

Easter Day Mark 16:1-8 or John 20:1-18

Christ is risen! Shouts of alleluia ring out; flowers adorn our Church; people are dressed in their finest attire; everyone has a smile on their face. We are here to celebrate the resurrection in grand style! Because Christ is risen we too have the promise of eternal life. Because the tomb was empty on Easter Sunday, we know that no obstacle is too big for God. No matter how final death may be in our human reality, it is not the end of it all. Because Jesus overcame death, we also overcome death.

As fabulous as the promise of resurrection is though, Jesus' resurrection isn't just about pie in the sky when you die. That is a common theological misunderstanding of the resurrection story. Resurrection isn't just about life after death; it is also about the promise of abundant life-now! It has to be! Otherwise, we might as well just convert just the moment before we die. If the resurrection was only about life after death, then instead of being here in worship, we should all be at home with actuarial tables, calculating the moment of our own death so that we could turn to Christ just in the nick of time. But Christianity is not just a religion of death - it also holds the promise of life.

St Paul tells the people of Corinth, as we have just heard, what it is that Christians believe regarding the resurrection of Jesus, The first thing is that he died, then that he was raised from the dead and further that he continues to live and form relationships with humanity.

We are thankful for the many things that Jesus did like, giving cleansing to the Leper, hearing to the deaf, sight to the blind, speech to the dumb, comfort to the down trodden, and hope to the hopeless! But there would have never been a church at all without the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of the precious Son of God. So let us look today at this proclamation of St Paul and the three elements of it, was dead, is alive, continues to hold power over death.

The first element: "...Jesus died..." The cross is the beating and throbbing heart of the Christian Faith. Jesus' death on the cross was the greatest gift ever given to humanity. The death of Christ differs from the death of every other person in the world, others suffer death, but Christ achieved it. Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God tasted death for everyone. He tasted the full bitterness of death. Christ's death was one of will, he laid down His life. As he said in John's gospel "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of myself, I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again."

The second element: "Jesus was raised from the dead." The cross was not the end, death was not able to hold Jesus. Death was reinforced by the great stone, the seal, the soldiers, but death was defeated. On the third day the women who went to the tomb to finish the burial rites, when they got there they found it EMPTY, and went to the disciples telling them that the tomb was empty. There have been others that were dead and became alive: the shunammite's son, Jarius's daughter, widow's son at Nain, and Lazarus. But they became alive only to die again. Jesus is in our yesterdays, He is in our today; and thank God He will be in our tomorrows. "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

The third element: "Jesus continues to live in relationship with us." When Jesus rose from the dead, He not only conquered death, but He made the way for you and me to

be saved! Jesus stripped death of its power, and now death has no more dominion over us.

The resurrection is incredible and it restructures reality, as it exists today. When Jesus was raised from the dead, he did more than just give us a reason to believe He also gave us a reason to live. Because Jesus is alive beyond the cross, we see that God can use events that seem like the most wretched failure. Because Jesus is alive beyond the grave, we have the courage to escape from the hurtful places that seem to surround us. Because Jesus offers us life that lasts beyond death, we can face our own death without fear. There is a hymn you may have heard called "Because He Lives". The chorus goes like this: "Because he lives, I can face tomorrow. Because he lives, all fear is gone. Because I know he holds the future, and life is worth the living, just because he lives." Jesus' resurrection gives us reason to live – today, right now.

Easter can invite us to break out of old patterns, to turn from bad habits, to be freed from the guilt or burdens of the past, to entertain fresh thoughts, to love even when loving someone is difficult. Jesus' resurrection should change us, make us new, and help us to really live life in the now. The Resurrection should embolden us to face our fears, to escape envy, to deal with denial. The Resurrection could even give us strength to be vulnerable and open ourselves up for the sake of another person. Because through the resurrection the Jesus who we count as our friend, has conquered anything that we could fear.

Herein lies the true message of Easter. Not just that Christ is risen, not just that the tomb was empty, not just that we go to heaven after we die, not just that God triumphed over the devil. No, the truest, deepest message of Easter is that the same Jesus who rose from the dead continues to be alive and cares about us now, as we live. And his caring can empower us to face our demons, our fears, and our dark sides – can help us to bear our crosses. We are free to make mistakes, free to be vulnerable, free to give of ourselves.

We are all broken one way or another, not one of us is perfect but God has already released us from the bonds of death. The grave could not hold Jesus, and it will not hold us either. We can live boldly, we can live fearlessly, and we can live graciously... because Christ is risen. He is risen indeed, alleluia.