

St. Peter & St. Paul Church
Easter 6B
5/6/18

WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTION

We are now well into the Great Fifty Days. Easter Sunday is fast fading in memory. Jesus' Ascension into heaven will be celebrated on Thursday. Ten days later we celebrate the coming of God the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Today let us pause to reflect on THE essential Christian belief. That is--is our personal belief--yours & mine--aligned with the church's celebration & teaching? Do we truly believe--in our heart of hearts--that Jesus was raised bodily from the dead on the 3rd day after his crucifixion?

For me personally as a Christian & disciple of the Lord, the Resurrection is non-negotiable, true historical fact.

Why is the Resurrection so important? It is everything!!! Without the Resurrection, we would never have heard about Jesus of Nazareth. He would be dead, buried & forgotten. There would be no Christianity, no Christian Churches. St. Peter & St. Paul Church would not exist as a place for you to worship and be formed into disciples.

We would not be here this morning. Perhaps we would embrace some brand of pagan religion, but we would be dead in our sinfulness, with no hope for us or for the world.

However, the writers of the 27 books of the New Testament--Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Paul, James, Jude--all the writers believed they personally had seen the transformed Christ in His new physicality or had the authentic testimony of those who had seen Him. And their transformed lives and, for most of them, their martyrdom, is a ringing testimony.

Sometime on that first Easter Sunday or during the next 40 days they saw Him restored to life. Perhaps they touched the scars on His transformed body--a body not always recognized at first; a body as physical as our own bodies, which could speak & eat food but also appear & disappear in locked rooms. YET IT WAS JESUS!!!

Now the Jewish people of that day believed there would be a General Resurrection of God's departed people when God would make all things right--a time called in the Old Testament books "the Day of the Lord." In other words, a one stage plan. But now, after the Resurrection appearances of Jesus, the New Testament writers said that God had a 2 stage plan. The first stage was now accomplished: Jesus was already bodily raised; something that had never happened to anyone before. The second future stage: That when Jesus comes again, what happened to Him will happen to us who love, believe in and serve Him. That when we say in the Creed -- " I believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come" -- IT IS REALLY TRUE!!!

Further, the New Testament writers saw Jesus' victory as proof of His true identity: That He IS the long awaited, unique Messiah, the Incarnate Son of God, the world's one & only true Savior, Lord & King.

Brothers & sisters, this is the hope of God's future for us--in this life & the next--more glorious, greater than anything we could every hope for or imagine--described inadequately by words like New Heaven/New Earth, New Jerusalem, Eternity, Life Everlasting. Something to stake our lives on; to trust our living Lord and the apostles words with all our hearts.

So the first and second generation writers--those who saw the Risen, Living Jesus or trusted as authentic the witness of those who saw him--wrote down the resurrection stories. But their witness did not stop there. There are hundreds of specific references to "resurrection, raise, risen & rising from the dead" in reference to Jesus. Clearly every word of the NT is to be read through the lens of Easter & reflects Easter reality.

That is why in today's gospel reading, written by John, who was there at that first Easter, the Lord's admonition to abide in His love; to love one another; & to bear fruit as His obedient friends & disciples, is not only spoken by Him at the Last Supper, the night before his betrayal and death. Through the Holy Spirit, His living presence speaks to us the same words right now.

John, who also wrote I John, in our 2nd reading declares that Jesus is the Son of God & the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One. He declares that the victory that conquers the world is our faith in the Risen Savior.

In the passage from the Acts of the Apostles, the writer Luke, who was not present at Easter but who clearly had direct relationship with Peter & Paul, proclaims that the gift of the Holy Spirit is for all people who give their hearts, minds & lives to the One who gave so much for us.

And we read the Psalm today and all the Old Testament books in light of the life, death and resurrection of our living Savior and Lord.

2000 years have passed and Jesus has yet to return. Yet, as He promised, we are not alone. The Holy Spirit continues to call us to trust our Living Lord and the apostles' written witness---to take them at their word! And God the Father has chosen us--you and me--to also witness to his Son's resurrection in our lives & world every day--in deed & word--with our families, friends, neighbors, associates--with whomever we spend time.

Everyone around the world needs to hear and to trust this incredible, hopeful message. It starts with the message taking hold in us. As with the apostles, there is much hard work for us to do in joyful anticipation of the Lord's return. Because **OUR LORD JESUS IS ALIVE**, to be a witness of His Resurrection is **OUR CALLING AS WELL!!!**