

Sermon- Easter Service 2020

Scripture- John 20:1-18, Colossians 3:1-4

NOTE TO PARTICIPANTS: At the end of this service, as is our tradition, we will participate in a service of Holy Communion together. In order to do this in our current scattered condition, I invite you now while the music plays to go to your kitchen and grab some bread or crackers or anything of that nature, and any kind of juice or water and come back into the room where you are viewing this so we can partake in spirit, even if we are not physically together.

MUSIC SELECTION:

Introduction:

A grouchy husband made it into heaven along with his wife. However he still seemed upset. "What's wrong now?" the wife asked. "Can't you see, we're in heaven? This is beautiful—the music is great, the food is out of this world, the mansion has everything and more we'd ever dreamt of, the golf course is the best we've ever seen, there's no fees, no taxes, our health is fantastic, why aren't you happy? What's wrong with you?"

The husband replied, "If you hadn't made me eat all that miserable health food, we could have been here ten years ago!"

The punch line of this joke compliments the words of our second lesson today. In this passage, the Colossian Christians, which was a town of Phrygia in Asia Minor, close to Ephesus, were exhorted to focus on heaven.

Earlier they had been told that through the entrance rite of Christianity; through the sacrament of Holy Baptism; they had

died and risen with Christ. Now, continuing with that line of thought, they are instructed:

“So if 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, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

I. Live and act like Easter people.

They are to live and act as resurrection people. This is true, because for Paul, the writer of this letter, the resurrection is something that has already been accomplished in the past. Paul reminds them and us:

A. “You HAVE been raised with Christ,” an action, a fact that has already occurred—not “you shall be raised with Christ” in the future.

The resurrection is an accomplished action; a victory won; a fact that has now become part of Christian salvation history. Paul says this with utmost confidence.

Pastor and professor, Dr. Donald Deffner tells the following story: An atheist who served as a custodian at a seminary enjoyed baiting the young theologians. He told one who was reading a book about eternal life, “If you ask me, that’s so much hogwash. When you’re dead, you’re dead.”

The student replied, “You’re right, George. When you’re dead, you’re dead.” The janitor walked away, wondering what in the world that young man was doing at a seminary.

The student’s point was that hope of eternal life comes only after one has faced the reality of eternal death—which the janitor had not.

B. Our passage from Colossians reminds us that

hope of eternal life comes only after we have faced the reality of eternal death. We have all done that when we were baptized. In baptism we were buried with Christ in his death and in baptism we were raised with Christ to new, resurrection life.

Therefore, Paul exhorts the Colossian Christians to focus on this new reality of resurrection. Resurrection, says Paul, is to be the Christian's entire orientation in life.

II. Resurrection is the key, the guide, the reason for living life now in this world. Resurrection is the Christian's life focus. What does that mean?

A. Does it mean that we're so heavenly minded that we're no earthly good? No, not at all! That is to misunderstand the message of our passage. Rather, it is to **live life on earth in light of the reality**, the accomplished fact that Christ, through his death and resurrection has won the victory for us and for everyone—that is why he is now "seated at the right hand of God."

This picture of Christ being exalted, by sitting at God's right hand is a Jewish concept of future reward in heaven; it is giving Christ the ultimate honor as the Messiah.

It reminds one of a winner, a victor after a great battle. Christ is the Victor, Christ is the Winner, and Christ is the Ultimate Conqueror.

B. Christ has defeated the powers of sin, death and evil. If that is true, then the way we live as Christians each day should and must point to that reality of the resurrection.

Christian Leadership magazine carried a cartoon of a pastor addressing an **overflow** congregation on Easter Sunday and asking, "Are you people not just a little curious as to what goes on here the rest of the year between Easters?"

III. Regardless of the motivation, what does Easter mean to you? Or rather, what does Christ mean to you? Do you see him as just a notable historical person like Socrates, Buddha, Gandhi?

A. Do you revere him as the most sublime ethical teacher of all time? Or do you believe that he overcame the sharpness of death, that is to say, he is not only the Jesus of history but the Jesus of experience, alive and at work in the world here and now?

If you are inclined to shy away from that last question, dismissing it perhaps as sheer mysticism, take another look at the facts.

B. Christianity is something more than hero-worship. It is not just the perpetuation of a great memory. It is a relationship **to** and a fellowship **with** a Christ who is "alive for evermore."

