

Easter

“Hold fast to the Gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection!”

(1 Corinthians 15:2)

March 31, 2024

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this Easter day of our Lord’s resurrection is from our Epistle reading, 1 Corinthians 15:2

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.”

So far the text...

Hold fast! “Hold on for dear life” is an expression we sometimes say. Picture yourself in a rollercoaster climbing up, up, up. There is the clickety clack of the mechanism that is pulling you to the top. And then when you get to the top, there is that moment of silence when the rollercoaster is released and it begins to pick up speed. And then comes the inevitable screams as the body feels these strange sensations of speed and weightlessness. Hold on for dear life! For if you somehow get dislodged from your seat, which is very, very, very rare, you could lose your life unfortunately.

Paul tells us that the Christian faith is the greatest “roller coaster” ride that there is. There is nothing that can give such pure joy, excitement, contentment, and pleasure than the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the first things! The most important things! The foundational truths of the Christian faith! What are the first things?

“that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,”

25 years had gone by since these things were witnessed by the women who went to the empty tomb, the apostles and other disciples behind closed doors, and those walking to Emmaus, and over 500 others before Jesus ascended into heaven, forty days after His resurrection. Last of all Paul includes himself, ashamed of his past, as a persecutor of the church, as one born untimely, like an aborted baby that by the grace of God lives. Yes, Paul too saw the resurrected Jesus.

What a roller coaster ride the women who first saw Jesus experienced! They went to anoint a dead body. Clickity clack the roller coaster climbed. How painful an experience it was for them as they walked in mourning. The impossibility for them to roll the huge stone away from

the tomb so that they could enter. Clickity clack. And then, there was a gasp. The stone was rolled away. Mary Magdalene jumped to conclusions that the body had been robbed and went back to tell the disciples what she believed to be the case. The other women went in and were greeted by an angel. He is not here! Jesus has risen! Just as He said He would! Go and tell the disciples that He will meet them in Galilee. And the roller coaster ride down began with excitement, fear and much joy! And along the way Jesus appeared to them. He was alive! Death had not won the victory! Jesus had! Hang on for dear life!

Mary Magdalene, as we know, went back to the grave in sadness, following Peter and John who ran and saw the empty tomb for themselves. The linen cloths, the folded handkerchief, but no Jesus. John believed. And his roller coaster ride began to pick up speed. Hang of for dear life!

Mary arrived at the tomb and in tears spoke to two angels now. Clickey clack.

“Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.”

There should be no weeping when confronted with the amazing Gospel, that Jesus has risen from the dead. Jesus Himself then speaks to her and asks her the same question. Why are you weeping. Whom do you seek? Supposing Him to be a gardener, she says, **“Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.”** Clickity clack, imagining herself moving a dead body.

And then, with a single spoken word, her roller coaster ride of renewed faith began. “Mary” Jesus spoke her name. And Mary recognized the voice of her Savior. It was Jesus! What joy. Oh, she held on for dear life, literally to Jesus, didn’t want to let Him go. But Jesus tells her to go be His messenger. Others need to know that He is alive and that He will also ascend to heaven to reign over all the church. For He has put all things under His feet by His death and resurrection!

“I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.”

And Mary Magdalene did just as Jesus told her and went and told the disciples. Others needed to know the Good News! Others needed to know that Jesus had won the victory over sin, death and the devil! Hold on for dear life!

25 years had passed since these events had unfolded. And with time, Paul laments that there were false prophets and a scepticism that had crept into the congregation at Corinth. Paul is amazed. Paul is amazed that there are some who would be denying the truths of which Paul has preached and others have preached.

For to deny the resurrection has devastating consequences which Paul goes on to enumerate in our epistle reading. To deny the resurrection means that life itself turns into a hard climb, clickety clack, with no relief, no joy, no hope. And when life ends, which it does for all people because of the sin of the first Adam as Paul goes on to say, then the roller coaster comes off its tracks and falls to destruction, eternal destruction!

Listen to Paul pose the hypothetical. “If this were true... that there is no resurrection”.

“if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. 15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. 16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.”

What are the results of this hypothetical? First, obviously, Jesus is dead, returned to dust. All who claimed to see Jesus were in fact false witnesses. And those who died believing this “fallacy”? Perished. And to top it off, you are still in your sins. There is no Savior, no faith, no hope. You are in fact, the most pitiable of all men for having given your life, your time, your energy, your treasures over to further this untruth.

And that is what the sinful unbelieving world wants you to do – believe that this hypothetical, this untruth, that Jesus is not risen, is in fact, true. For if the devil and the unbelieving world can convince you that these first things of Jesus’ death and resurrection are not real, then Satan wins. The devil wants you to let go of what you know is the truth ...that the Holy Spirit convinces you in your spirit to know is the truth. Let it go... and you lose everything for eternity.

Are there voices today telling you, distracting you from holding tight to the Gospel of Jesus? Have the first things of which Paul preaches and others preach, the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith, taken a lower precedence in your life? How often do you come to church to be strengthened by God’s Word and receive the very body and blood of Jesus for your forgiveness which proclaims His death...until He comes again? “Until He comes again” means that He is alive! His death secured your forgiveness, paid the price with His blood, established the New Covenant, Testament of the Gospel and His resurrection seals this truth!

What will Jesus find when He returns? Fervent believers holding on for dear life? Or half-hearted souls on the verge of falling off the tracks?

Oh, the sinful world tries its best to take the message of Easter out of easter. The annual White House Easter egg coloring contest, yes it is called an “Easter” egg coloring contest includes this rule: The artwork cannot be religious! What is Easter, but the religion of Christ crucified and risen! Clickety clack says our government!

And then of all things, there is a movement under foot to highlight this day, March 31st, as “The Transgender Day of Visibility” led by an official proclamation by President Biden.

‘On Transgender Day of Visibility, we honor the extraordinary courage and contributions of transgender Americans and reaffirm our Nation’s commitment to forming a more perfect Union — where all people are created equal and treated equally throughout their lives’

Yes, God created two genders, male and female, and did not give mankind the power to try and change genders, as this is impossible. To recognize, affirm and promote this impossibility is to further harm confused people physically, emotionally and spiritually. However, President Biden believes he has this power to over throw God’s created order.

“NOW, THEREFORE, I, JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR., President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim March 31, 2024, as Transgender Day of Visibility. I call upon all Americans to join us in lifting up the lives and voices of transgender people throughout our Nation and to work toward eliminating violence and discrimination based on gender identity.”

What is visible on this day and every day is mankind’s sin. The sins of all people, you me and anyone who believes that they can change genders. What is visible is the need of all people of a Savior from sin. And what is visible, what needs to be visible on this day and every day is the empty tomb and the risen Savior, Jesus Christ!

This is the day that the Lord has made! We will rejoice and be glad in it. And there can only be rejoicing and gladness in one’s heart if one confesses one’s sins and believes that they were buried at the cross, and that Jesus rose from the dead, victor over sin, death and the devil. This is true for all people, all nations, all peoples, male and female that God loved the world and gave His only begotten Son, Jesus to give us the hope of an incredible transformation. The death of the mortal, corruptible flesh and the putting on of the glorified, incorruptible flesh of which Paul speaks.

“So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” 55 “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”

56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And we hold on to this victory for dear life. We hold fast to this amazing truth.

“20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

And this is our proclamation of hope and courage and joy. This is the only proclamation, the first things of the Gospel that can truly give life and peace. And we proclaim it, we preach it, and we hold fast to it! Blessed Easter!

Amen

“And this peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)