

EASTER BLESSINGS TO ALL

Hope and Valby Lutheran Churches All Saints' Episcopal Church

Easter 2000... a Shrinking World

We live in a shrinking world. Shrinking through continuing advances in transportation, communication and by our economic interdependence. All these factors have brought the world's belief systems into direct communication (or conflict, depending upon your point of view) with one another as never before.

One response to this contact is "pluralism" - the conclusion that any claim for uniqueness must be abandoned. There can never be just one of anything. There are no absolute values given to us. Therefore, we must create them; but this must be a collective exercise in which all faith communities make an equal contribution through their interpretation of the transcendent.

Where does that leave us who would make a truth claim that there is a "unique event" of the Transcendent in human history? An event that is true not only in a historical sense, but also "a living truth" in the lives of believers down through the centuries that continues even today? Namely the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who was not just the human Jesus, but also the Incarnate Word.

The cover article of the March 27, 2000, Newsweek was "Visions of Jesus - How Jews, Muslims and Buddhists View Him". It contained a fascinating overview of the world's religions views and understandings of Jesus of Nazareth. He is held in high esteem by many: Muslims recognize Jesus as a great prophet; Jews see Him as an "admirable Jew", but not the Son of God; Buddhists liken the earthly Jesus to an enlightened being much like Buddha; Hindu legend has a tradition where Mary takes the teenager Jesus into Asia where he learned yogic meditation, whereupon he returned home to become a guru to the Jews. But of course for Christians, He is unique, the only Son of God and the Savior of the world.

But it is the central event of Holy Week - the cross of Good Friday - that separates the Jesus of Christianity from these other views of Jesus. In Judaism there is no provision for a Messiah who dies, much less on a cross. For Islam, Jesus' death on a cross is rejected as a direct affront to Allah. Hindus can only accept Jesus as a yogi who escapes the degradation of death. Buddhist Monk Thich Nhat Hanh says of the crucified Christ, "It is a very painful image to me. It does not contain joy or peace, and this does not do justice to Jesus."

The authors of the Newsweek article conclude, "There is, in short, no room in other religions for a Christ who experiences the full burden of mortal existence; and hence there is no reason to believe in him as the divine Son whom the Father resurrected from the dead."

The irony is that it is precisely here - in the "full burden of mortal existence" that Christians find the revelation of the true God. God becoming man in the incarnation, entering fully into the our human existence to fully participate in our lives, even to the point of enduring a criminal's death on the cross. A God who knows our pain and struggles. An incredible claim about God? Yes, but one that the Apostle Paul understood as the power and wisdom of God:

21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:21-24, NRSV)

Little has changed in 2,000 years. The gracious gift of God's grace that we call "faith" or "belief" is just as hard for us to accept or fathom today as it was for the Jews and Greeks of Paul's time. This contradiction of God's power being manifest in the obedience and sacrifice of Jesus as the Son of God even onto death on a cross is an affront to many even today. It is what Soren Kierkegaard called the "absolute paradox", that this humble, crucified man is also the eternal Word of God.

Ultimately, our "truth claim" must simply be a matter of faith. Faith that the Easter event breaks through the pain and struggles of our earthly existence just as the empty tomb erases the gloom of the cross of Good Friday. Easter is God's "yes" to Jesus as the Christ -- the ultimate affirmation that Jesus is the decisive disclosure of what God is like. And in that revelation we know that God's will for us is life... "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10) Alleluia! Christ is Risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

-The Reverend R.G. "Dick" Metz, Pastor

St. Patrick's Catholic Church

His Past, His Present, His Future

As we consider the life of Jesus Christ, we find him during the week that we call holy in Jerusalem. A quick flashback tells us that he was born in Bethlehem, was an exile in Egypt, lived at Nazareth. Then began his ministry which started him on this journey to Jerusalem. He traveled through Judea and Galilee. He met and influenced all kinds of people: the woman from Samaria, the Roman officer, Nicodemus the Jewish scholar, The Syro-Phoenician woman who asked for help, Lazarus whom he raised from the dead, the widow's son at Naim, and a multitude of others. Then came his triumphal entry into Jerusalem where there were young and old, Jew and Gentile, Roman and Greek. And what an entry it was. The people chanted "Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

If one had been an observer, one would have been convinced that he was on the crest of a wave of success, that the whole Jerusalem was about to follow him. However, there was an undercurrent. There were those in high places who were opposed to him. As the week wore on they were able to turn the current of events. And so we find him taken prisoner by the Romans, condemned to execution, death by hanging on the cross. The prelude to this was being whipped, crowned with thorns, spat upon, led through the streets in infamy. He submitted to this contemptuous form of death for the salvation of mankind. In dying on the cross his arms are outstretched to welcome all mankind of all generations, to reach out with hope to the fallen, the destitute, the sinful.

