

**THE RESURRECTION MATTERS****Read Matthew 28:1-10**

*Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."*

I remember lots of Easters when I was a kid. I remember being excited about getting an Easter basket, and having an Easter egg hunt. Oh yes, it was about Jesus being raised from the grave, for sure, but sweets and fun too often won out.

It's funny, I don't remember any sunrise services at my home church. We just simply didn't have them. I remember the one time that we were going to attend one, as a youth group. It was dark when we all piled into my brother-in-law's 1959 Galaxy he had named the Black Barge and we drove to the banks of the Perkiomen Creek where the service was supposed to be. When we got there it must have been called off because no one was. This was probably because there was about 10 inches of wet new snow that had fallen overnight – and as I recall it was still snowing – so as you can imagine there was not much of a sunrise that morning anyway. But I sure do remember that Easter.

I read this last week that we live in a time and a culture where there is a memory of Christianity, but it's very weak. Now, I don't believe it's that way for us. For one thing you would not be here at 6:45 AM if this was a memory. This is because we are practicing Christ Followers and Christianity isn't merely a memory for us. But for many people it is something from their past. Because of this, celebrations like Christmas and Easter have been diluted to the commercialized celebrations they have become, where there is passing mention of the arrival of God's greatest gift, Jesus Christ, in the midst of Christmas gift giving, and even less thought is given to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ in the midst of chocolate eggs and jelly beans at Easter. Now, maybe I've overstated this a bit here in our North Central Ohio rural culture. We do have a taste of these infinitely important holidays. But they should mean so much more so much more than a taste.

SO, why do we celebrate Easter?

Well, the most important one is, Jesus conquered death. I remember quite a number of years ago I followed Arden Gilmer in the pulpit at the Ashland Community Good Friday Service – his was the sermon right before mine and because of that, I sat in on the end of his sermon. As I listened I caught a powerful concept that was not new but it still hit me with power and I've used it ever since. Arden simply yet powerfully stated, Jesus put death to death. The resurrection of Jesus was the death of death for the believer.

That means that Easter is more than just having Jesus living on in the hearts of Christ Followers. In fact Paul actually points out in 1st Corinthians 15:14 that if Christ Jesus had not been raised, our faith would be worthless. Sin brought death for every human being who ever lived, and Jesus's resurrection means that sin has been defeated. Death has been defeated. It's the death of death.

Death didn't just take its hands off of Jesus for a little while when he rose from the grave, death's hands were broken when Jesus rose from the dead. Two weeks ago we talked about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. In that case, death took its hands off Lazarus for a while but it came for him again. Some people actually think that he was murdered right after Jesus raised him. But when Jesus rose from the dead, death never came for him again. It couldn't. He had defeated death.

Jesus will raise us from the dead too. As we have faith in him we will be raised from the dead just as he did. I think I told you in my sermon last week that I have a list of songs for my funeral. They are songs that testify to what I believe about my saving faith in the Lord and all the promises I have in him. One that I just added to that list is the song AIN'T NO GRAVE which has this refrain:

*There ain't no grave*

*Gonna hold my body down  
There ain't no grave  
Gonna hold my body down  
When I hear that trumpet sound  
I'm gonna rise up outta the ground  
There ain't no grave  
Gonna hold my body down*

Yes he's going to raise me from the dead, a he's going to raise you from the dead. If you have testified to the saving power of what he did on the Cross, the resurrection is your promise too. As a matter of fact, that same song lays the story out,

*Oh, there was a battle, a war between death and life  
And there on a tree, the lamb of God was crucified  
And he went on down to hell, he took back every key  
And he rose up as a lion and he set all captives free  
There ain't no grave  
Could hold his body down  
There ain't no grave  
Could hold his body down  
When he heard the trumpet sound  
He rose up outta the ground  
There ain't no grave  
Could hold his body down  
There ain't no grave  
Could hold his body down*

It couldn't hold his body down, and it won't hold our body down.

I saw this promise last week, "*At the resurrection, we're not going to be playing harps on clouds. We're going to have Resurrection bodies, and we're going to be working in God's new heavens and new Earth.*" Now I don't know what that looks like, but it's what the Bible promises, even though its just beyond my imagination, it's going to be that good.

And finally Jesus's resurrection means that what we do in our lives today really, really, really matters. Earlier I referred to 1st Corinthians 15. In the 58 verse that comprise that powerful chapter, Paul talks for 57 verses about the resurrection. In includes the famous passage where, in verse 55, he taunts death with

*"O death, where is your victory?  
O death, where is your sting?"*

And then, in the very last verse of that chapter, after laying out the case with all the facts of the Resurrection, he gives us a command in verse 58 with, *Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

Don't let your work be in vain. You will be raised again. And your resurrection is promised. But what about other people? They need to know Resurrection power too! They need to know that Easter is more than chocolate eggs. It's about Jesus rising from the dead, and the promise that we will do the same.

I can honestly say I can't remember any Easter sermons from when I was growing up. I'm actually wondering after 45 Easters and dozens of Easter sermons, how many of my own Easter sermons do I remember. But I do know this from what my Sunday School teachers taught me and with what my parents and every pastor I had lived out in front of me, this is what I know about Easter.

Jesus conquered death! And because Jesus conquered death, he has conquered death for us too. He raised us from the dead and now our lives and what we do matters infinitely.

**He's risen!**

**He's risen indeed!**

**Amen!**