

"THE MAN WHO LEFT TOO SOON"

"But Peter followed Him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end."

(Matthew 26: 58)

INTRODUCTION

I believe that only those who have nursed great expectations can know great disappointment. That only those who have fought hard to win can know the pangs of defeat. Only those who have dared to hope can know the depths of despair. And that's why my heart goes out to Simon Peter - one of the most tragic persons connected with the events of Holy Week.

Peter had given it a good try ever since that day back there in Galilee when Jesus first crossed his path and said to him, "Come...follow me." Slowly, but surely all of this talk on the part of Jesus about a Kingdom was getting through to him, making good sense. Rough, blustery and burly type that he was, Peter had grown to appreciate those frail intangibles that Jesus was talking about - things like faith and hope and love.

DEVELOPMENT

But after Palm Sunday, things had started to slip out of control. And it had all happened so suddenly. The opposition lined up against Jesus. For His part, Jesus had ruffled a few feathers in Jerusalem in the early part of the week by throwing the money changers out of the Temple and then cursing a fig tree. After that memorable Thursday night last supper, Peter had tried in Gethsemane's garden to help the cause by swift use of his sword, but all he got for his trouble was a sharp reprimand from Jesus that "Those who take the sword shall perish by the sword".

Then in swift succession came the traitor's kiss, instant arrest, and the trial before the authorities. The big fisherman saw what was happening; he could read the handwriting on the wall. He wanted to protect his own skin. Matthew tells us in his Gospel:

"That Peter followed Jesus...at a distance...as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end".

He figured it was all over - not only the end of the life of this good man he had grown to love, but all that Jesus had come to represent. He saw the curtain coming down with a thud on the drama of Holy Week. Going inside, he sat with the guards to witness the end...the end of all his hopes and dreams.

SITTING TO SEE THE END

I sometimes have the feeling that there are many people today who, like Peter, are sitting...waiting to witness the end. There's so much pessimism in the air; disillusionment blankets many a heart. There's that uneasy feeling that some grim inevitability is moving slowly in upon us. Little hope. Mostly quiet despair.

And sitting seems to be the appropriate posture, for we feel there's so little that we can do. We sit - to watch the end of those peace initiatives between Israel and Egypt; to watch the end of the UN; the end of Western influence; the end of law and order; the end of the city; the end of the Church; the end of credibility and integrity in government; the end of the family; and yes - even the end of God.

TOUGH TO GO ON LIVING

And it's a tough, demanding business trying to go on living with some faith and hope as we feel these "ends" of our world coming closer and closer to us. There's that feeling of "Oh, what's the use...it's just a matter of time". Such a feeling seems to lead us in the direction of a new isolation in the nation - public and personal.

Not too long ago I heard a speaker reflecting upon the past decade who offered the observation that many of the young people in the "Jesus movement" were "burned out" activists of the mid-sixties who found that they couldn't change the world in two or three Summer vacations, and so they retreated - (cults) many of them - into a strange womb of piety. Trying to help history along is about as futile as re-arranging the deck chairs on a sinking Titanic.

Then, too, along with this creeping isolation one also senses a new hedonism among us. "Grab all the gusto you can; you only go around once!" Take the pleasures of the moment - for there is no tomorrow. It leads to fun, to games, and ultimately to boredom. We seem to believe that if we plunge into enough pleasurable activity that what's wrong out there will somehow eventually go away - maybe it's only fiction after all.

Which reminds me of a cartoon which caught my eye. It showed a rather harassed and upset motorist next to the rear tire of his station wagon which obviously had a flat tire. It was a hot, broiling July Saturday afternoon out there on the turnpike. Traffic was heavy. No help in sight. His kids were peering out the rear seat window offering all sorts of helpful advice. The tag line has the exasperated father responding with these words, "But kids...we can't switch the channels; this isn't TV. This is the real thing!"

