

Easter Sunday, March 23, 2008, Liturgical Year "A"
ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA
The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

"Why the Resurrection?"

DID YOU KNOW?

Have you noticed how early Easter is this year? It's March 23! There is still snow on the ground and yet it's Easter. I think there's something wrong with this picture. That's because unless you are 95 years or older, you have never seen an Easter this early. The last time Easter was this early was in 1913. And the next time Easter will be this early will be 220 years from now, 2228. The earliest Easter can be is March 22 and that won't happen until 2285.

Some may be asking why all the different dates? It is because Easter is always the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox (March 20). This dating of Easter is based on the lunar calendar that the Hebrews used to identify the Passover, and is why it moves around in date on our Roman based calendar, which is determined by the sun's movements (ie. a solar based calendar). So now you know a little Easter trivia.

THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION

What isn't trivial, however, is what this day represents. In fact, its importance cannot be overstated. The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the pivotal event in human history. Everything that we believe and hope for hinges on that one event. It was the culmination of why Jesus came. It was the climax of His life and ministry on earth. If Christmas is one book end of Christ' life, and His Ascension the other, then His resurrection is the high point in the library of His life.

Without the resurrection, we would not be here today, there would be no Christian Church, there would be no hope whatsoever for mankind. I mean think about it for a moment. What else is there? Islam? Eastern Religion? Animism? Paganism? Communism? Atheism? What else is there that can truly give us hope? What else is there that can truly transform mankind for the better? Nothing. There is absolutely nothing else.

Now in years past I have given several sermons that highlight why we can know that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an historical fact, why we can know that it's the truth. But what I would like to do this morning is highlight why the resurrection is so vitally important for ourselves as individuals and for this world of ours.

You see often times when we celebrate something on a regular basis; we can forget why it is so important. We can loose sight of its significance. We can lose the focus that it helps to bring. And this is true when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now the way we regain this focus is by looking at why Jesus rose and what did and does His resurrection accomplish. What does it reveal to us today?

Now as you might suspect, there are many passages in God's Word that answer that question, but there is one passage in particular that encapsulates the essence of why the resurrection is so important. It is found in **1 Peter 1:3-9**. Please turn there with me.

Easter Sunday, March 23, 2008, Liturgical Year "A"

Now let's read verse 3 again: "**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by His great mercy He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**"

IT CONFIRMS WHO JESUS IS

The first thing the Resurrection shows us is that Jesus is who He said He was. It reveals to us the Person of Christ. That He indeed is the Lord. Please turn with me to **Daniel 7:13-14 and Mt. 26:63-64.** Not that Jesus identifies Himself with the "son of man" figure in Daniel's prophecy.

Jesus is the Son of Man. Such a title refers to His Kingship. And you can't have an eternal Kingdom if the King is dead. If there is to be an everlasting Kingdom, the King must live forever. If Jesus just died and that was it – He could not be this everlasting King.

He is also the Son of God. At His baptism the voice of the Father declared "***This is My beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased.***" (Mk. 1:11). And on the Mount of Transfiguration God declared, "***This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased, listen to Him.***" Jesus told Peter and James and John to tell no one of this vision until He had risen from the dead. When Jesus was with His disciples, He spoke of His unique relationship with the Father, He addressed God as My Father and He also said, "***He who has seen Me has seen the Father.***" (Jn. 14:9).

He is the I AM of the people of Israel. In **Ex. 3:2**, Moses saw the burning bush that was not consumed. And God spoke through the burning bush. While God was known as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He then revealed himself to Moses as "**I AM.**" Jesus declared He was this same God when He told the Jews who prided themselves in that Abraham was their father and they needed no one else, "***Before Abraham was, I AM!***" (Jn. 8:58).

And as Lord of life and death, He has the authority and the power to lay His life down and to take it back up again. In other words, death has absolutely no power, no say over the risen Christ. Every other world religious leader, every other king, prophet, priest and politician is dead and buried and gone from this earth. **Except for one - Jesus Christ.**

And so the resurrection confirms the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as both God and man. That Jesus is the one true Lord. For Paul tells us in **Philippians 2:10-11**, "***at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.***"

IT CONQUERS SIN AND DEATH

But Christ's resurrection does not just confirm who He is as the Son of God, it also deals once and for with the problem of sin and death. It is Christ's resurrection that conquers sin and death. It reveals the purpose of Christ's coming.

