

Sermon for 4/21/19
Easter Day C

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!
Today Jesus Christ has triumphed over the powers of sin and death
Today Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead into the glory of life with God.
For us, he has opened the doors to eternal life.
For us, he has burst out of the tomb and won the victory over sin and death.

The women came to the tomb on that first Easter Day, prepared for and expecting death.
Instead, they found life.
They heard the message, "He is not here but has risen!"
Awestruck, they returned to their friends and told them the great good news that they could scarcely believe themselves: Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

Jesus' resurrection to new life with God was the death of death.
No longer are we in thrall to a pointless life that ends in nothing, in emptiness, in grief.
We have been freed to live into the full glory of God's infinite love and forgiveness.
Through Jesus Christ we are inheritors of eternal life.
Through Jesus Christ we can live our lives in hope.
Through Jesus Christ we will be able to feast forever at the heavenly banquet, basking in the glory of divine love.

Sounds good, doesn't it?
But I have to wonder, who's going to wash the dishes after the heavenly banquet?
Jesus Christ brings us life in the fullest; the problem comes when we don't really understand what that means.
For example, we love the blessing of having children but don't like having to deal with dirty diapers.
We truly enjoy the time that we spend with our friends, but wouldn't it just be easier if they always wanted to do what we want to do?

Easter is a celebration of Jesus' resurrection from the dead and all that it means to us.
Our usual Easter focus is on Jesus' promise that we may inherit eternal life, certainly an important message and one worth celebrating.
But the promise of new life is also a promise for new life right here and right now.
Our life in Christ is meant to be life in *all* of its fullness, life that is made real through the love of God.
Too often, people focus on the fear of God, scared to make a mistake, cowering before the wrath of God.

That's not the message I hear from Jesus.
He was someone who cared deeply about other people and who was surrounded by friends.
Wedding feasts, a picnic of bread and fish with 5,000 people, eating with people who were known sinners, spending time with a few friends, even several of his resurrection appearances centered on eating with people.
And he spent time meeting and listening to what was going on in people's lives so that he could comfort and heal them.
There were even people who accused him of being a drunkard and a glutton simply because he spent so many hours eating and rejoicing with all sorts of people.
Doesn't that sound like someone you'd like to know?
And you know, I would be honored to wash the dishes after a meal that I could share with Jesus.

Jesus knew that a full life consists of good days and bad days, times of celebration and times of sorrow, times when we care for others and times when they care for us.
He also knew that a full life needs to be an honest life.
He helped people see and claim their sin so that they would know where they were going off track in their lives.
He didn't do it to make them feel guilty, he just wanted the best for the people he met and cared about.

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And then, he told them that their sins were forgiven, that they could make a fresh start, that the power of God's love was far stronger than the power of any mistakes they may have made.

How often are we completely honest with ourselves?

You know, when I lose 10 pounds, I like to think that I'm looking pretty good – because I really don't want to see the 50 more that I should lose as well.

Abusive parents or spouses often deceive themselves into thinking that one moment of kindness can make up for years of cruelty.

People with addictions are so focused on their own immediate needs that they can't see what their actions are doing to people who love them.

The truth is that we all deceive ourselves from time to time.

We all have blind spots that keep us from being fully honest with ourselves.

But here's the great good news: Jesus loves you and forgives you as you are.

Knowing precisely who you are, Jesus loves you enough to die on the cross for your sake and loves you enough to forgive you for all your shortcomings and all your sins.

Jesus loves you enough to offer you life in all its fullness, life filled with joys and sorrows, defeats and triumphs, mistakes and second chances.

Through Jesus Christ and his resurrection, we always have the great gift, the eternal gift of hope.

In the middle of our daily lives, even when things may seem bleak, we know that the last words in our personal stories will be new life with God.

But hope also means that we can be blessed to receive that new life here on earth as Jesus guides us in paths that lead forward after a personal tragedy, defeat, or failure.

No matter where we are in our lives, Jesus give us hope.

Now not all hopes are fulfilled; I still haven't won the lottery and the Yankees haven't called to offer me the job of starting right fielder.

But realistic hope, hope based in the truth about ourselves, and hope that is founded on our love for Jesus Christ can be fulfilled.

Perhaps not the way we wanted or expected, but in a way that can help us to move forward to a better place in our lives.

Through Jesus Christ, we always have hope.

Remember, we have all been given the greatest gift possible: we are alive.

And in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ we can live our lives surrounded by the love of God, knowing the love of people around us, and being filled with hope for the future.

That's a good life.

That's the kind of life that Jesus lived and that he wants us to know as well.

It may not always be joyful, but it can always be hopeful.

You may have some unpleasant tasks ahead of you, but they're just part of the life we've been given.

On this Easter Day, may you be blessed to know that Jesus loves you, that Jesus forgives you, and that Jesus gives you hope for the future.

That's the good news of the resurrection.

That's the true meaning of Easter.

Oh, and if you want to get in touch with me later on today, you're probably going to be out of luck because, after our Easter dinner, I'm going to have some dishes to wash.

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