

He is Risen! He is Risen indeed! The hymns on Easter morning just stir my soul. Do you feel the same excitement, the wonder, the joy and the assurance this morning as we are able again to sing those old familiar hymns – *Christ the Lord Is Risen Today, Up from the Grave He Arose, and He Lives?* Because that's what Easter is all about; that's why we are Christians. On Easter morning Jesus rose from the grave defeating death and sin forever more, and opening the way to eternal life for all who believe. While Christmas is the most celebrated Christian holiday, in my opinion Easter is by far the most important; because it defines who we are, what we believe, and what is promised to us. While we should celebrate Easter every day, today especially we remember and worship the Risen Lord.

In the scripture text that I just read from the Gospel of Luke, the women went to the tomb early on Easter morning to anoint Jesus' body for the final preparations for burial without any anticipation or hope of finding the tomb empty or meeting the Risen Lord. But the tomb was empty that morning and they hurried back to tell the disciples who at first didn't believe them. So Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself. Luke tells us that Peter went in, saw that the tomb was empty, and went away wondering to himself what had happened.

Peter went away wondering what had happened. Wondering, where is the body? Is Jesus really alive? Did Jesus really mean it when He said that He would rise from the grave after three days? This morning, over 2,000 years later, many people are still confused as the women were, still doubting like the disciples, and still wondering like Peter. They are still looking for Jesus among the dead. Some still have not found Him, and established a personal relationship with Him.

From the beginning of time, men and women have raised the age-old question articulated by Job in the Old Testament: "If a man dies, shall he live again?" Century after century everybody, the famous and the unknown, the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor, the young and the old have all marched into the chambers of death. From the beginning of time, people have feared death and the grave. But in God's divine plan for salvation, His Son Jesus Christ answered Job's question on a cross at Calvary on Good Friday and in an empty tomb on Easter morning. As the Apostle Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 15: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" Jesus Christ defeated death forever for all who will believe in Him.

The basic truth of Christianity is found in the announcement by the angel on Easter morning in the Gospel of Matthew: "He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come and see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead." The message of Easter is not an argument, but a divine proclamation. The angel declared that Jesus

Christ had conquered death and risen to life. The Bible records numerous appearances of the Risen Lord to the disciples and others, over 500 people, over a forty-day period. The empty tomb spoke volumes of halleluiahs declaring that Jesus Christ was no longer dead, but alive.

As a family watched the Easter story on TV, the young daughter was deeply moved. As Jesus was tortured and killed tears rolled down her cheeks. She sat in silence until after Jesus had been taken down from the cross and laid in the tomb. Then suddenly she grinned and shouted: "Now comes the best part." We first hear of the suffering and death of Jesus, but now comes the best part! The tomb is empty! Jesus has risen from the grave! He is alive!

As a young man, Dwight L. Moody was suddenly called upon to preach a funeral sermon. He searched through the four Gospels for one of Jesus' funeral sermons, but found none. What he found was that Jesus broke up every funeral He attended. Death could not exist where He was. When the dead heard His voice they sprang to life. In John 11:25 Jesus stated: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live."

Do you ever wonder or have questions about the Resurrection? What does the Resurrection mean to you? Let me share a story that you may have heard before about what it meant to one little boy. On Palm Sunday, a Sunday School teacher gave each child in her class a plastic egg and asked them to put something in it that reminded them of the Resurrection, and then to bring it back the next Sunday on Easter. On Easter morning the teacher took each child's egg in turn, opening it, and commenting on what the child had placed in it and how it applied to the Resurrection.

The first egg contained a tiny flower. "What a lovely sign of new life that springs forth at Easter," she said. Another egg contained a picture of Christ, and the teacher spoke of that. The next one had a small nail in it representing the nails of the cross. Another one had a round pebble that represented the stone that the Roman guards had placed at the entrance of the tomb.

But the teacher was speechless when she opened the last egg – it was empty. After a moment of silence, young Tommy spoke up: "That's my egg. It's empty just like the tomb was empty, and that means new life for everyone." What a lesson. That young man knew more about theology and the basic Christian beliefs than most of us. As the Bible says – "A little child shall lead them."

The tomb was empty! As a matter of fact there are three tombs in Jerusalem today that scholars believe might have been the tomb where Jesus' body was placed after the crucifixion, but they are all still empty; there is no body. So, how would you define resurrection? Well, for a starter, our word resurrection comes from a Latin word meaning rising from the dead or returning to life. It also means that the grave is not our final resting place. It means that death

was defeated once and for all by Jesus when He walked out of that cold, dark tomb on Easter morning. Because of Jesus we no longer fear death realizing that there is hope beyond the grave.

Today is a Day of Resurrection, a Day of Forgiveness, a Day of Freedom, a Day of New Beginnings, a Day of Life, a Day of Love, and a Day of Grace. The tomb was empty that Easter morning and because of that we, as believers, have been freed from the grip of sin in our life through the amazing grace of God. In addition, we have the opportunity to have a personal relationship with our Lord and Savior, and to live an abundant life. We should have no fear of the grave because it is not our final resting place because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and the empty tomb.

We should not celebrate Easter only once a year. If we truly believe in Jesus, then each and every day can and should be Easter – a day of freedom, a day of forgiveness, a day of victory, a day of hope and promises, and a day of sharing God's love with others. God so loved us that He sent His only Begotten Son to die on an old wooden cross for each of us and to be raised from the grave three days later. That my friends is the meaning of the Resurrection; the meaning of Easter! Hear the Good News: He is risen! He is risen indeed! Thanks be to God. Amen