

Easter Sunday - Because He Lives _____

If Jesus had not risen he would have been a great teacher, and a form of Christianity may have sprung up based on his teachings and his martyrdom - but it wouldn't be the same. . . I suspect that my life and probably all of yours and the whole world would be radically different. I suspect there would be much more violence and darkness in the world.

You know the story don't you? The Easter story I mean. You know that on the first Easter morning Jesus rose from the grave. Oh you may not know all the details but you know the story. You knew the story this morning when you got up; you knew it last night when you went to bed; you have known it for years; you may have known it for so long that you can't remember a time when you didn't know it. I was baptized as an infant and have attended Church and Sunday school ever since; I can't remember a time when I didn't know that Jesus rose from the dead on Easter morning. I'm glad so many people know the story. I'm glad you know the story.

But that poses a little problem for me and every other preacher on Easter morning each year. Because everyone in church on this morning already knows the story with its spectacular ending it is hard for preachers to come up with new ways to tell. How do we make it new or surprise you with the ending. We certainly can't make the story end any better, "Jesus Christ is risen today, alleluia."

In all my years of ministry I have only met one person who went to Church on an Easter Sunday morning and didn't know that Jesus rose from the dead. And the irony is that when she left church that morning she still didn't know. I want to be clear that it I wasn't preaching and it wasn't a Presbyterian Church. It was a neighboring church in the community where I served before moving here. The uninformed person was a 12 or 13 year old girl whose family had just moved to North Carolina from

California. Her family went church shopping and on Easter Sunday they had attended Methodist Church. I met the girl a few weeks later when she was visiting our youth group. I'm not sure why but she started talking about the Easter Sermon at the Methodist Church and told me that the minister kept going on and on about the big surprise on Easter morning but never told them what the surprise was.

"Well" I said, "I suppose he was talking about the fact that everyone was surprised that first Easter morning when Jesus rose from the dead." "What?" she said, "Someone came back from the dead?" "Yeah" I answered, "On Easter morning Jesus who had been crucified, dead and buried came back from the dead. That's what Easter is about." "I didn't know that." she answered. And she was sincere in her ignorance. She really didn't know. Well she and I talked some more. And I made sure youth covered discussions covered basic Christianity over the next couple weeks.

But of course you all know the story don't you? I mean it's not news to you. I didn't see surprised or puzzled looks on anyone's face this morning when I read the scripture. It's old new to us. We are so familiar with it that we could take it for granted. But we don't. I mean we come to hear it each Easter, don't we? We count on hearing it again on Easter Sunday. We want to hear that Christ arose; we want to hear that death did not hold him; that he defeated death. We want to hear how his victory assures of us of life beyond the grave. We want to hear of how he died for us and rose for us and forgives us and loves us.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to hear that; we should want to hear that again and again. Preachers should preach the old story of Jesus and his love and life again and again. Even those of us who have known the story all of our lives want to hear the story again and again; maybe we even need to hear it again and again. So let me tell you one more time that on that first Easter morning Jesus Christ who was crucified, dead and buried, arose from the dead and he continues to live beyond this world with the Father and all those who have died in his love; and he died out of love for everyone.

But you knew that when you got up this morning didn't you? You believe that truth as much as me maybe more than me or if not more than some of you have believed it longer than me. There is no need for me to go and on. I could stop right now. We could recite the creed, sing the hymn, take up the offering, receive the blessing and go home.

But wait - before we move on I want everyone to take a moment and fill in the blank left in the sermon title, "Because he Lives_____." How do you fill in that blank? What difference does the fact of the resurrection make in your life?

That question has been on my mind all week. I know my life would be radically different if he had not lived. All our lives would be radically different if he had not lived.

If Jesus had not risen he would have been a great teacher and a form of Christianity may have sprung up based on his teachings and his martyrdom but it wouldn't be the same. Jesus may have been revered as highly as the great philosopher Socrates, who was convicted of corrupting the youth of Athens and forced to drink the hemlock. Jesus may have been revered as much as Gautama Buddha the founder of Buddhism. When I was a young man I would have been curious about his teachings and probably revered them more highly than those of any of the other great philosophers, sages, and founders of religions. But I would not be a Christian today. In fact I don't think I would be religious person at all. Oh I think I would believe in God as an abstract concept. Atheism makes no sense to me at all when I consider the wonder of the universe. But I don't think I would be a religious person because for all their good no religion beyond Christianity that touches my soul and makes sense of things. And if Christ had not risen I don't think Christianity would have touched my soul as deeply as it has. I suspect that my life and probably all of yours and the whole world would be radically different. I suspect there would be much more violence and darkness in the world.

But I have just answered the wrong question. I didn't fill in the blank. I partially answered the question "What if he had not lived?" But I didn't fill in the blank question. "Because he lives _____." I tried to give you something of an answer when I wrote the Prayer of Confession for this morning. "Eternal God ...Because he lives we should live boldly, freely and completely for you." I'll stand by that statement but it's not really an answer to the question either is it. It's a partial answer to the question, "What should we do because he lives?"

But it doesn't really fill in our blank does it? And it doesn't fill in the blank space that would be left in our lives if didn't live; the blank space that would be left in our lives if we didn't find meaning and purpose in following his ways; the blank space that would be left in our lives

if we didn't not believe that God loved us; the blank space that would be left in our lives if we didn't believe in his promise of a life beyond this life.

Because he lives I don't feel empty. Because he lives I know life has a purpose.
Because he lives I know God loves us. Because he lives I know that we will live.

There is an old gospel hymn that goes "Because he lives I can face
tomorrow...Because he lives all fear is gone...life is worth the living just because he lives."

It is good that we all know and celebrate the story of Easter morning but what it is even
better and more important is when let the living God fill the empty places in our lives giving us
meaning, purpose, and hope.

All Glory to God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

2281/498 "Because He Lives _____" John 20:1-18 Troy Lewis 10:00 Easter
4/12/09