Had that been the end, it would have indeed been tragic... The Gospels tell that he rose gloriously. It was an angel that

proclaimed: "He is risen." Now there were apparitions - to Mary Magdalene, to the Apostles, to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, to a multitude who witnessed his ascension. Like St. Thomas, those who saw believed. The apostles were so convinced that they were willing to give their lives for that faith. His fixture is in heaven while on earth his followers live by his principles and values. He has said: "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." (John 20, 29) When we put our faith in Him we will be able to say with St. Peter: "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6, 68-69)

-Fr. Gerry Condon

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Willow Creek Branch

April is the month when we normally celebrate Easter, the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, even Jesus Christ. This time of year always has a special significance in that Spring is here with its life-giving sunshine and rain, the return of the birds, the sprouting of flowers and the budding of trees. It is a time of newness, of freshness, of beauty.

We imagine the Savior had a special fondness for Spring and for all it brings. It was in the Spring he made his ultimate sacrifice and display of love in the Garden of Gethsemane and on Calvary. It was in the Spring the new lambs were born which brought him so much joy and a part of many of his parables as he thought of his love for us.

Easter brings many pleasant memories and feelings to each one of us. However, what should be foremost in our hearts is what the atonement of our Lord really means to us. One of the most important aspects of the atonement is the actual resurrection, the conquest over death. Without this, we would be eternally prevented from being with our Father in Heaven and doomed to a world without progress. We are now assured that we will rise again, spirit uniting with body, to form an immortal soul. The other aspect of utmost importance is that the Lord took upon himself the sins of all us. This unlocks the other door whereby we may be cleansed of our sins and able to stand unspotted in the presence of our Father.

Another aspect of the atonement most of us do not think about is the savior suffered for more than just our sins in Gethsemane. He also suffered for our sorrows, our despair, our failures, our loneliness and even our weaknesses. How else could he be able to lift these burdens from our shoulders if he hadn't already felt them himself? If we but faithfully ask for his help, we will be comforted. As we prepare for this Easter holiday, let's remember all of the blessings our elder Brother has given to us through his ceaseless love. If we need his help we must seek it and it will be given abundantly.

May we constantly seek the Lord's presence in our lives.

-The Branch Presidency
Dar Merrill

Church of the Nazarene

You Gotta Believe In Something

What do eggs and rabbits have in common? New life? The egg symbolizes life because from it all living creatures have a beginning. The rabbit, emblem of the Anglo-Saxons goddess, Eastre, goddess of springtime, also represents new beginnings. From these ancient ideologies came stories about rabbits delivering painted chicken eggs in colorful baskets to people. Well that's easy to believe. Isn't it?

Well, some believe that Elves make toys for Christmas, which Santa then slides down chimneys to deliver. In fact some people will believe almost anything that does not require rational thinking or verifiable facts. Did you know that one has greater odds of being killed traveling to purchase a lottery ticket than actually winning (Big-Time). You gotta believe in something. Don't Ya?

Believing in something requires a certain degree of faith that "something" will happen. Yet, when it comes to believing by faith that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, right out of a sealed grave, many people scoff. Nevertheless, this "something" did happen. Bible accounts written by several different people at different time intervals confirm our faith about Jesus. So is this really so hard to believe? Check the facts out for yourself. (Begin by reading the book of John-any version, your choice.) You gotta believe in something.

God loves you and me so much that He allowed His Only Son to be punished for our transgression. And, as if that were not enough, He then validated His love for us by bringing Jesus back to life. This act is our assurance that we too will experience eternal life. By faith we believe in Him and we are no longer condemned. However, those people who do not believe already stand condemned. Why? Because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

John 3:19-21 "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Easter Bunnies delivering chicken eggs? Well, You Gotta Believe In Something.