Everything in Christianity depends on the reality of the resurrection of Christ, on the fact that he rose from the grave, appeared to his disciples, made his presence felt in their lives, and still makes his presence felt, is **in** our generation **as great an actuality** as he was to his first followers.

David Livingstone asked the students of Glasgow University on his return from sixteen years spent in Africa, "Shall I tell you what sustained me amidst the toil and hardship, and loneliness of my exiled life? It was the promise made by Jesus, that "Surely, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age."

For multitudes this is life's most precious conviction. When they speak about Christ, they use not only the past and future tenses but the present tense as well. "Surely, **I am** with you always." That is the heartwarming, heart-gladdening fact we celebrate this morning.

C. For us Christians, our ultimate security; our eternal home; our most healthy state of being is in heaven with God in Christ. That does not mean we are so heavenly minded that we're no earthly good.

Rather, that means living in light of the fact of our baptismal inheritance and covenant. That means living in light of the fact that, as our second lesson reminds us we: "have been raised with Christ." This is an accomplished fact that shapes all of our history, personally and collectively.

In light of this fact, our life on earth can bring resurrection where there is death; hope to the hopeless; love to the loveless.

IV. Today is resurrection Sunday: the day where we celebrate the most important and defining event in history: the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

A. In the face of all sufferings and failures—there is healing and ultimate victory thanks to our risen Savior Jesus Christ. Yes, we "have been raised with Christ!"

B. Consistency requires that believers live in conformity with the fact that they were raised with Christ, who is not only the Object of their faith but also the Source of their life.

By saving faith, believers have entered into a new dimension. They possess divine and eternal life, which is not merely endless existence, but a heavenly quality of life brought to them by the indwelling Lord. They are thus alive in Christ to the realities of the divine realm.

Because Christ is alive, He has risen from the dead, Christians have an obligation to live consistently with this reality.

Paul reminds the Colossians and us that believers have risen with Christ. This is the path to holiness, not self-denial, angelic experience, or ceremony. Believers are no longer to live the old

life they lived before their salvation, but since they possess the eternal life of Christ they have been raised to live on another plane. They must not be ignorant or forgetful of who they are and how they are to live. All sinful passion is controlled and conquered by the power of the indwelling Christ and our union with Him.

V. Annie Johnson Flint wrote in her poem: The Way of the Cross:

Some of us stay at the cross,
Some of us wait at the tomb,
Quickened and raised with Christ
Yet lingering still in the gloom.
Some of us abide at the Passover feast
With Pentecost all unknown.
The triumphs of grace in the heavenly place
That our Lord has made His own.
If the Christ who died had stopped at the cross,
His work had been incomplete.
If the Christ who was buried had stayed in the tomb,
He had only known defeat,
But the way of the cross never stops at the cross
And the way of the tomb leads on
To victorious grace in the heavenly place
Where the risen Lord has gone.

On this day of celebration as we are scattered under trying circumstances, we must celebrate the source of our ultimate victory...Jesus Christ and his atonement on the cross. As we approach His table united in the Holy Spirit, let us truly endeavor to live the full victory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let Us Pray!

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION AND OF CONFESSION:

God of mercy, whose Son, Jesus Christ,
longs to gather us in the wide embrace of his love,

we confess that we have been wayward children.

We have disobeyed your commands; our ears have been deaf to your call; our hearts have been cold to your love.

In thought, in word, and in deed,

we have hurt others and dishonored your name.

in your great mercy receive us again as your well-beloved children,

not because we are worthy but for the sake of him

who loved us and gave himself for us.

Father, there is a virus in the world that prohibits us from being together with each other, on this the most sacred of days.

But in truth the fact of the situation will never prohibit us from being together by virtue of your Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts.

We pray that you will consecrate all of the elements which we have gathered, for the purpose of refreshing our spirit as only you can, In the name of your Son Jesus, who came so that we might have life in abundance, **Amen.**

Demonstration of the Elements:

In the partaking of the elements, remember those words of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which explained the reason he gave us the gift of Holy Communion:

Scripture: Matthew 26:26-29 ²⁶ While the disciples were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body broken for you." ²⁷ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of

the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

I invite you now to take and drink and eat all of it in remembrance of Him!

BRIEF MUSIC SELECTION HERE:

Closing Prayer- Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray by saying, Our Father, Who art in Heaven...hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever, Amen!