Most of us just rough it out...glad I suppose for the daily routine that keeps us busy and from having time to dwell upon ultimate meanings. We try to keep a straight face as we make "ultimate concerns" out of attempts to curb inflation or seek a raise, or think about the next election, the next vacation, the pennant race, the latest scandal. Sometimes we get ourselves involved in the "non problem problems" of Madison Avenue as they invade our homes - ring around the collar perhaps, or the effect of the ratings on a TV show.

The truth of the matter is that when your life and mine are void of any semblance or concern for the transcendent they sink slowly into the absurd. And "Peter followed Him at a distance...as far as the courtyard of the High priest and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end".

Soon he would deny his Lord - which is to say that he would renounce His vision and His way and walk away from it all. Nothing was left. Just a feeling of emptiness...a hollow emptiness.

GOOD NEWS OF EASTER

But then came Easter, and the good news of that first Easter morning was that Peter had left too soon. He should have stayed. The word was that the world was not coming to an end - a stop, but rather it was coming to a start - a fresh beginning.

God got into the act. He intervened. He reversed the sentence that men had imposed on Jesus, on all that He had stood for. "on the third day He rose from the dead". Those who had come to Joseph's garden prepared to mourn left running and rejoicing. "He is not here. He has risen". Death had done its worst and its worst was not enough. God had pronounced His divine "Amen" on all that Jesus had done and said. This Kingdom He had been talking about did

have a future. The twilight through which Peter had passed was not the twilight of the night, but rather the twilight of the dawn!

MEANING / TWO LEVELS

This event we celebrate today has meaning for us - profound meaning for us - on at least two levels.

First, at the personal level, Easter means that death need have no power over us. I believe that with even greater certainty than the Psalmist of Israel; we can affirm, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil". We can place our loved ones to rest in the sure and the certain hope of life beyond this, an Eternal Life - brought to light through the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

But this Easter event also has something to say about the meaning of history. I think we dare not so privatize Easter that it has to do only with individual men and women and the life to come. Easter has a lot to say about history - personal, national, global. We need to remember this.

This resurrection event affirms God's intention to establish His kingdom here on earth. It is not His aim to evacuate the faithful from this scene, but rather to work through men and women who share this glorious Galilean vision - to bring the Kingdoms of this world beneath the rule of God.

This does not mean that every human alignment now standing will continue to stand - that current balances of power will prevail, that the institutions to which you and I are accustomed will survive unchanged, that familiar forms and structures will continue as we've known them and loved them. But it does more assuredly mean that God's purposes for people will ultimately prevail; that service will triumph over exploitation; that generosity will triumph over greed; that freedom will triumph over bondage; ~~that generosity will triumph over greed~~; that grace will triumph over sin; that love will have the last word. This is all caught up in the meaning of Easter.

And to live by faith is to believe that this is so! Against Auschwitz and Hiroshima; against Belfast and Bangladesh; against assassinations of good men, and yes - against the petty hatreds and private antagonisms of our lives, God sets the resurrection of His Christ and invites our trust and response. It was as one who trusted and believed that Nicholas Berdyaev said:

"It is not possible for my faith to be shaken by man, however low he may sink; for this faith is ground not on what man thinks about man - but on what God thinks about him".

In the light then of the Easter faith, we are to keep busy with God's unfinished tasks here on earth - remembering the spirit of Paul who wrote:

"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."

ONE DAY TURNED IT AROUND

One day turned it all around for Peter, and what a day it was! Let the message of this one day turn it all around for you. Let it put new faith in your life - for Easter is God's grand "nevertheless" flung into the face of all that would assert itself against His will.

Yes, Peter left too soon! To think that he might have gone the way of Judas and possibly missed that day. One day brought him back. One day can do as much for us.

CLOSING I've always been fond of the poem "Columbus" by James Russell Lowell. The poet in the lines of this poem feels his way into what it must have been like to have had the vision of Columbus and then to have had to face the obstacles he endured - first, on land...then at sea. Toward the end of the poem, the crew puts pressure on Columbus to go back. All those days at sea and no sign of land. Food supply...water supply diminishing. They plead with him, almost to the point of mutiny, to turn back, to head for home.

