

EASTER, A – April 12, 2020
SCRIPTURES: Jer. 31:2-6; Col. 3:1-4; Matt. 28:1-10

“Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!! As this joyous cry is echoed throughout our world on this day, and over the coming weeks, I want you to consider this question: what difference does it make?

Oh, sure, it made a difference for Jesus. His arrest... his trial, on trumped-up and false charges... his sufferings... his crucifixion... they were all unjust, unfair. His rising from the dead, then... well, it was his vindication, the making right of what had been oh so wrong. Christ is risen... good for him! But, what difference does it make for you?

Skeptics say that it's all a show, this Easter stuff. It's the sight and smell of beautiful flowers in an empty church! It's all show... like the beauty of spring right now. Oh, sure, it's great to take a walk and hear the birds singing, and see all the beautiful flowers. It's a much-needed uplift! But, also lurking out there is a hidden danger, a tiny virus just waiting to bring suffering, and maybe even death.

Sure, spring is great. Even greater is that Jesus rose and triumphed over his own death! What joy it gave to those women who saw him, and to His disciples when they saw him later that day. But, each of them eventually died. Jesus didn't end death. Nor did He end injustice by appearing to those who had arrested and unjustly tried Him, and so change them. They went on to oppose his disciples, and eventually kill almost all of them.

So, again, I ask: what difference does Jesus' resurrection make?

“Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.” There's the difference. Do you get it? It's all in there in these words. Let me lay it out for you.

First, Jesus' resurrection declares that our sins are forgiven. **OUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN!** How can we be sure of that? Well, look at those women who went to the tomb. Look at them! You know why they're there. In their hands they are carrying spices. They planned to anoint Jesus' body with them, and so finish the preparations for the dead that were not finished because he had been hurriedly buried. So: they stand there before Jesus with the evidence in their hands of their doubt and unbelief. He had told them many times that he was going to be rejected by the Jewish leaders and killed, but then would rise to life again on the third day. They didn't believe him! The evidence of their unbelief is in their hands!! (I can just see them hiding the spices in their robes when Jesus met them!)

Does he rebuke them? Does he shake his head in disappointment? **NO!** ***“Do not be afraid.”*** These are the first words out of his mouth. They have no reason to worry or to hide anything. He's not holding anything against them! Their sin is forgiven!!

Then, he goes on to say, **“go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”** His disciples, who had run away when he was arrested... who, to save their own skins, had denied even knowing him. Those wimps! Those phonies! **“My brothers,”** Jesus says. He is one with them, and will have them be one with him. Their sins are forgiven!!

Are yours? Writing years after Jesus’ resurrection, to people who, like us, never saw or heard Him, Paul says: **“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”** (Col. 3) So: if you seek the things above – seek Christ – by setting your minds on them, then you are raised with Him!... right? Kind of like, if you set your mind on good things, on happy things and better times to come, then you will be raised above this depressing social distancing and it won’t bother you... right? Get your mind right and you’ll be right with God!

We’re in trouble if this is the case. I don’t know about you, but I’m finding it difficult right now to think positively all the time! And, we’re really in trouble – in spiritual trouble; faith trouble – if the forgiveness of our sins depends on our mental focus and positive thoughts about Jesus. Lord, give me a better brain if that’s what You expect!

He did give us brains to understand language and grammar. Look again at what Paul wrote in Col. 3. After encouraging those Christians to seek the things that are above and set their minds on them, he says: **“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”** You have died: that’s past tense. It’s already happened! And, because of that death your life is hidden with Christ in God. Is hidden: present tense. Your life is right now hidden with Christ, and you are in God!

Let’s see: a past event has had this present impact. A past death... and one that didn’t physically kill because those Colossian Christians were alive to read his letter. What could Paul possibly be talking about? We don’t have to guess. He wrote in chapter 2:11-12: **“In [Christ] you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith, the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”** So: your baptism was your death, and then your resurrection with Christ! That past event raised you to life with Him now!! It did; for it, and also your faith, is **“the powerful working of God”** and not your work. In baptism you were buried and raised with Christ... joined to Him, so that He is your brother. **“Go and tell my brothers,”** Jesus says. Jesus’ resurrection declares that your sins are forgiven! What a difference this makes for our lives!

Ok, now pardon me, but I am going to go on for a little longer than usually do in a sermon. But, hey, you’ve got time, right? You’re just sitting at home!

Another difference that Jesus’ resurrection makes is that it confirms God’s everlasting love. **“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you,”** God says in Jer. 31. What wonderful news this is! God’s love for you is everlasting! This means that:

- 1) He loved you before you were, and so before you loved Him and before you had any good deeds to offer Him. In fact, as your Father His love brought you forth, and also brought forth your love and every good thing you do!
- 2) God loves you now. And His love is not changed or lessened by anything or any event in the present.
- 3) Most importantly, God's love for you will continue after you die; and this means that He will raise you to life after you die. God's love, you see, is not a mere idea. Nor does He love what is only a memory. God's everlasting love results in action; results in life. He will raise you to life again after you die! Jesus' resurrection confirms this.

His whole life confirms this! To give you and seal you with His everlasting love, God sent His eternal Son to you in your flesh to take your sins upon Himself and away from you, so that you are not destroyed by them. God raised Jesus to life after His death to assure you of His everlasting love and seal you with Jesus' everlasting life. What a difference His resurrection makes!

And, finally, because of Jesus' resurrection we can speak of this promised future with present conviction. Take Moses as an example. Today's Introit is his praise of God for "resurrecting" the people of Israel at the Red Sea. Pharaoh's army with his chariots had come out of Egypt after they left and trapped them before the Red Sea. They had nowhere to go and were as good as dead! But, God parted the Sea and brought them safely through it... and when Pharaoh's army pursued, He brought its waters down on them. And Moses praised God: ***"Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy. You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode."*** What beautiful words of praise! But, notice: Moses praises God for something that had not yet happened. ***"You have guided them by your strength to your holy abode"*** – Mt. Sinai. But, they weren't there yet! Moses was sure that they would arrive there, however, for the God of resurrection and life was with them as their Savior!

He is also with us. The Lord Jesus, who rose over your sin and death in triumph and drowned them in your life by the waters of your Baptism is with you and is leading you! You can speak confidently of your future, then, even in the face of sickness and disease... job uncertainty and financial worries... and, finally, sin and death. The Lord Jesus is your strength and your song! By His death and resurrection, and His joining you to it in your Baptism, He has become your forgiveness, your life, your salvation! What a difference – an eternal difference – this makes!! Thanks be to God; through Jesus, our risen Lord and Savior. Amen!