

# EASTER BLESSINGS TO ALL

## St. Patrick's and St. William's parishes "From Belief to Responsibility"

There are several accounts in the New Testament of the appearances of Jesus - to Mary Magdalen, to the Apostles, to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and to some 500 at the time of his ascension. Presumably, when he appeared to the apostles, there was no one else present, but what about the occasion when he appeared to Mary Magdalen? Could there have been others present, others who would have seen her making their way to the tomb, and followed along? Then what about the disciples on the road to Emmaus? Surely there would have been other people along that road. Perhaps these appearances are like the other "signs" in St. John's Gospel - something that any number of people might physically see but could fail to understand? Those who saw Him were obviously being led to new responsibilities.

These Easter appearances reveal who Jesus is. Earlier on he had asked the apostles: "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They had replied: "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah and others one of the prophets." Then he had asked them: "Whom do you say that I am?" That was when St. Peter had said: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." The resurrection of Jesus leads them a step further in that belief, and a step further in their responsibility to share that good news with others. Remember the woman at Jacob's Well? She came to draw water, but was led to faith by Jesus. She had returned to her village, told the people about Jesus. They had come to Him, and began to believe in Him also.

Consider Mary Magdalen. She saw the empty tomb, but made the wrong interpretation of the event. She thought that someone had stolen the body until Jesus appeared to her. Then she hastened to tell the good news to the apostles. St. John, on the other hand, makes the correct interpretation, for he "sees" the empty and believes. St. Peter, who had denied Jesus three times, later went out fearlessly and preached his first sermon, and clearly proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus. That belief had to be a very strong conviction because the apostles gave their lives for the faith they had received and preached. We who profess to be followers of Jesus also need to have that same strong conviction. When we have that we will be motivated by His principles and values. We will have it in our hearts to forgive those who have hurt us, to feed the hungry, visit the sick, shelter the homeless, to live lives of faithfulness, of honesty, integrity, and of concern for others. We have not seen Jesus as did Magdalen, Peter, the apostles. So, we need to keep in mind the words of Jesus to St. Thomas: "Blest are they who have not seen and have believed." Let us also carry His message to our world.

-Fr. Gerry Condon

## Christian Life Center "The Resurrection-What Really Happened"

Everything a Christian believes and ever hopes for hinges on the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Make no mistake about it. If the Resurrection story is a hoax, nothing about the gospel is valid! Nothing!

Let's review some of the testimony. The first witness is none other than a physician, the beloved Luke. In two lengthy letters to his Greek friend Theophilus, Luke told the story of Jesus before and after the Resurrection. This testimony is found in Luke 1:1-3.

The second witness was the apostle Paul who was Jesus' mortal enemy until that life-changing day on the road to Damascus when he personally met the risen Lord. Paul's witness is also worthy of our closest scrutiny on the subject of the Resurrection. This testimony is found in I Cor. 15:1-8.

Now neither Dr. Luke nor Sandhedrin candidate Paul were scatterbrains. They were not given to crazy philosophies. Both were highly educated, trained observers of nature. And both of them wrote clearly and emphatically of the fact of Jesus' resurrection. Paul went even further than Luke in stating the effect on Christianity if the Resurrection were a hoax. I Cor. 15:14,15,19,20

Chuck Colson has rightly stated that there are only three things critics can deduce from these witnesses, and they have to choose one of the three conclusions: "Modern criticism of the historic truth of Christianity boils down to three propositions: first, that the disciples were mistaken; or second, that the disciple knowingly perpetrated a myth, intended as a symbol; or third, the eleven disciples conceived a Passover Plot, spirited the body of Christ out of the tomb and disposed of it neatly, and to their dying breaths maintained conspiratorial silence."

The fourth alternative is, of course, to accept the record as given in Scripture, that Jesus Christ actually did rise from the dead, which makes the Bible the inspired Word of God, the total revealed mind of God to man.

