

# EASTER BLESSINGS TO ALL

## From Unbelief to Faith

Only once in the history of mankind has a tomb had a rock placed before it - to prevent the dead person from rising. Only once in the history of the world has a tomb had a soldier guard put before it - to be sure that the dead person did not rise, nor to allow his followers to take his body. That tomb is the tomb of Jesus Christ. The sentinel was there lest the dead walk, the silent speak or the pierced heart quicken to the throb of life. The enemies of Christ knew that he was dead; they said that he would not rise again; but they were not taking any chances, so they arranged for the guard.

The astonishing fact about this spectacle of vigilance over the dead is that the enemies of Jesus expected his resurrection, his friends did not. On Easter morning Magdalene went to the tomb weeping, and carrying spices - not to greet the risen Savior, but to anoint his dead body. She found the tomb empty and, instead of believing, she said: "They have taken my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." When the apostles were told by the holy women that Jesus had risen, the Gospel tells us that "they did not believe." The two disciples, whom Our Lord joined on the road to Emmaus, did not believe either, until they recognized him in the breaking of the bread.

Once the apostles overcame their unbelief in his resurrection, courage and conviction filled their hearts. That unshakable conviction remained with them for the rest of their lives. It was the anchor of their faith. For that faith they were willing to sacrifice their very lives, and actually did.

It is clear that they were not easily convinced. It was only when they had abundant proof that they believed. Their doubts were dispelled. So, too, should our doubts be removed forever. We really begin where they left off. So, let our faith be anchored in the resurrection of Jesus. Like the apostles may we fearlessly defend our faith, and courageously live it. Such is the challenge of Christianity.

- Fr. Gerry Condon  
St. Patrick's and St. Williams Parishes

## Called to Life Called to Love

I believe that Easter is the most important time of the year to nurture our inner life. It is, of course, a time in which we prepare ourselves for the death and resurrection of Jesus, but also the death and resurrection that constantly takes place within us. Life is a continuing process of the death of the old and the familiar, and being reborn again into a new hope, a new trust, and a new love. The death and resurrection of Jesus therefore is not just an historical event that took place a long time ago, but an inner event that takes place in our own heart when we are willing to be attentive to it. I believe that true repentance is an interior attitude in which we are willing to let go of everything that prevents us from growing into spiritual maturity, and there is hardly a moment in our lives in which we are not invited to detach ourselves from certain ways of thinking, ways of speaking, ways of acting, that for a long time gave us energy, but that always again need to be renewed and recreated.

Easter offers a beautiful opportunity to discover the mystery of Christ within us. It is a gentle but also demanding time. It is a time in which we are called to listen in community, and love. It is a time of listening to the voice within, but also a time of paying attention to other people's needs. It is a time to continuously make a passage to new inner life as well as to life with those around us.

When we live Easter attentively and gently, then Easter can truly be a celebration during which the full proclamation of the risen Christ will live in the deepest place of our being.

Easter possesses the seeds of Eternity that are sown into our lives. I believe that our short lives on earth are sowing time. If there were no resurrection of the dead, everything that we live on earth would come to nothing. How can we believe in a God who loves us unconditionally if all the joys and pains of our lives are in vain, vanishing in the earth with our mortal flesh and bones? Because God loves us unconditionally, from eternity to eternity, God cannot allow us to be lost in final destruction. God did not allow Jesus to be destroyed and God will not allow it for us.

No, life on earth is the time when the seeds of the risen body are planted. Paul says, "What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body." (I Corinthians 15:42-44)

This wonderful Easter knowledge that nothing we live in our bodies is lived in vain holds a call for us to live every moment as a seed of eternity for we are called to life and called to love. I hope that this Easter you will discover how to make that possible in your life. Have a glorious Easter, friends!

