

Go Ahead Resurrection of Our Lord, 3/23/08,

Grace, mercy & peace from God our Father & our Lord & Savior, JC. Amen

TEXT-Matt. 28:7 (Angel speaking) “Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message to you.” Amen.

Pray-Dear God, guide our celebration that the crucified Jesus may be our risen Jesus. Amen.

Three men were doing the same thing. When asked what they were doing, the first man said, “I’m laying bricks.” The second man said, “I’m earning \$25/hour.” The third man said, “I’m building a beautiful cathedral.”

Are you laying bricks or building cathedrals? We want to build cathedrals. We want our life to be meaningful. The resurrection of Jesus Christ give us that meaning. But before we celebrate we better be careful what or who was resurrected.

The resurrection is more than an empty tomb. An empty tomb raises as many questions as it answers.

When I go to the hospital to see a patient who is critically ill and the room is empty, I do not rejoice. I am faced with 3 possibilities: the patient has recovered and gone home, the patient has died, or the patient has been moved to another room. I don’t have peace until I know the answer. Only the empty tomb, leaves us empty.

But we don’t just have an empty tomb. We also have the message of the angel. “Don’t be afraid. I know you’re looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here but has been raised as he said.”

“As he said” indicates a connection of the present and the past. The one who rose is the one who was crucified. Only his followers could comprehend what had happened.

Jesus did not appear to his enemies. He appeared to his disciples, friends and followers in the post-resurrection appearances. Before the crucifixion, the disciples believed Jesus was an authentic leader. The crucifixion made the wonder. The resurrection showed that he was authentic. They could trust what he taught. What happened was what he said would happen, so it was not as threatening.

But we better be careful who or what is resurrected. The resurrection is more than the belief that eventually everyone will live happily ever after. What is resurrected isn't my favorite restaurant or meal, or my favorite movie, musical group, athletic team, house, car or even my bicycle.

Jesus Christ is resurrected and all that he taught and believed. Those truths contrary to Jesus Christ died and remained dead. They proved to be powerless.

The resurrection is more than an empty tomb and even more than a resurrected body. What is resurrected is the truth of Jesus Christ and those who believe it. That truth is bigger than the person. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life."

When someone dies, we often hear, "Gone but not forgotten." What is not forgotten? That someone was a Cub fan? That she raised flowers? That they like Ford products better than General Motors products?

I hope we are celebrating something more than that. I hope we are celebrating the truth of the Christian faith, especially as it is embodied in others. We want to leave behind a legacy that will last.

Let us review some of those truths as we considered them this Lenten season. On the first Sunday in Lent we considered Jesus being tempted in the wilderness. The truth is that there are no shortcuts to the cross no matter how attractive they may appear.

On the second Sunday we learned that Nicodemus was born again by the lifting up of Jesus on the cross.

On the third Sunday the woman at the well whom Jesus evangelized became an evangelist. That reminds of Jesus power to change lives.

On the fourth Sunday the blind man could see physically & spiritually. But the Pharisees who ridiculed Jesus were blind spiritually.

On the fifth Sunday Jesus last miracle of giving life to Lazarus caused his death. It was more important to Jesus that others live rather than he live.

And on Passion Sunday only the Centurion said, "Truly this man was the Son of God."

We want these eternal truths because they hit nerves in our lives. We say to ourselves, "That's real. I need that in my life. I believe that."

I had an experience last week to show the importance of hitting nerves. Two weeks ago I received a Christmas card from a high school friend, Ted. His Christmas cards are always late because Christmas is a difficult time for him.

Many years ago I officiated at his marriage to Cathy. Cathy's father had died of cancer. This was Cathy's second marriage because her first husband died of cancer. Since then Cathy has died of cancer. By the grace of God Ted accepted these deaths.

But in the last year his daughter died of cancer as well. That was almost the straw that broke the camels back. That meant his grandson. Teddy, didn't have a mother.

Last week I sent an Easter card to Ted stating that I was praying for him during Holy Week, and I hoped to see him at our all school reunion this summer.

I mailed the card a week ago Saturday. The earliest he could get it in NW Iowa was Monday. 1:00 last Monday Ted called. He thanked me for the card and invited us to stay at his house for the reunion.

I think I hit a nerve. We won't spend all our time talking about the good old days at Sibley High. We may also talk about the meaning of life and faith.

Ted, you, and I need eternal values. That's why the resurrection is so important. The truth Jesus taught became authentic. His enemies and the power of death could not destroy that truth.

We can be sure of what we are celebrating by separating the truth from fiction. I have found it helpful to make a distinction between a compass and clock.

A compass is our core values as family, faith, education, work or a belief as being saved by God's grace.

Our clock is what we must get done as paying taxes, Gof, or walking and feeding the dog.

It is a daily battle to keep our compass as a higher priority than our clock. So many good things get in the way that the good can become the enemy of the best. An example would be making more of the empty tomb than the risen Jesus Christ.

This leads us to the last part of the angel's message. "He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." Later Jesus said, "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." Jesus called the disciples who deserted him "brothers." That is an act of reconciliation which is another truth of Jesus.

The resurrection is not an end in itself but a means to an end. The goal is to go to Galilee and meet Jesus. Galilee is where Jesus ministered earlier in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus is already there. He has gone ahead of us. Where ever we go, Jesus has already been there. That's why we need to be his followers to recognize him.

The resurrection results in a passion for mission. We want to live the truths that have hit nerves in us. We want them to live beyond our life.

I'll close with some examples

I know a couple whose 7 year old son died of a brain tumor. Today their greatest satisfaction in life is helping other parents who are grieving. That truth has resurrection power.

Friday is the first anniversary of a dear friend. He has a daughter who is mentally and physically challenged. His care and love and concern for the handicapped continues to live.

A few weeks ago in the Sunday Pantagraph were pictures and an article on neighbors helping a farmer's widow. A member of our congregation organized that effort. That's resurrection power.

A week ago yesterday we celebrated the life and faith of Anna Simms. We cried and laughed. Anna had a challenging life to raise a large family after her husband died.

Her son, Jim, gave remembrances at the end of the service. When Anna was in her 70s she cut down a cherry tree in the back yard and sawed it in pieces. She did not have a power saw either. It was only right that the casket was made of cherry wood. What a story!

But there is something else I'll remember longer about Anna. I have taught the Seniors Bible Study on Thursday mornings for about 9 months. She was a faithful member of that group. Her love and knowledge of the Scriptures will long out live her life.

May our lives witness to the eternal truth of the resurrection. Amen.

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Pastor James E. Reents