My friend, the overwhelming evidence tells us that Christ shattered the grave, that He indeed rose from the dead. And that means that everything he said about himself is true. Jesus is the Son of God. He is the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world. And He is the only way to God.

You cannot be neutral about this. The observance of Christ's resurrection is not just another holiday or a time that you add to your wardrobe.

You have two choices about this whole concept- you can just deny that it ever happened and go on your sinful way ignoring the claims of Christ. But to do this, you step on and over the overwhelming evidence that Jesus did indeed rise from the grave. It's like denying gravity - utterly foolish and unknowing to do so, and also probably fatal.

Or, you can believe that Christ came forth from the grave and therefore believe that the rest of the Word of God is also inerrant and infallible. You will believe everything else the Bible teaches us about our blessed Lord Jesus, and, believing, you become a servant of the Lord, a Christian with all your heart and soul.

If you deny the story, then nothing in the Bible can possibly mean anything to you. But if you believe it, then only total commitment to Christ will suffice. You will declare it fervently, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Joshua 24:15

Easter Weekend is fast approaching. Resurrection is fresh on our minds. What about your newness of life? What about your spiritual rebirth? What a great time for you to come to God with all your cares and burdens! Why not attend a local church in celebration of His Resurrection this Sunday!

-Pastor Tim Van Cleave

## Hope/Valby Lutheran Parish "Easter 'Belief'"

Those of us who live in the last half of the 20th century have grown up with a belief structure (or "paradigm") that is essentially based upon "empirical proof." The notion that our existence and our world can be understood, explained and mapped out using the scientific method. We have a tendency, therefore, to think that proof is available for all of our questions and issues. After all, we have traveled to the moon; unlocked the genetic code of many diseases; computer science advances exponentially; medical science is constantly making great strides.

The trouble with this "empirical world view", is that we sometimes think that we no longer need faith; that science has replaced any need for "faith". But the reality is really quite different - you see we all believe in something! We all place our faith somewhere. It may be our own abilities - our own strength and perseverance; or our intellect or level of education; it may be in our wealth or a level of economic security; perhaps its a family that has been around for generations. The question then becomes not "Do I believe?"; but rather, "What do I believe in?"

For Christians at Easter the question, "What do I believe in?", centers around the issue of eternal life, starting with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Professor Ella Mitchell said that for modern day people, resurrection is like a 4th Dimension -- its a place where you can remove the yolk from an egg without breaking the shell. Our scientific minds find it all but impossible to conceive of phenomena that are outside of our normal, everyday world. But that, of course, is why we call it "faith".

As the apostle Paul put it in his Letter to the Romans, "For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." (Romans 8:24-25, NRSV)

The late Secretary General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjold said this about faith and hope: "The essence of faith is that we act on more than meets the eye". Our willingness to take a "leap of faith", and trust in God, is the acid test of Christian Hope. It forces us to acknowledge that there is something out there that we can never explain or control in this life. Our acceptance and living a life blessed by God's saving grace of Easter hinges on our willingness to face our human limits - to live and trust in more than "meets the eye."

What do you believe in? The important question we need to ask ourselves is, "Do I have faith in something that is ultimately life giving or not?" "In what do I place my hope?"

Jesus told the disciples, "... because I live, you also will live". (John 14:19b) The empty tomb on Easter is God's promise that in Jesus' Resurrection we have a gift that surpasses all others. New birth, new life, new hope, new promise. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3)

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!! He is risen indeed! Thanks be to God!  
-Rev. R.G. Dick Metz

## Ione United Church of Christ "From Despair to Hope"

The followers of Jesus, in the Resurrection Story, move from despair to hope. Other followers of Jesus have been doing the same for almost 2000 years. This is something far stronger than wishful thinking, and far better than "Don't worry, be happy!" It is trust in God, who gives life.

About one year ago, the people of Ione watched flames and smoke bellow from the upper floor of our church building. This was a bitter moment not only for the members, but for the many neighbors in the community who have come to the church in times of need, sorrow, and joy for generations.