-The Rev. Al Trachsel  
Heppner United Methodist Church

## Overcoming Death

I, Paul pass on to you what I know to be true, that Jesus died for our sins just as the Scriptures said he would, and that he was buried, and that three days afterwards he arose from the grave just as the prophets foretold. You see he was seen by Peter and later by the rest of "the Twelve." After that he was seen by more than five hundred Christian brothers at one time. Then James saw him, and later all the apostles. Last of all I saw him too, long after the others, as though I had been born almost too late for this. For I am the least worthy of all the apostles, and I shouldn't even be called an apostle at all after the way I treated the church of God. But whatever I am now it is all because God poured out such kindness and grace upon me--and has blessed my life richly.

But the important thing is not me or the other apostles. The important thing is that we preached the Gospel to you and you believed it. For it is the Gospel, a risen Savior that changed my life. But tell me this! Since you believe what we preach, that Jesus rose from the dead, why are some of you saying that dead people will never come back to life again? For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Jesus must still be dead. And if he is still dead, then all our preaching is useless and your trust in God is empty, worthless, hopeless; and we apostles, "What are we?" We are all liars because we have said that God raised Jesus from the grave, and of course that isn't true if the dead do not come back to life again. If they don't, then Jesus is still dead, and you are very foolish to keep on trusting God to save you, and you are still under condemnation for

your sins and all Christians who have died are lost!

But don't be fooled by those who say such things for they are not true. Jesus did rise from the dead and overcame death. You see it will happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. The dead in Christ will rise first, followed by those of us who are still alive. O death, where is your victory? Where is your sting? For sin--the sting that causes death--will be gone; and the law, which reveals our sins, will no longer be our judge. How I thank God for all of this! It is he who makes us victorious through Jesus Christ our Lord! So, my dear brothers, since future victory is sure, be strong and steady, always abounding in the Lord's work, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever wasted as long as there was a resurrection.

This a paraphrase of I Corinthians 15. This Easter I want to remind everyone who reads this. No matter how many self-help books you read, how many degrees you earn, how much money you make, or how much stuff you acquire you will still die and leave this world behind. Another passage in the Bible says in reference to Jesus, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one come to the Father but by me." Think about it. Isn't it time you gave God a chance to do something with your life and at the same time gain eternal life.

This Sunday our service starts at 10 a.m. First Christian Church at the corner of Gale and Center. Everyone is welcome.

-Andrew Johnson, Minister  
Heppner First Christian Church

## Jesus Christ is the Key to Real Life

Earlier this week my wife Jennifer planted our garden. As part of our garden she planted some basil seeds in starter pots and put them in our window. After a short time the seeds will begin to grow up into basil plants. With the proper amount of sunlight, water and nutrients in the soil, our basil seeds will turn into nice plants that will be useful for cooking.

In one way each of us is like a seed. We all have the potential to become something so much more than just a seed. From a spiritual standpoint we all need connection with life. Jesus Christ is the key to real life within us. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Because of the sacrifice that Jesus has already made for us we can know true life. He died on a cross to pay for our sins and rose again on the third day to conquer death on our behalf.

Each of us must accept what Jesus did for us personally and put ourselves in an environment where we can grow and mature in our relationship with Him. The church provides this environment. Jesus created the church so individuals can come together and celebrate what God is doing in their lives and help each other be more like Jesus.

Easter should be a time of great happiness and joy because it is a time of great hope and victory. I challenge you this week to read Matthew 28:1-10 in your Bible. Jesus Christ has risen upon your behalf. But you must ask yourself, "What difference has it made in my life?"

-Brent Waldrep, Pastor  
Willow Creek Baptist Church

## Easter is God's Answer

Two years ago at this time of the year, I was reading one of the San Francisco Sunday newspapers. And in the "Community Life Styles" section of that Sunday edition, a writer had a rather large column explaining the origin and meaning behind an upcoming "spring festival". You can imagine my surprise when, as I began reading the article, I realized that the columnist was writing about and explaining Easter! She was explaining to her readers the basic beliefs that surround the Christian celebration of Easter Sunday. I was dumbfounded. Even as recently as twenty or thirty years ago such an explanation would have been unheard of, totally unnecessary. This article, especially in a major metropolitan paper, drove home for me that we are truly living in a "Post Christian Era".

