

## **Christ is Risen! Now What?**

Today is the third Sunday of the Easter season. We are celebrating Christ's resurrection. We will observe the Lord's triumph throughout these weeks leading up to Ascension and Pentecost. He is risen. Because of Easter we don't have to feel let down and mournful, as we did on Good Friday. We can go on living our lives just as we did before. Or can we?

After his resurrection, the disciples must have been marveling and exulting in what had transpired. The pain and grief of Good Friday had given way to the joy of Easter. We may wonder if they ever got tired of saying to one another, "The Lord is risen." I think that their exuberance about the resurrection is something that they carried with them all the rest of their days.

But for the disciples then, as for us today, the question is, "Now what?" The Lord has risen - now what? Would they go back to their homes and their families and resume the lives that they had lived before they had known Jesus, enriched by his teaching and the wonderful memories of what they had known with the Lord? Peter and some of the other disciples tried to do just that, when they decided to go back to fishing, but the Lord intervened. There's was no going back for them after the resurrection. Their lives had been changed forever.

Now that Easter Day has come and gone, do we go back to everything in our lives as it was before? Is Easter meant to be just a joyous once a year celebration with feasting and spring flowers and music, and then the day after Easter, the celebration is over, and we go back to normal, whatever that is? Or does our belief in Christ's resurrection bring about a fundamental change in how we live our lives from now on?

To put it another way: Is Christ's resurrection merely an historical fact, or is it for us a living reality? Does Easter mean only that Christ has

risen, or does it mean that he lives, that he is alive, here and now, in you?

For the committed Christian, Easter changes everything. We no longer live for ourselves, but for him. We cannot go back to our former ways, to the things we knew and did before we came to the Lord. As Peter wrote, “Do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ... And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear ... knowing that you were *ransomed* from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, ... with the *precious blood* of Christ.” (1 Peter 1:14-19)

We were ransomed. God in Christ paid the price of our redemption. He has bought our freedom. There was a price to be paid for our salvation, and the Lord paid it for us. We have been bought with a price. As Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God. You are *not your own*, for you were *bought with a price*. So glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Glorify God in your body. I think that does not mean merely to keep ourselves from committing carnal sins. This imperative has an affirmative aspect to it. It means we are to live our lives so as to bring glory to God.

As Christians, we live for the Lord. We no longer live for ourselves, but for him. As Paul wrote to the Romans, “None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.” (Romans 14:7-8) God has done this great work of redemption to bring us to himself. As we read in today's passage from Isaiah,

“But now thus says the LORD,  
 he who created you, ...  
 he who formed you, ...

“Fear not, for I have *redeemed* you;  
 I have called you by name, *you are mine*.

<sup>2</sup>When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
 and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
 when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
 and the flame shall not consume you.

<sup>3</sup>For I am the LORD your God,  
 the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

<sup>11</sup>I, I am the LORD,  
 and besides me there is no savior.

<sup>12</sup>I declared and saved and proclaimed,  
 when there was no strange god among you;  
 and *you are my witnesses*,” declares the LORD.” (Isaiah 43:1-3, 11-12)

“You are my witnesses.” We are meant to be God’s witnesses. We are meant to do something for the Lord. We are meant to speak of the Lord. We are meant to tell others of the Lord. We are meant to live our lives for him. We are meant to serve him. We are meant to work for him. As James, the Lord’s brother, wrote, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” James 2:14-17

Jesus wanted his disciples to live for him. He wanted them to devote their lives to him, which meant that they were to be actively working, speaking of him, drawing others to him. The risen Christ told his chosen ones, “Go therefore and *make disciples* of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them* to observe all that I have commanded you. And

behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

Go, make disciples, teach them. The disciples were meant to make disciples for the Lord. And we, as disciples, are meant to make disciples for the Lord. God bestows gifts on us, not merely for the purpose of making us lovelier people, although his gifts indeed serve that function too. God bestows his Holy Spirit, his grace, his gifts, his goodness on us so that we might draw others to him.

Our lives have been unalterably changed. We are lifelong servants of the Lord. We have a duty to use what he has given us for his glory.

Remember the parable of the talents. Jesus was teaching his disciples about the kingdom of God, what it is like, and who is a part of his kingdom.

