

Sermon Easter .07

In quickening faith, faith being raised up against unbelief, Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself if what Mary Magdalene and Johanna and Mary the mother of James and a host of other women had said about Jesus' empty tomb was true. It was! He could see it for himself. Jesus had been raised from his death. That's the only answer that Faith has to give. And, only faith will give that answer. Let's all thank God this morning for this gift of faith in our hearts that lets us see that Jesus is not in the tomb. We thank God this morning that we've been given to know that because Jesus is no longer in the tomb, we understand that to mean that he's been raised from the dead and that he lives. We now know God's fantastic love for Jesus and the world succeeded. We know God's steadfast love for us has won out. Jesus' faith in God proved sufficient. So, I say again in faith, "He is risen!...."

We must focus on, and rely upon, the power of our faith to inform us on this Easter Sunday, because there are so many other messages circulating around out there on the streets, even of New Augusta, that make their claims to be the most significant honoring of this day. I'm not even talking about the easter bunny or the colorful egg trees and baskets or the new bonnets and dresses and Easter ties. Nor am I talking about the probably happy family reunions over dinner planned yet this afternoon. They all seem to have a place in this easter-time culture of ours, such that my friend, Pr. Gordon Lathrop, a significant Lutheran theologian of our era, calls this day a "mildly important Christian feast day." The things I just outlined are what make it "mildly" important, instead of vitally important for all Life and Creation. It's only our Faith that lets us peer into the gravitas of this day and become the spiritually stronger for it. Our faith, and not anything else, points the way to why we can find such joy in our refrain: "He is risen!...."

Today is April 8. The first day of spring was three weeks ago. Things are warming up. Plants are beginning to sprout. Grass is green and growing. Daylight hours have increased. Farmers are even now calculating their best chances for a successful planting and ultimate harvest. The earth is heating up (this is no reference to global warming, a topic currently being debated) so that dormant seeds can sprout. Darkness has given way

to more light. The earth is showing signs of being fertile again, after a hard, dead-looking winter, at least in our part of the world. It seems like the world has now finally sprung back to life. We can feel Hope as we emerge from the sterility and bitterness of winter. This seems to be the popular basis for understanding Easter. I guess, in that spirit of the earth being renewed, I went out and bought myself a new tie. A nice bright red one. A Jerry Garcia tie. But, what really is cool, is that there's a little pocket sewn on the backside of that tie especially made to hold an MP3 player. I could download music, Jerry's stuff, I suppose, and listen to it while I wear my hottie tie. Isn't the world a hopeful place? I hope I don't spill Cherry Garcia ice cream on it.

I think the popular cultural claim for Easter's importance and vitality, which is so utterly different from Faith's claim, lies precisely along these lines. We would like for, and, perhaps we've already made, Easter to be the sign or symbol for the victory of something like light emerging over darkness in all its worldly manifestations. Knowledge over ignorance. Morality over immorality. Goodness over badness. Health over illness. Love over hate. Righteousness of our cause over the wrongness of their cause. Right over wrong. Warm over frigid. Spring over Winter. Sight over blindness. Sensation over numbness. In other words, it's easier to take our cues for Easter's importance from the world of nature, and perhaps from the world of commerce, in its annual process of renewal and ability to once again provide sustenance for the world. So, the symbol for Easter is Easter eggs. Or, Easter bunnies (not full grown rabbits, but bunnies.) Or chocolate. Or a new tie for an old shirt.

All these things are what the world of nature can produce. Or, what humankind can produce or strive to achieve. Easter can become what WE think is achievable or to be hoped for. It has become the goodness and fun WE are striving for. If this analysis stands, we've indeed slipped Easter into the hole of being a mildly important springtime holiday, just as Pr. Lathrop states.

To this, the Apostle Paul says, "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." Faith says something very much more enriching and vital

about Easter. Faith says that the value of Easter is seen against Good Friday. Good Friday was the death of God in Jesus Christ. So dead was he, that no germ of life could lie dormant to sprout again. With all the sins of the world in Jesus' Good Friday dead body, sin was put to death. And, "the last enemy to be destroyed was death." The Resurrection of Jesus, which we celebrate today, was God's great act of divine love against our failed and failing human desire to become like God on our own. Our failures to be like God, and deep down we know this, make us guilty. Adam and Eve felt their guilt. King David knew his guilt. But, Easter, the Easter of Faith, is God's divine love covering guilty humanity and conquers it with Jesus' Resurrection. Jesus, resurrected from death, is God's supremely loving action towards us as human beings with all our inadequacies that makes Easter Easter. The Resurrection, the idea of the Resurrection, doesn't proceed from the processes of nature. The Resurrection comes TO US because God gave it to us.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that Good Friday was not a "transitional stage" for us. Good Friday really was an end. An end of time. An end of the stranglehold sin and guilt have over us for which the only answer was the great, strong unconquerable love of God acting to make all things new for and in Creation in the face of all that nothingness that death is. The Resurrection is God's loving Christ beyond the bounds of Death and therefore loving us the same way. God's action towards us and not ours towards God. Not even the admittedly providential powers of God's creation can bring us to salvation. Our faith says that only God's action in Jesus on the day we've now gathered together to celebrate has saved us.

In faith, let's run to the tomb with Peter. Better yet, let's believe the women. They had the story right. He is risen!