And among scholars there is much disagreement and debate over the central figure of this "spring festival". Dozens of new books have been written in recent years where critics have reported on their research and search for the true identity of this man from Galilee; a scholarly attempt to determine the basic reality of who this itinerant teacher was; the man who was crucified outside of Jerusalem at a place called Calvary. It is not surprising that there is little agreement amongst these scholars as they continue their quest for the "historical Jesus" - the man whose life story is told in the Gospels.

Actually, there is nothing new about Jesus as a controversial figure. Even when he was alive, he was seen by many Jews and their Roman rulers as a mere rabble-rouser and trouble maker. His empty tomb and the reports of his appearances to his followers after his crucifixion were denied even then. Two millenniums later, little has changed in that regard, we still have passionate belief opposed

by scornful doubt. Many scholarly critics dismiss the resurrection as deliberate myth, or as mass hysteria or psychiatric delusion. It doesn't fit the known realities of science, life and death as we know it today at the close of the 20th century. No archaeological finds confirm it. No other ancient texts confirm the accounts in the New Testament. Therefore, they conclude, it couldn't have happened. But all of these skeptics and scholarly attempts to "nail everything down" miss the very core of discipleship and belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God -- Easter is about faith!! As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews puts it in the 11th chapter:

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Faith is belief and trust that in Jesus Christ, God has acted decisively in human history, so that we might have lives filled with hope. As Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians:

"Death has been swallowed up in victory." 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (I Corinthians 15:54b-56)

God has stepped into human history, and in the raising of Jesus from the dead, he has, in the words of Paul's letter, "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (2 Timothy 1: 10)

Easter is God's radical, extreme and ultimately decisive answer to the suffering and need of the whole world. The Easter message tells us that our enemies, sin and the curse of death are beaten, and announces new possibilities for our lives. When we place our lives in the hands of the living God, we discover as Paul writes, that His empty tomb is also our own. It has become an open door with an invitation to start fresh and forgiven every day of our lives.

May God richly bless you with His presence this Easter Season, and in the days and years ahead.

-Reverend R.G. "Dick" Metz, Pastor  
Hope/Valby Lutheran Parish

## Because He Lives

If you live long enough and open your eyes and ears from time to time, you are aware that death is all around us. Cars die in busy intersections. Pets die for many reasons, but almost always before we are ready for them to go. Ideas and dreams die in committees or from lack of interest or from fear. Faith dies from lack of use. Babies die in our country at an incomprehensible rate before they are ever born. Abortion is the word we use for killing these children. Old people die from disease and organ failure. Young and old people die from malnutrition and cancer and carelessness and disasters and family fights and wars and in our school yards and the list goes on and on. Many people of all ages die within themselves daily because they do not know God and because they have no idea that they are loved.

Bill and Gloria Gaither wrote a song which says: "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." With so much death around us, it would be easy to simply give up ... to despair of trying. But He Lives! Jesus Lives! His heritage was questioned; His miracles were attributed to evil power; His teaching was opposed; His confession of divinity was called blasphemy; His love was rejected; His back beaten; His face struck and spit upon; His head was pierced with a crown of thorns; His hands and feet were nailed to a cross; His side was opened with a spear; His dead body was wrapped and laid in a tomb. Yet He Lives!

The Resurrection of Jesus the Christ is God's statement of victory over sin and death. Because He who died with our sin now lives, we too, can live! We can have hope! We can have faith! We can share His message! We can face today and even tomorrow! Because he lives! This is the hope. This is the message. This is the reality of Easter. It is my prayer that we will not allow another celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ go by without experiencing the change that is possible Because He Lives.

-Pastor Glenn Anderson  
Lexington Baptist Church

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