Yet within a few days, the people of the church and the community were looking forward in hope, reaching out in love, and starting to work on new possibilities. Thank you to all who offered help and encouragement in a difficult time.

Many situations are desperate, and may seem hopeless as a tomb to those who face them: physical pain, prolonged unemployment, unpayable debt, depression and other mental illness, addiction, conflict and tension within families, war and disaster, and, of course, the sorrow and loneliness following the loss of a loved one.

Yet we are still the followers of Christ in the Resurrection Story, for we still trust and follow Jesus, and not as just a memory but as One among us. And so we turn from despair to hope, and we encourage others, assist as we can, and retell the story of Jesus so that hope may break their despair.

May you find new hope and new life on Easter morning!  
-Rev. Paul Clay

## Willow Creek Baptist Church

Life and death. It is the cycle of the seasons as we move beyond the gnarled, bare branches and cold days of winter into the days when the wood displays life: budding leaves, hundreds of pink flowers and a hint of summer. The season provides a fitting backdrop for Easter-the celebration of Christ's victory over death and the reality of new life.

There are a lot of people who are like the trees we saw a few months ago. They feel like their branches are bare and they've noticed it can get pretty cold outside. Or perhaps, like, the tree, they are alive but have not yet burst into bloom.

Nature holds a profound lesson in the pattern of the seasons. There can be no spring without winter. The new blossoms will not bloom until the old petals die and fall off the tree. Jesus used a similar illustration to explain his pending crucifixion. He said that a kernel of wheat must be planted in the soil. Unless it dies it will be alone--a single seed. But its death will produce many new kernels-a plentiful harvest of new lives. This illustration was more than talk. Jesus put his words into action. He died to pay the penalty required of the human race because we chose to turn away from the one, true God.

This pivotal death produced the source of new life for anyone who chooses it. If someone wants to get right with God-to be alive-he can do so by accepting that Jesus died on that person's behalf. The next step is to say no to oneself and to follow Jesus. This too, involves death. A person must die to himself before he can experience new life in Christ. Jesus led the way by sacrificing himself on our behalf. If a person follows in his steps by sacrificing himself to live for God, then a beautiful thing will occur: that person will have a new life-a difference as drastic as winter is from spring-and God will use that person to share the beauty, hope and joy of this new life with a world that is still in winter.

-Brent Waldrep, Pastor

## Church of the Nazarene "Proclaim the Good News"

How is Easter applicable to you? Whether or not if you believe in Christ. Whether or not if you believe that He rose from the grave. The fact still remains, He did it.

Why did He do it? Because of sin. Because of unforgiven sin. Because of your unforgiven sin. Romans 3:24 says: "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Bound in sin all men are spiritually dead; thus we are separated from God who is the Source of life.

Consider this poem written by Chip Heim. Titled: IT.  
They laugh and smile and talk and embrace  
and I do too.

But sometimes my smile covers a tear.  
And no one knows.

Right now, my tear is from an IT.  
I'm sorry, so very sorry I did IT.

I feel like a broken record,  
and the skip... is the IT...

that never completely goes away.

What would they think if they knew my IT?

Would the laughs vanish?

The smiles disappear?

Would the talk be hurled at me?

The embrace taken back?

Do they have an IT?

What do they do with IT?

Why do we act for each other when there is no play?

There is only life.

And that life includes a lot of IT.

The point is not to celebrate IT  
but only to admit to IT.

I am told Jesus knows everything

which means- He knows about IT.

And yet He whispers... in words too good to be true...

I died for you -- don't worry about IT.

We all have an IT. Our IT is sin in our lives. Sin separates us from God. Without God, we will die in our sin, and we will carry all our IT'S with us for eternity. Unless, we accept the fact that God has provided to us a gift of eternal life. Through His resurrection from the grave Jesus conquered death.

