

## **Dear Friends in Christ, Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen!**

There is a true story that made headlines a few years ago about a boy with Down Syndrome named Philip. Even at his Sunday school he was not readily accepted. But his teacher was sensitive to Philip and had a marvelous idea for his class the Sunday after Easter. The teacher gave to each of the 8 year old students an empty plastic egg. They were given clear instructions to go into the church yard and find symbols of new life, then place those symbols of new life inside their own plastic egg.

After they were finished scavenging the property, the class came inside and put all the eggs on a table. As the teacher sorted out the eggs on the table all the children gathered around and “ooh-ed and aah-ed” as each egg was successively opened to reveal buds, leaves and butterflies. They opened the next one and all the class peered inside. There was nothing. The children, as eight-year olds will do, said, “That’s not fair. That’s stupid! Somebody didn’t do it right.” Then the teacher felt a tug on his shirt, and he looked down. “It’s mine!” Philip said. The children said, “You don’t ever do things right, Philip. There’s nothing there!” Standing tall, brave Philip defended himself, “I did so do it right! I did! The egg is empty because the tomb is empty!” Silence.

Isn't that a marvelous story about the simple teaching the wise? Within this true story we get to the heart of why we Christians are here. We are here to proclaim to everyone the shattering news that Jesus' tomb is empty and because of that you and I have the gates of paradise opened for us. This is the central point of our holy religion. This point about us having "New Life" because of the empty tomb was of such importance to the early Christians that St. Paul dedicated the whole section of 1 Corinthians 15 to this matter:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures...

Our identity and our mission are tethered to the same foundation: Christ is Risen! It is our identity because we are people of the resurrection, and “Christ is Risen” is our national anthem! We believe so much in it that we are willing to give the world myriad numbers of martyrs in every land, in every generation. “Christ is Risen” is our mission statement because we are driven by divine command (Matt. 28) to go to the ends of the earth to share this news with everyone. Citizens are bound to vote and pay tax, so too we are bound to missionize all with this news. This means communicating with everyone that God loves us so much that He united Himself to our human nature, lived among us, suffered with us and for us, died for us and entered the pit of death, rose in glory and ascended to heaven with that same glorified human nature where it remains united to His Divine nature for all eternity. Further, this God-Man Jesus Christ will come again at the end of time to give judgment upon all, both the living and the dead. To enter into relationship with this God of self-emptying love He demands that we spread this message to all nations, baptize them in the name of the Most Holy Trinity, to celebrate the Eucharist and to love one another. How do we know all this to be true? Because, in the worlds of Philip, the tomb is empty! How do we have any guarantee of a new and better life awaiting us? Because the tomb is empty!