

Let me say a sort of personal word before we begin. There is no place in the world I would rather be than here with you, in this church, to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Christians, Easter Sunday radiates life, and light, and joy, and thanksgiving . . . and believe me, a pastor needs that as much as anyone else.

A friend of mine, caught up in the midst of a cluttered schedule and daily tasks, found time to express what I hope all pastors feel in their hearts. He says:

"PASTORS: Be thankful when you make a parish call on several shut-ins only to find one that has gone to the hair-dresser, another visiting her sister in Buffalo, and a third is at a bridge club party.

Be thankful when you enter the church to lead the worship and the suppressed voice of a child says: 'Mommy, is that God?'

Be thankful when you begin a church meeting with prayer and ask for deeper spiritual commitment and a greater sense of mission, and then spend the remainder of the evening discussing property and finance.

Be thankful when your son tells you he wants to be a minister when he grows up and you ask him why and he says: 'So I can shout at people and then shake their hands at the door after church'."

Well, I am thankful to be with you this Easter Sunday, 2 just as I am thankful for all that God is doing in and thru this church, and all that he has promised he will do in the days to come. We have much to celebrate today, so let us make a joyful noise to the Lord, a joyful noise that will resound from every housetop for all the community and the world to hear. The Lord is risen, He is risen indeed.

You and i know that there is nothing more important than the resurrection of Jesus Christ..to a Christian at least.

Where would you and I be today if Jesus Christ be not risen? What if. . what if you had gotten up early, put on your Easter clothes walked up to the door of the church and found the lights off, the organ silent, the pulpit empty, no flowers, and the pews empty? Would you think you had the wrong day, or that your clock had failed to go off, or that the town had been evacuated during the night and the Civil ~~Service~~ ^{Defense} forgot to tellyou?

Well that is how Mary Magdalene felt at dawn on the first Easter Sunday, because when seh came to the tomb where Jesus had been laid, he was not there, the soldiers were not there - nobody was there and she was afraid. But, as she wept, she heard the voice of the one who had changed her life, and she recognized the risen Christ standing before her . . and she was not afraid anymore.

Fred Craddock tells about a teacher at a university who

died. She had been a first rate teacher with a zest for life.

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And this is what he tells:

"Five years ago, she went to her room alone and she heard a knock at the door. She went and it was old Death. She locked the door and went to a doctor, and with some surgery and therapy she was able, after a while, to return to her classes. She was doing all right and we all embraced her and said 'Ha, Ha, you got him'.

About two years ago, she was alone in her room and she heard a knock at the door. She went to the door and it was old Death. She locked the door and rushed back to the doctor and there was more surgery and chemotherapy and she came thru: 'Ha, Ha, you got him again'.

A few months ago, she heard a knock at the door and went to the door and it was old Death. She slammed the door and tried to lock it, but the lock was broken. So she called her friends and family in Florida and we all came and took turns leaning against the door. once in a while we would look out the window and that yellow faced thing was still there waiting. But we leaned ever harder against the door.

One morning she said: 'Back away from that Door'. and we backed away and it opened and there he stood. He reached down to get her and he was embarrassed. Old Death was embarrassed, because in his left hand was rest and in his right hand was peace, and he was whipped. Old Death was whipped. It can happen. It is possible. Old Death can be overcome".

{, Faith in God can . . . faith in God will overcome our fear: our fear of failure, our fear of things seen and unseen, our fear of death . . . for we believe in a God who raised his own son up out of the grave that we might have life. "O Death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God who has given us the victory thru our Lord Jesus Christ". *Awake & Greet the risen Christ* Rise to greet the dawn, Mary and all you who are afraid. Jesus Christ is risen today.

Now the scriptures tell us that ^{the women} ~~Mary~~ ~~can~~ ~~to~~ told Peter and John. But Peter and John and the others had deserted

Jesus a few days before...deserted him in the most critical days of his life.

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If you have ever betrayed a friend or turned your back on a neighbor in need and been bothered by guilt..then multiply that a thousand fold and you may get some idea of what Peter and John felt when Mary came to tell them the news.

according to John
They ran to the tomb, they looked in and saw that it was empty, and by evening of the same day, their guilt had been washed away and their broken hearts healed, for they believed and they knew that Jesus Christ, their Lord, was risen.

A mother in Maryland, a mother of eight, had been visiting next door one day and as she walked into her living room she saw her five youngest huddled in the center of the room on the floor, on her new carpet very much involved with something wiggly and squirmy. On closer examination, and to her total dismay, she discovered that the children had gathered ^da family of skunks. In her horror, she screamed: "Run, Children, Run". Whereupon each child grabbed a skunk and ran.

That may be a parable of our ~~times and~~ lives. We may be horrified at that part of our lives which is selfish, sinful, neglectful and even cruel. Yet we cannot leave it behind any more than those early disciples could escape from their weak and sinful nature.

When the Lord appeared to his disciples in the Upper

Room, Jesus' words were calm and clear: "Peace be with you",
and, when he said this, he showed them his hands and his side
and they were glad, for he told them that they were forgiven

That is resurrection Peace, and Power, and Love.

Answer of Great the Risen Christ

Rise to greet the dawn, Peter and John and all you who
suffer this day from guilt and despair. God has forgiven you
.. and he has given you eternal life. Jesus Christ is risen
today. There is another thing to be said, tho.

I'm sure you know and love the old spiritual: "Were you
there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they
nailed him to the tree? Were you there when they laid him
in the tomb?" My spirit soars when I hear that sung around
Easter each year . . . but I must confess that the words have
always troubled me. I do understand that we were all involved
as part of humanity in those events long ago, but the fact
remains that I wasn't there, and neither were you when they
crucified my Lord. I wasn't there with Mary Magdalene in the
garden when she saw him face to face, nor was I there when
Jesus saw his disciples in the upper room and said: "Peace
be with you".

We, who live on this side of Easter, we need a sign, some-
thing that we can grab onto, and by the grace of God we have
that today. Supported by the scriptures, sustained by the
Holy Spirit and surrounded by the witness of saints down thru
the ages . . .

We are the Church of the living Christ. The Church that he lived and died for, the church he rose from the dead to create, the church that is his body here on earth.

Where would you be today without the resurrection? You wouldn't be here because you would not have anything to celebrate.....

No Hallelujah chorus
no hymns of grace and glory
no faith to hold us up
no church to hold us together
No world with the hope of salvation
no world with the promise of eternal life
no peace to calm our fears
no forgiveness to remove our guilt

Rise to Greet the Dawn *Awake and greet the Dawn*
But by the grace of God, we'll never know a world like

that, for "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life". *Christ is risen.*

Faith has overcome our fear,
God's grace has washed away our guilt,
The joy of Easter has filled ^{the} world with hope.

So *Awake* rise . . Rise to greet the dawn. . Jesus Christ is risen today. *Awake to greet the Risen Christ - he is risen today*