us the possibility of life forever in the presence of God. We are Easter people... Christians are people of hope and not despair. Because we know that God, who had the first word, will have the last, and not death. God is never caught napping by the circumstances of our lives.

To have faith in Jesus does not mean we try to pretend that bad things are really good. Rather, we know that God will take our difficulties and weave them into purposes we cannot see **as yet**. And when He is done, the day will be more glorious for having gone through the difficulties.

We know that if the logic of God's love nailed Jesus to the cross, we have no right to go another way. But our lives can be lived well, with courage and with joy because we live by the hope of the resurrection. We are Easter people!

This is where God is present. This is where God is active in our lives. Today, we go to these tombs, to these places of death and struggle and disappointment, and that is where the healing occurs.

We are given strength beyond our own strength. We are given power to move through these situations, to new life, to new hope, to new expectation. This is what Easter is all about. We don't merely sit here and remember some dim historical event. We are Easter people!

We can experience it now, the joy of Easter, the joy of the resurrection, at the points of hurting, at the tombs of our life. And if we miss that, we miss Easter. Easter is a time to bring to the surface the conviction deep within us that God is in charge. God is good, and God will take care of us in life and in death; that dry bones are coming alive once again. Whatever our present source of deep hurting -- a personal habit, a broken relationship, the reality of physical death -- Easter is now. We are Easter people!

Who defeated death and made it possible for us to do so? Jesus Christ the first born of the dead. In 1859, a French tightrope walker named Blondin walked across Niagara Falls. After he crossed the falls before a large crowd, he spoke to the spectators, "Do you believe I can carry a person on my shoulders across the falls?" One man shouted, "Yes, you can." Blondin then replied to that man, "**Will you be the man?**" Likewise, God asks you and me, "Do you believe I can raise you from the shallow of *bondage* that confines you?"

Do you believe that My power is greater than the power of alcohol or of your possessions or of those alluring images we see in the media? Do you believe I can raise you even from the grasp of guilt, insecurity or fear, and death? Do you believe I can make you a new creature?

Will you connect your heart to the power of my love? If so, I will transform you into a *person*, into a Christian who is empowered... empowered to love the world." Thanks be to God who gives us the victory in Christ Jesus our Lord!

**(Cross held high)** This is not the sign of despair but a victory sign of God's love over the forces of darkness. Whatever your present source of deep hurting, whenever we are sent back to the tombs just remember this .... Easter is now. As the Swedish proverb says: "There is a dawn in every midnight."

Thomas Merton wrote, "True encounter with Christ liberates something in us, a power we did not know we had, a hope, a capacity for life, a resilience, an ability to bounce back when we thought we were completely defeated, a capacity to grow and change, a power of creative transformation." How important are these words in these days of the corona virus pandemic?

So, no matter what life dishes out to us, if we will only trust God and wait and never lose heart, the song we sing one day will be of victory. And then, with battles over, death swallowed up, the time will come when faith becomes sight and hope fulfilled, and our whole beings are united with the God we love. Joy of all joys, goal of our desire, all that we long for will be ours, for we will be His. We are Easter people!

During this social distancing, we shouldn't forget to pray for one another; and we shouldn't forget to be in touch with those for whom Church is always distant and unattainable, who are more isolated than ever. A phone call, a note, a mail-ordered Easter basket will go a long way to keeping Christ present in our absence...a little taste of heaven goes a long way.

The tomb is empty, and Christ is alive in us ... while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. He IS Risen! Hallelujah!

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Christ Is Risen! Alleluia! # 382
- The Strife Is O'er, the Battle is Done # 366
- Christ the Lord Is Risen Today; Alleluia! # 369

The tomb, after all, is empty. Death swallowed up.  
Christ is alive in us! Amen.

**HAPPY EASTER AND BE BLESSED BY THE  
POWER OF THE RESURRECTION.**

April 12, 2020