

“Easter: Future Hope or Present Power?”

Date: April 4, 2021

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; John 20:1-18

Occasion: Easter Sunday

Theme: Resurrection; Hope; Power

A joke to start our time off together: A pastor was discussing various Christian holidays, and the traditions that accompany them, with some of the children of her church. “At Christmas-time,” she said, “we traditionally use a plant called a poinsettia for decorating our sanctuary and homes. Can anyone tell me what plant we use to symbolize Easter?” A young hand shot up in the air and a small boy said hopefully, “An eggplant?”

Yes, we do use eggs to symbolize new life, but it is the lily which is the plant most often associated with Easter. But that’s not the only thing we use to use to symbolize this holy day. People often wear new hats and new dresses. Beautiful music celebrates this day. White cloth adorns the altar and the cross. Sometimes balloons help to share the joy of this day.

In many different ways we are trying to get the message across: “Jesus Christ, by his resurrection and defeat of death, has made all things new.” Alleluia! It was a totally unexpected thing that happened.

Even though Israel had been talking about it for years. Even though Jesus made it clear that they could expect it. Still, no one seemed able to comprehend its possibility. Mary Magdalene certainly did not.

She went to the tomb early in the morning to prepare Jesus’ body for its final resting. She went full of grief and despair. Her beloved teacher was gone; ripped from her life. Never in her wildest imagination did she ever dream she would find the Lord, risen from the grave.

Peter and John surely did not. They went running to the tomb, full of questions, I’m sure. Who had stolen the body? Where had they taken

Jesus? Why would anyone want to steal his body? Sceptically, they ran to the tomb, wondering, "What in the world happened?"

However, the privilege of being the first one to see our risen Lord was given to Mary Magdalene, a woman of questionable reputation, allegedly a former prostitute whom Jesus had forgiven. Mary, who had been given a second chance on life, had given herself completely to the Lord. Mary, whose very life expressed the gospel of new life, to her was given the privilege of seeing the risen Jesus first.

How fitting and symbolic that Mary was chosen to be first one to whom Jesus revealed himself in glory. In doing so, Jesus sends a message to the world: "Those who believe in me will be given new life." Mary's life testified to this truth.

Easter is the proclamation of the presence of God's power in our midst. It was the power of God which raised Jesus from the dead; not Christ himself. It was God the Father who raised the Son from death. Resurrection is the power of God to bring forth life out of death.

This morning, some of us from Lakewood went to Laurel Hill Cemetery for our sunrise service. It is such a symbolic place to celebrate Easter. As we stood among the tombstones of that cemetery, we were celebrating God's triumph over the power of death.

The Christian promise is that everyone who places their hope and their faith in Jesus Christ will live again, even as he did, with a new and eternal body. We too shall share in the resurrection of our Lord. Many find this hope to be very comforting and it is; this is the hope of Heaven.

And that is certainly part of the Easter proclamation, but there is more to it than that. Easter is not only the hope that there is life after death. There is also the message that there is new & abundant life before we die.

Read the gospel closely, and you will begin to understand that death is something more than the physical body ceasing its functioning. Death, in the scriptures, is also a power which robs life of meaning, causing people to be “dead” before they die. Death is a power which keeps us from experiencing life as fully as God intends it to be lived.

As children, many of us learned, “Now I lay me down to sleep; I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.” But what if we should die before we have actually lived? What if we have died on the inside before the doctor pronounces us dead? What then, my friends?

Resurrection is not merely a future hope, although it is that. Easter is a present power, the power of God to bring the spiritually dead back to life, before they physically die. For many people it could be said that they died at 20, 30, or 40 years old, but they were buried at 80. Easter is the power of God to bring people to life while they are still living.

One young woman explained it this way: “I know what the Resurrection of Jesus means. It’s new life. There’s been a resurrection in my house. My Dad has replaced alcohol with iced tea, and porno magazines with the Bible. And I thank God for this miracle!”

Far too many people are counted among the living dead, walking spiritual corpses; alive in the flesh but spiritually dead. Empty inside, frustrated with life, feeling as though there ought to be more than this, but not knowing what it is they’re missing.

What’s missing in their life is God. Dead in their sin, they are cut off from the source of life itself, our Heavenly Father. Beloved in Christ, resurrection is not merely a future hope; Easter is a present power to change lives. Let me say that again. Resurrection is not merely a future

hope; Easter is a present power to change lives. It is the power of God to bring the dead back to life, even before they physically die. A story:

The old man sat, slowly rocking in his chair. Twilight shadows crept across his nursing home room as he visited with his pastor. He said, "For 32 years my brother and I have not spoken a word to each other. We used to do everything together. Then one day we had a fight, and since that day we've avoided each other completely. Thirty-two years have gone by and not one word. Pretty soon, we'll both be gone....."

Isn't that a tragic story? Brothers and sisters in Christ, the same power which brought Jesus back from the dead, can put new life back into dead relationships. If you've got one of those "I'll-never-talk-to-him-again relationships," Jesus can heal that wound. He can heal that brokenness and sadness. *That* is the power of Easter!

Easter is the power of God to make broken lives whole again. It is the power of God to turn damaged human beings into "better than new." Easter has the power to turn weapons of war into instruments of farming. Easter is the power which can restore broken marriages, reversing years of bitterness and reclaiming the beauty of their wedding day.

Easter is the power of God to heal damaged emotions, to heal the scars of sexual abuse, an abortion from decades ago, marital infidelity or the ravages of drugs and alcohol. Easter is the power of God to continue after the death of your child, or your spouse of many years.

Easter is the power of God to make all things new. It is the power of God which overcame even death itself. It is the power of God which cancels the debt of sin and makes the human race clean again. It enables each of us to walk as the children of God, once more.

Beloved in Christ, Easter is more than merely the hope that we will live again after we die. Easter is the power of God to live, to fully live, before we die!

Christ is risen; He is risen indeed! Praise be to God, who gives us the victory, now and forever more. Amen!