2 Timothy 1:10 says, "our Savior Jesus Christ... has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." Yes Jesus did it. He died for you. Some of you want to believe that His death was the end of it. And it would have been, had His death been the end of it. However, the loss of His physical life paid the price for your eternal life. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23. That's why He did it. Now what are you going to do with IT?

-Pastor Duane Jones

## First Christian Church "Without Easter, the Christian faith is a waste of time"

That's what the apostle Paul says: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

The reason for this is that Christ's Resurrection not only gives us hope for eternal life, but it also confirms that what Jesus said in his earthly life was true. Jesus said he would rise from the dead. If he hadn't, who would have taken his teachings seriously thereafter? "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead," Paul says (1 Corinthians 15:20). The resurrection was God's stamp of authenticity on Jesus, proclaiming, "Yes, Jesus is my Son. Yes, he has overcome death. Yes, what he told you is true. Trust him! Follow him!"

In the joy of Christ,  
-Pastor Andrew Johnson

## Heppner United Methodist Church

As churches across the world are preparing this week to celebrate the resurrection of Christ this coming Easter, NATO jets are delivering on the ultimatum they gave to Yugoslav President Milosevic concerning alleged atrocities committed by Serbian forces against Kosovar Albanians. There is something profoundly unsettling about this confluence of ethnic violence, international military response, and religious celebration.

What unsettles me the most is the fact that the Serbs are for the most part Eastern Orthodox Christians, and the people they are supposedly committing atrocities against are for the most part Muslim. Their actions smack of "ethnic cleansing" which recalls similar campaigns by the Nazis during the Holocaust of the 30s and 40s. Persons of conscience around the world have declared "Never again!" not only in reference to acts of anti-Semitism, but to any acts anywhere of ethnic cleansing. And so, at least in part, the United States and its allies have acted out of this conviction.

The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ stand as God's definitive action against all human presumptions of ethnic, religious and national superiority. I say crucifixion and resurrection, because Good Friday and Easter are simply two acts of one drama, two movements of the same symphony. In this drama God overturns all human presumptions of power, might and exclusivity, religious, ethnic and otherwise.

God did this by first challenging the imperial claims of Rome when Jesus embraced the cross. Crucifixion was the Roman form of capital punishment, usually reserved for those who were threats to the order of Roman rule. The claims of Jesus' followers that he was a king of some sort was interpreted by the Roman authorities as enough of a threat, in spite of Pilate's hand washing, to justify crucifixion. The collusion of the religious authorities in Jerusalem with the Roman governor against Jesus simply brings to the fore the dangers created when ethnic and religious pretensions and rivalry are joined with military might. When the followers of Jesus in the decades to come proclaimed "Jesus is Lord," they were claiming that Caesar wasn't. As instructed by Jesus, in following him, they picked up their crosses, and were similarly crucified.

Which brings us to the second act, the resurrection. With the death of Jesus upon the cross, everything appeared to have been decided in favor of empires and ethnic and religious exclusivism. Until the stone rolled away, and the tomb was empty. With the resurrection of Jesus, God declares to every empire, government, nation, and ethnic power bloc: "Your crosses, swords, guns and bombs are nothing. There is no victory in your methods of death. Even in your mass graves the Lord of Life rules!"

The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus remind us where to put our hope. Ultimately our hope is not in cruise missiles and stealth bombers, nor in campaigns of terrorism and ethnic cleansing. It is not in appeals to religious rivalry nor in proclamations concerning whose side God is on. Rather, our hope is in the One who smashes through our national divisions, bigotries, and ethnic arrogance and rises in triumphant witness to the broadness of God's embrace.

The Easter message is basically this: all the forces and powers in our world that conspire to divide the human family and hang its heroes upon a cross are doomed to failure. The power of God's love is the most powerful force in the universe, and it is a force poured out upon the entire world, not a select few.

So take that Caesar.

-Pastor Craig S. Strobel