Why do we die? The reason is very simple - sin. It is not a popular subject. People tend to squirm when sin is the topic of discussion, but it is a distinct reality. The fact remains we are all sinners and we die a physical death as a result. **Romans 3:23** says "***For all have sinned***

Easter Sunday, March 23, 2008, Liturgical Year "A"

and fall short of the glory of God." And **Romans 6:23** says, **"For the wages of sin is death."**

God told Adam and Eve that because of their sin, the world would be cursed. I don't like it and I know you don't like it, either, but it is our reality and we all have to go through it, whether we like it or not. And there are only three responses when it comes to sin: you either deny it, wallow in it, or you confess it – admitting that you are wrong and you need help. And for those who confess their sins we are told in **1 Jn 1:9** that **God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."**

But why? Why does God cleanse us from all unrighteousness? Because God loves us and one of the ways He shows us His love is by being merciful. What did we hear in **1 Peter 1:3**? **"According to His great mercy."**

I remember hearing about a woman who went to a photographer to have her picture taken. When she saw it, she didn't like it. She took it back and told the photographer, "You'll have to take this over." He asked, "What's wrong with it?" She said, "It doesn't do me justice." He looked at the picture and then looked at her and said, "Lady, you don't need justice; what you need is mercy."

God is just, but we need mercy. And if you have never come to place where you have seen yourself as a sinner lost before Almighty God and cried out to Him for mercy, then you'll never be born again.

Romans 6:23 may say **"For the wages of sin is death,"** but we also must remember the second part, **"but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord!"** And all we have to do is receive that gift. God has given us that gift as a result of His mercy and grace. That's the starting point of being born again – the new birth. And it has been wrought through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But now what are we born into? St. Peter tells us.

IT CHANGES US FROM THE INSIDE OUT

"...A new birth into a living hope..." This is the third purpose of the resurrection. It reveals God's plan for mankind. What is this plan and living hope? It is the transformation of our bodies, souls, and spirits. You see it is the reality and hope of the resurrection that changes us from the inside out. The New Agers like to talk about the god within. That we can have and do what we want and experience fulfillment from within ourselves – this is just the old lie of Satan. The serpent told Adam and Eve in the garden that "you can be like God without God." And that is totally wrong.

The truth is the key to life is not just being changed from within, but it is allowing God to change us from within. In **1 Thess. 5:23**, St. Paul prays that God keep our spirit, soul and body be preserved completely until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, there is **the Spirit** – that eternal part of ourselves. **Ecclesiastes 3:11** says that **"God has set eternity in the hearts of man."** That longing and zest for life to go on – and the

Easter Sunday, March 23, 2008, Liturgical Year "A"

planning for a future comes from the spirit within us. (cf. **Eccl.12:7; Prov. 20:27**) This is what distinguishes us from the animals. We each have a unique spirit that is eternal. And it is our spirit that is transformed by the Holy Spirit when we turn to Christ (**Romans 8:15-16**).

Second, there is **the Soul** – our emotions and mind. Our soul can only be satisfied by the One who made it. Jesus came to tell us that yes, indeed, we can have a personal relationship with the Living God and that He came to give us rest for our souls (**Mt. 11:28-29**).

Finally, there is **the Body**. **Ps. 139:13-14** tells us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. God gave us our bodies. He designed them and He will transform them into bodies that will not be subject to disease, decay and death. That's why concerning our bodies and their coming resurrection, the Apostle Paul wrote in **I Cor. 15:42-44** concerning our bodies: ***"It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body."***

All three will be transformed and are part of our promised inheritance that we just read in **I Peter 1:4: "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you."** And notice in verse 5, that through it all, we are protected by the power of God through faith... for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

So do you see why the resurrection from the dead is called a sure and certain hope?

We have hope for the future, we have hope for our own person, and we have hope for our own bodies. That means we can face death without fear. We can face the death of our loved ones without despair. And we can live life knowing that this is just the stepping stone and the training ground for all eternity.

Many of you know that my father-in-law, Richard Patrick, is near the end of his time here on earth. He was diagnosed with leukemia this past November and while the treatments were successful at first, there is now nothing the doctors can do. He is at home with hospice care and can go at any time. And while it has been a difficult journey it has also been a fruitful one – with family and friends, neighbors and church members visiting him and praying with him and for him. He is a man of great faith and courage and I am proud to call him my father-in-law.

But what gives him the strength and courage and hope is that He knows where He is going. And I know that though the Lord may call Him home any day now, I will see him again in glory. And though I want to live my life here on earth for the appointed time I am on it, I also know that my home is not here on this earth, my home is in heaven. And the only reason why I know that my home is in heaven is because of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said to His disciples on the night before He died, ***"I go to prepare a place for you...that where I am, you may also be."*** (**Jn. 14:3**).

That my friends is why the resurrection is so important and why we need to live not merely for ourselves alone and those around us but why we need to live for the One who died for us and rose again! (**2 Cor. 5:15**).

Yes, Jesus Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen indeed, ALLELUIA! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!