Jesus told them, “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. <sup>15</sup> To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup> He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. <sup>17</sup> So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. <sup>18</sup> But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. <sup>19</sup> Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’ <sup>21</sup> His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ <sup>22</sup> And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’ <sup>23</sup> His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ <sup>24</sup> He also who had received the one

talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed,<sup>25</sup> so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’<sup>26</sup> But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed?<sup>27</sup> Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.<sup>28</sup> So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents.<sup>29</sup> For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.<sup>30</sup> And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’” (Matthew 25:14-30)

I think that in this Easter season, we need to be convicted by this parable. Christ has risen. The Master has gone away for a while. He has told us that he will return. In the meantime, we, his servants, have been entrusted with the duty of gaining more souls for the kingdom. He enables us to do that by giving us the good news of the kingdom and the power of the Holy Spirit to make it known. He has given to each of his servants, to *each and every one* of us, the ability to do that. To some, like Billy Graham or Charles Stanley, who recently passed away, he gave many talents. They have introduced many to Christ.

But the fact that there are those with many talents, like Billy Graham, or Charles Stanley, or Chuck Swindoll, or David Jeremiah, or others who are out there proclaiming God’s Word, doesn’t let those of us who have only one talent off the hook. We must not bury our talent in the ground so that when we meet the Lord we can say, “Here it is. You can have your talent back. It’s all there. I didn’t use any of it.” How would we feel if the Lord said to us, as the Master in the parable said to his servant, “You wicked and lazy servant.”

Coming to church is a wonderful start to fulfilling our role as disciples. Thank you all for your faithful attendance. But church attendance alone

is not enough to fulfill our duty as servants of the Master. Presumably, even the servant who hid his talent in the ground showed up at the workplace every day. There is something more we need to do for the Master, and that is to be witnesses for him.

Personal evangelism may be a scary thing for most of us. We feel awkward and inadequate. We aren't used to speaking openly about Christ to others. But this isn't something we need to do all by ourselves. Jesus sent his disciples out two by two. Paul had a group of followers who accompanied him on much of his journeys. We can do this together as a church.

Next Saturday, we are going to have the first of a series of once-a-month fellowship dinners. It will be in the church hall at 5:30 pm. It will be a potluck supper. (See Linda Kantarges, our Senior Warden, about what you can bring.) The purpose of having these dinners is twofold.

First, we build one another up when we eat together and talk with one another. Fellowship is not an optional, but an essential part of any church. We are companions in our faith journey. And so, these dinners are something to be enjoyed. At each of these dinners, one of our members will have the opportunity to speak a little about his or her faith and what being a Christian has meant in his or her life. By hearing others speak of their faith, it may encourage us to do the same. At our first dinner, Father Jeff will share his witness with us.

Second, through our fellowship we can draw others to Christ. It is our hope that you will be encouraged to invite others to come to our dinners. That is all you have to do. Invite someone else to come. Better yet, bring that someone with you. Introduce them to others at dinner. Devote your time to making them feel at home and to their enjoyment of the evening. They will hear someone speak about his or her faith which message we hope will touch them. If we make this a practice of reaching out, leading to a habit of reaching out, we are well on our way to fulfilling our role as a church in reaching the community for Christ.

Let me emphasize that this is not a church membership drive. If through our efforts, and the work of the Holy Spirit, we win some souls for Christ, “Hallelujah”, *that* is our aim. If, some were, as a result, to attend the First Baptist Church whose space we share, that would be doubly good. The objective is not to get more people in our little church, but to enlarge the kingdom of God. If they did decide to join us, wonderful! We would welcome them with open arms. But that is not the reason we are doing this.

Please turn with me to the back page of your bulletin, where we have our Mission Statement. This is what we have declared our purpose to be. Please read this with me.

“To celebrate the Christian faith acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, to uphold Scripture as the unchanging Word of God, and to lead others into a saving relationship with Him through Biblical teaching and fellowship.”

We want to fulfill our mission, as stated in our mission statement, “to lead others into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ through Biblical teaching and fellowship.” Let us lead others to Christ through our fellowship. It is our hope that these fellowship dinners will be a vehicle through which we can, at least in part, fulfill this mission.

Christ did not make his appearances to the disciples after his resurrection just to cheer them up and calm their fears and anxieties; he came to fortify them to do the work of the church. And that work is not just to help its members cope with all the difficulties in our lives, but to look beyond all of these difficulties and win souls for the kingdom of God.