

Easter Sunday, April 8, 2007, Liturgical Year “C”

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA**

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**“A Resurrection Tour”**

**HOUDINI’S FAILED ESCAPE**

I would like to begin by asking a question, have you ever heard of a man named Harry Houdini? Many of you have. He died in October of 1926. But his claim to fame was that he was a magician who specialized in spectacular escapes.

As a matter of fact, he was said to have laughed at locks and sneered at fetters. They said of Harry that he had the flexibility of an eel. He had the lives of a cat. And people tried all sorts of ways to trap him. They sealed him in a coffin. He escaped. They riveted him into a boiler. He escaped. They sowed him up in canvas bags. He escaped. They locked him in a milk can. He escaped. They even put him in a maximum-security prison. And Harry somehow got out.

But then in October 1926, old man death laid his hands on Harry Houdini and put him in a grave and he has yet to escape. Harry told his wife, if there is anyway out, I will find it. If there is any way out I'll make contact with you and we'll do it on the anniversary of my death. For 10 years she kept a light burning over his portrait. But at the end of 10 years she turned out the light. There was no more use trying. Death had Harry and he couldn't escape.

Well, death laid its hands on the man they called Jesus Christ. And death put Jesus in a rock-hewn tomb. And a stone was rolled in front of that tomb and the Roman government with its guards placed its seal on that tomb. But on the third day, the earth shook, Jesus Christ stirred himself and He rose from the sleep of death. And He left those grave clothes that were wrapped around him and He walked out through the walls of that rock-hewn tomb. And Jesus Christ is alive. He is not behind us in a tomb. He is before us on a throne.

**WHY A RESURRECTION?**

And His Resurrection proclaims to the world that death has been defeated. His Resurrection confirms who He is – that is His Person. It demonstrates that Jesus is in fact who He claimed to be – the very Son of God, God in human flesh. But it also confirms His power - that as the Word of life – He has power over life and death, that He has power over Satan and the hosts of evil. Finally, it confirms His promises of eternal life. Jesus said, ***“I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me shall live even though he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.”*** (Jn. 11:25-26) And of judgment – ***“Behold I am coming quickly and my reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.”*** (Rev. 22:12).

## OUR FUTURE

Clearly, the Resurrection is the pivotal bulwark of our faith. But I'll tell you another reason why the Resurrection is important, it reveals our future. It reveals what awaits us as individuals. And so what I would like to do in the remaining time we have together is to take a little tour. A tour of God's Word and what the Word has to say about our own resurrections. The Bible says, **"Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:17).** So let's start our tour by getting into the Word. Let's see what the Bible says about our future and why the Resurrection is so important. Please turn with me in your pew Bibles to page to **Ezekiel 37:1-14.**

### EZEKIEL 37:1-14

Ezekiel was a prophet of the Lord who ministered to God's people about 600 years before the time of Jesus. In fact he was sent by God to encourage the Jews who were exiled to Babylon (modern day Iraq). And one day Ezekiel is overcome by a vision from the Lord. In this vision, Ezekiel sees a valley and in this valley are dry bones (read vv. 1-4)

Now have you ever been to place with a bunch of dry bones? Ever seen photos of human skeletal remains or hundreds of skulls like in Cambodia or Rwanda? It's quite disturbing, isn't it? There's no life, no movement, just emptiness, nothingness. This is what Ezekiel sees. The Lord asks Ezekiel, **"Can these bones live?"** Ezekiel says, **"Lord, you know."** Ezekiel knows that only God has the power to bring life out of death. God then tells Ezekiel to speak to the bones. Why? It's the Word of God that gives life. Just as God spoke life into existence at the beginning of time (Genesis 1:2), just as God created mankind (Gen. 1:26) with His power, God can put the bones of our bodies back together. And it's not just bones strewn throughout the valley but the skeletons of those in the graves. (read vv. 12-13).

There's no mixing up bones here. God is bringing back to life that which was once dead. God is making whole that which was totally lost. If you ever wonder how God can do it, just think about how we got here in the first place!

Now the prophecy the Lord gave to Ezekiel was of a future event. It was about the restoration of God's people Israel. But it also is a glimpse into the future resurrection of all of mankind; God the Creator, God the Sustainer, breathing life back into that which was dead, bringing light into the darkness. So it doesn't matter what happens to our bodies, whether they are buried in a coffin, cremated, or blown to smithereens. God is going to put it all back together. But what will these bodies be like?

### 1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-57

Please turn now to **1 Cor. 15:35-57.** St. Paul writes, **"...So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being;" the last Adam became a life-giving spirit...The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the**

***image of the man of dust, we will also beat the image of the man of heaven. What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.***"

Not only will our bodies be transformed and put back together by God's power, they will be indestructible, powerful and eternal. They will no longer be of the natural realm, they will be supernatural! "Spiritual" doesn't mean that we will be ghosts but that we will have bodies that will be able to transcend the present physical realm.

We see this demonstrated by Jesus in His resurrected body. His body is the model for our own future bodies. **Philippians 3:20-21: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humble state that it may be conformed to the body of His glory by His power..."**

With our new bodies there will be recognition, instant travel, incredible strength and durability. There will be no more aches and pains. No more being tired and cranky. We will be the way we were meant to be.

This is what we have to look forward to. Not reincarnation, not a ghostly apparition, but living in a new body serving the Lord in a new heavens and earth. And it will happen at the return of Jesus Christ.

For this great gift has to be on God's terms, not our own. And what I just described is a power and glory greater than even the power and glory of man's imaginary superheroes. In fact, in the first Spiderman movie, as Peter Parkers is developing his super powers, his uncle tells him, "With great power, comes great responsibility." That is a spiritual truth.

God will not give His glory, His power, or His wisdom to those who will abuse it. And that's why there is not only the future hope of the resurrection but there is also the future warning of judgment for those who willfully turn their backs on the Lord. Such talk is not popular and we don't like to contemplate such things. But I would be remiss if I did not address it. And even though for the believer judgment is not something to be feared, we need to reckon with it nonetheless.

There will be a final judgment. There will be a final punishment. God is a holy and righteous God, and He doesn't just sweep things under the rug. The prophet Daniel was told by the Angel of the Lord that at the end of the age, ***"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."*** (Dan. 12:2)

### **REVELATION 21:11-15**

Now please turn with me to **Rev. 21:11-15: "Then I saw a white throne and the One who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged**

***according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown in to the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.”***

There are only two destinations for those in our world. You are either in the Book of Life or you are not. One must be careful, however, not to think that what is being described is really salvation based on works. It is not salvation based on works because the Bible is very clear, we are saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (**Eph. 2:8-9**). But if you are following the Lord God, good works will follow. Good works will be produced in you. Not so you can point to them as something *you* accomplished but rather they reflect what God has accomplished through and in you. Remember Jesus said, ***“You will know them by their fruit.”*** At the end of the age our fruit will be there for all to see – both angels and men. The good works in our lives will confirm the grace of God already working within us through Christ. But the lack of good works will reflect the lack of grace in one’s life.

The good news of Easter is that Jesus Christ is Lord and He is alive. And because He lives, we too shall live; not only in spirit, but also in body. But that means trusting Christ completely with all our mind, heart, body and soul. It means saying yes Lord I will follow, I will obey.

And when we do, we will be able to say like St. Paul: ***“Oh death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law, but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”*** (1 Cor. 15:57) In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, AMEN!