

Easter Homily – April 17, 2022

Since I began preaching, I have subscribed to the old Episcopal tradition of starting every sermon with a joke during the Easter season. Here you go.

After suffering a heart attack and having quadruple bypass surgery, a man woke up to find himself in a Catholic hospital with nuns taking care of him. As they nursed him back to health, one of the nuns came in to talk about how the man intended to pay the bill. She asked him if he had health insurance.

“No,” he replied, “No health insurance.”

“Do you have any money in the bank?” asked the nun.

“No. Not a cent.”

The nun asked, “Do you have any relatives you could ask for help?”

The man replied, “I only have a spinster sister, but like you, she’s a nun. She doesn’t have any money.”

The nun got a little irritated. “Nuns are not spinsters. If your sister is a nun, you should *know* that nuns are married to God!”

“Alright! Have it your way.” said the man. “Send the bill to my brother-in-law.”

In our Easter liturgy, we remember and celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead – which we are told is the hope of our own victory over death – our own hope of eternal life. But Jesus’ Disciples didn’t understand it on that first morning, anymore than we sometimes do.

Anglican Bishop and New Testament scholar, N.T. Wright says

They (the Disciples) knew as well as we do that things like that just don’t happen. When people died they stayed dead in first-century Palestine just as much as in the technological twentieth (now 21st) century. Jesus’ followers weren’t expecting him to die in the first place; when he did, they certainly

weren't expecting him to rise again. Yet they say, loud and clear, that that was what had happened. He had gone through death and out the other side, into a new mode of human existence.

The stories they tell about meeting him are mostly quite breathless and artless. ... All the accounts suggest that the early Christians were as puzzled by this as we still are. But they are all quite clear that it happened. It wasn't a corporate hallucination. It wasn't a grief-induced fantasy. It wasn't just a matter of him living on in their memory. It was for real.

It is my strongly held belief that there is one and only one absolute and unalterable requirement for calling oneself a Christian – that is a belief that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. If you believe that the Resurrection event is both factually and theologically true, you ARE by my definition, Christian. If on the other hand, you don't believe that Christ was actually resurrected – that He somehow overcame death and burst from that tomb on Easter Sunday – then you may be a good person; you may be a moral person; you may have some spiritual belief system that serves you quite well; you may even be someone who attends church regularly; but you cannot be a Christian. That is how fundamental Christ's Resurrection is to our beliefs.

Without an actual resurrection from the dead, Jesus is just another prophet, teacher and healer. He is not really much different from Mahatma Gandhi; a wise prophet, an unquestionably moral person and a top-flight teacher of how to live one's life; but not someone around whom a faith that has lasted almost 2000 years could be built. It is the Resurrection that separates Jesus from all other holy people – past and present.

All the Gospels obviously tell us about the Resurrection of Christ, but it was St. Paul who first explained its importance to us. In his first letter to the Church in Corinth, he said it this way,

¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; ¹⁴and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. ... ¹⁷If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have died* in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If for this life *only* we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

It is Christ's Resurrection that gives us hope – the hope of eternal life – the hope of salvation and the hope that even as we struggle with our daily lives we have a Savior who has also struggled, but has overcome everything we suffer and more. A Savior through whom everything is reborn.

Christ's Resurrection *IS HOPE* for us, because – as Jesus told His followers in John's Gospel – "I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." The Resurrection is not just some abstract concept – some event that happened outside Jerusalem sometime around 33AD. It was an event that triggered an ongoing resurrection in the world.

Episcopal priest and writer H. King Oehmig wrote,

If Easter is merely a wonderful event that happened a long time ago – the way God worked once, but not since – then the resurrection has little relevance to our lives today. But Easter means more: it is a Once-and-for-All-Time truth. In the Easter Event, the "Resurrection principle" is disclosed. *In Christ, all is made alive*. Whatever "tomb" you are in. Wherever you expect deadliness and have given up hope, Christ can raise you up – for the power that took Jesus through death and beyond gives us the capacity to triumph over all the forces of creation. As we live by the assurance of Christpower, we come alive in hope.

We have been given the greatest gift of all time through the Resurrection of Christ from the dead – the gift of rebirth and renewal; the gift of new life – in every situation. So in this Easter season; in this time of rebirth; in this “new” year of our lives; let us begin to break out of those tombs that keep us locked in death. Let us truly begin to live life as if we believed that Christ died **AND ROSE** for us and for our sins.

In this very moment you are redeemed from sin and death! You have been given a new life! Everything old is being made new! Everything that has been cast down is being raised up! Throw away the chains that have kept you captive to the evil of the world. Those chains are broken! And your bondage is over!

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!