-The Rev. Duane Jones

Christian Life Center

Resurrection: Hoax or Reality

"Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: He is risen; He is not here: behold the place where they laid Him". Mark 16:6

Everything a Christian believes and ever hopes for hinges on the truth 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.

The second witness is 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. See I Cor. 15:1-8

Now neither Dr. Luke nor Sanhedrin candidate Paul were scatterbrains. They were not given to crazy philosophies. Both were highly educated, trained observers of nature. 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. See I Cor. 15:14-20

The next 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.

The overwhelming evidence tells us that Christ shattered the grave, that He was indeed risen from the dead. 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. 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 is also inerrant and infallible. You will believe everything else the Bible teaches us about our blessed Lord Jesus. 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 work. You will declare it fervently, "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord". Joshua 24:15.

Now it's just about Easter weekend. 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.

-Tim Van Cleave, Pastor

Heppner United Methodist Church

Every year as we prepare to enter into the remembrance of Jesus' passion and resurrection, we read from the Gospels the poignantly familiar stories of his triumphant and almost comical entry into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, of his confrontations with an entrenched and narrow-minded religious establishment, of his tender farewell dinner with his closest associates, and then his existential agony in the garden, his betrayal and the mockery of a trial by the religious authorities leading to his execution as a political subversive by the Roman military ("Are you the King of the Jews?")

The writer of the Gospel of John takes special pains to lay the blame at the feet of "the Jews." Because of John's vehement condemnation of this group in that Gospel, Christians have seized upon this phrasing as an excuse to persecute, defraud, and kill Jewish people living in their communities. However, a careful reading of the Gospel and a look at the primary Greek text behind our translations reveals a far different theme at play.

In the Greek text of the New Testament, the antagonists to Jesus are the judaioi, or the "Judeans," that is, residents of the region of Judea, which was the Greek and Latin rendering of the old region claimed by the kingdom of Judah. Jesus and his followers were from the region of Galilee, to the north of Judea, and a place considered to be a political and religious backwater. Certainly no good could come from such a region or its inhabitants. John's Gospel especially reveals the ethnic, regional and political power tensions and conflicts which existed between the privileged and powerful Jerusalem religious establishment and the poorer people of the hinterlands. Jesus' teachings and shifting of moral and spiritual authority away from Jerusalem, its temple and religious elite in Jerusalem, the "Judeans." It is this elite which sets out in collusion with the Roman government to destroy Jesus and maintain their religious and moral monopoly. It is this "power bloc" which conspires to disgrace Jesus and thoroughly demoralize his followers by crucifying him and placing him on public display upon a Roman cross.

As a religious leader, I take this story to heart, for it warns me never to presume to speak authoritatively for God. Only the Holy Spirit can speak for God, and the Holy Spirit speaks to each person's heart, to their spirit ("When we cry out 'Abba,' Father, it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God." Romans 8:15-16). In John's Gospel, when Jesus appears to his disciples after his resurrection, he breathes the Holy Spirit upon them. That is the sign that God has moved out of the temple, where access to God could be monitored and controlled, into the human heart, where God is free to move, and human beings are free to respond to or reject God.

The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus remind us where to put our hope. Ultimately our hope 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 denominational and 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.

Come hear and experience the power of that Spirit poured out upon all flesh this Sunday, and every Sunday, every day. Come worship at the church of your choice. The risen Jesus will be waiting for you.

-The Rev. Craig Strobel

BEO to sponsor scholarship

The Bank of Eastern Oregon will again sponsor an agriculture/business scholarship for graduating seniors at Heppner, Ione, Arlington, Condon, Riverside, Spray and Wheeler County schools, announced George Koffler, Bank of Eastern Oregon president. This marks the fifth year the bank has sponsored the \$500 scholarships to Morrow, Gilliam and Wheeler County students. This year the awards total \$3,000. Applicants must plan to enroll in college in either agriculture or business. Selection will be based on scholarship, leadership and citizenship. Applications may be picked up from school counselors. The deadline to submit applications is May 12.

BUSINESS CARDS
Heppner Gazette-Times