

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

Easter Sunday 2023
Colossians 3:1-4
John 20:1-18

A Sunday school teacher asked her class if they knew what happened on Easter and why it was so important.

One little girl spoke up and said: "Easter is when the whole family gets together, and you eat turkey and sing about the pilgrims and all that."

"No, that's not it," said the teacher.

"I know what Easter is," a second student responded. "Easter is when you get a tree and decorate it and give gifts to everybody and sing lots of songs."

"Nope, that's not it either," replied the teacher.

Finally a third student spoke up, "Easter is when Jesus was killed, and put in a tomb and left for three days."

"Ah, thank goodness somebody knows" the teacher thought to herself.

But then the student went on: "Then everybody gathers at the tomb and waits to see if Jesus comes out, and if he sees his shadow he goes back inside and we have six more weeks of winter."

It's kind of felt that way THIS year. But it does beg the question – is Easter JUST a HOLIDAY, like EVERY OTHER holiday?

It SEEMS like it sometimes. We make the extra effort to get to church on Easter Sunday, and sing these great hymns, and see our family and old friends, but what about AFTER we leave this place? Can we have EASTER and LEAVE our WORLD UNCHANGED BY it? Can we can HAVE the RESURRECTION of our LORD, and LEAVE the world as it was YESTERDAY? Does this DAY MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE?

Winston Churchill once said, "History can be a great teacher. Yet, most of the time, we simply get up, brush ourselves off, and learn nothing at all."

There's some truth to that. Do you remember what it was like RIGHT after the WORST of the PANDEMIC had passed? There was a rush of compassion and generosity, and we talked about making a NEW normal, becoming a BETTER people and a better NATION. But, things HAVEN'T changed that much, if at ALL. Are we a KINDER people, a more UNIFIED NATION? I don't think so. When I read the paper, and watch the news, and I hear about the kind of things we SAY to each other, and the AWFUL things we DO to each other, I don't think so. We seem amazingly well adjusted to the OLD normal. We seem to have simply gotten up, brushed ourselves off, and learned NOTHING at all.

That SEEMS to be our nature. It says HERE in the Gospel of John that the disciples went to the tomb on Easter morning, and discovered that it was EMPTY. THEN, it says, they went back HOME.

Now, let's THINK about that a moment. WENT BACK HOME? They had JUST DISCOVERED that Jesus had KEPT his promise and was RAISED from the dead, and ALL they can think to do is GO HOME? This WASN'T an ORDINARY EVENT. Here we have the GREATEST REVERSAL IN HISTORY – GOD'S TRIUMPH over SIN AND DEATH, and what do we DO? We get up, we brush ourselves off, and continue our lives as if NOTHING OF ANY SIGNIFICANCE has happened.

The truth of that Easter morning was on the FACES of those BEFUDDLED disciples who WITNESSED it. NOT ONE of them EXPECTED Easter.

And when Mary finally DOES SEE Jesus in the garden, she wants things to be the SAME way they always WERE. She wants Jesus to AGAIN be her “Rabbouni,” her TEACHER. But Jesus says, “Don’t hold on to me. Things CAN’T BE the way they were before. This resurrection CHANGES EVERYTHING.”

Easter ISN’T ABOUT what we EXPECT, and it isn’t about what we WANT. Easter is about what NEEDED to happen – the ONE PIVOTAL moment in history – the morning our God DID something that ONLY GOD COULD do. Easter is about GOD -- the God who RAISES Jesus from the grave to PROVE that DEATH DOES NOT have the LAST WORD.

(Show video (Easter 2023 At the Center”)

There are SO MANY lines in there that I love.

“He alone holds the pen of history.”

“Jesus isn’t written into OUR story; our story is written into HIS.”

“His mercies stand at the center of our faith.”

The RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST is the VERY CENTER of our faith, the LENS that brings everything ELSE into FOCUS. The resurrection is the ONE thing that gives LIFE MEANING AND PURPOSE, for BY it we KNOW that we have a LIVING AND ACTIVE GOD. DEATH HAS LOST ITS STING. Jesus has destroyed the POWER of death. The stone’s been rolled away. This is the CORE BELIEF that ALL CHRISTIANS SHARE.

In Christ’s rising from the dead, God offers us a NEW WORLD, a SECOND CHANCE. Our reading from Colossians says, “You have been raised WITH Christ” (Col. 3:1). That’s present tense. You ARE RAISED WITH Christ. By the power of his resurrection, CHRIST RESURRECTS US.

You’re given a NEW LIFE. You’re given ETERNAL life, because HE is alive.

His victory CHANGES EVERYTHING. It changes LIFE, and it changes DEATH. It changes how we MOURN and how we HOPE, how we ENDURE and how we LIVE.

Things CAN’T BE the way they were before. WE can’t be the way we were before. We can’t HAVE EASTER and LIVE the way we did YESTERDAY. The resurrection of Jesus is the CENTER OF OUR FAITH, and THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING.

THIS IS EASTER. This is the day our Lord walked out of the tomb and changed the WORLD FOREVER. This isn’t JUST ANY DAY. This isn’t just ANY HOLIDAY. THIS IS THE DAY. This is the CENTER OF HISTORY. This is the center of our LIVES, the center of our HOPE, the center of our FAITH.

This isn’t a day to just GO HOME; this is a day to CELEBRATE.

This isn’t a day to sit on our hands; this is a day to RISE UP. So let’s STAND up now.

This is a day to SING! This is a day to SHOUT! Say those words WITH me now:
CHRIST IS RISEN!

HE IS RISEN INDEED!

ALLELUIA! And AMEN.