

Death Is Swallowed Up.

Texts: Acts 10:34-43

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

John 20:1-18

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 uncontrollable joy, whether in Montreal, QC, New York, Senegal, Frankfurt, Kyiv, Moscow, Lagos, Seoul or Sydney?

For a start, Christ came. He visited planet earth like an asteroid 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 writes, "*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."*

When I am ask, why are a Christian? My answer always is because I believe in the resurrection. The resurrection is not the end in its self, rather a promise to those who would believe. You see, my friends 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. 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 you and me this very day.

Through the Resurrection God now offers you and I a 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.

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 them. Others experience change 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? 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 of the grave is meaningless too. Life amount 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 were created to live with God, we will all live eternally. The issue is whether we live eternally in relationship with God or, choose to live without Him.

That is the 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. We are Easter people!

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 in the here and now. 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 there 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 that happened some 2000 years ago. We are Easter people! Passover 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 surface the conviction deep within us that God is in charge and God is good and God will take care of us in life and in death

Those dry bones coming alive once again. Whatever our present source of deep hurting—a personal habit, a broken relationship, unemployed, the reality of physical death—Easter is now. We are Easter people! Alleluia we are Easter people!!

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!

The tomb, after all, is empty. Death swallowed up.

Christ is alive in us! Alleluia Amen.