But Columbus begs for one more day. He cries out:

"God, let me not in their dull ooze be stranded;

.....

One poor day!

Remember whose and not how short it is!

It is God's day; it is Columbus'.

A lavish day!

One day - with life and heart -

Is more than time enough to find a world".

Friends, it is God's day! Well may the trumpets sound this day. Well may our hearts rejoice and be glad. For God - not man - has had the final word.

PRAYER "One day, ~~like~~ with life and heart, is more than time enough to find a world."

For this Day - Easter Day - O God...opening as it does to us the larger areas of life, we give You our thanks.

Take our natural impulses and stretch them. Confirm and strengthen within each of us the message of this day. Let it turn things around for us, even as it did for Peter long ago. All this we ask in the spirit of the Risen Christ. Amen.

"THE MAN WHO LEFT TOO SOON"

TEXT: "But Peter followed Him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end"
(Matthew 26: 58)

INTRODUCTION Only those who have nursed great expectations can know great disappointment. Only those who have fought hard to win can know the pangs of defeat. Only those who have dared to hope can know the depths of despair. And that's why my heart goes out to Simon Peter - one of the most tragic persons connected with the passion of our Lord.

Peter had given it a good try ever since that day back in Galilee when Jesus first crossed his path and said to him, "Follow me". Slowly, but surely all of this talk on the part of Jesus about a kingdom was getting through to him, making good sense. Rough, blustery and burly type that he was, Peter had grown to appreciate those frail intangibles that Jesus was talking about - things like faith, and hope, and love.

DEVELOPMENT But after Palm Sunday things had started to slip out of control. It had all happened so suddenly. The opposition lined up against Jesus. For His part, Jesus had ruffled a few feathers in Jerusalem by throwing the money changers out of the Temple and then cursing a fig tree. After that memorable Thursday night supper, Peter had tried in the garden to help the cause by swift use of his sword, but all he got for his trouble was a sharp reprimand from Jesus. "All those who take the sword shall perish by the sword".

Then in swift succession came the traitor's kiss, instant arrest, and the trial before the authorities. The big fisherman saw what was happening, he saw the handwriting on the wall. Matthew tells us in his gospel,

"that Peter followed Jesus...at a distance...as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end...."

It was the end - not only of the life of his dear friend, but of all that Jesus had come to represent. The curtain was coming down with a thud on the drama of Holy Week. "He went inside and sat with the guards to see the end!"

SITTING TO SEE THE END I have the feeling that there are many today who sit right where Peter sat that night long ago - to see the end. There's so much pessimism in the air; disillusionment blankets many a heart. There's that uneasy feeling ~~in the air~~ that some grim inevitability is moving in upon us. ~~Too many today are sitting to watch the end.~~

And sitting is the appropriate posture, for we feel there's nothing more that we can do. We sit - to watch the end of the UN; the end of western civilization; the end of law and order; the end of credibility and integrity in government; the end of the civil rights movement; the end of the family as we've known it; the end of the city; the end of the church; the end of religion; and yes, even the end of God!

And it's a tough and demanding business trying to go on living with some degree of faith as these ends of our world come upon us. At times we sense a new isolationism building across the nation, both at the public and personal level. A feeling

of "what's the use"...it's just a matter of time...a decided retreat from history.

I heard a speaker recently say that many of the young people in the "Jesus movement" today are "burned-out" activists who found that they couldn't change the world in two or three Summer vacations, and so they have retreated into the womb of piety. Trying to help history along, they feel, is about as futile as re-arranging the deck chairs on a sinking Titanic.

Then, too, along with this one senses a new Hedonism among us. Let's take the pleasures of the moment - for there is no tomorrow. As the gospel according to Schlitz has it, "Grab all the gusto you can - you only go around once". So many live in an endless round of fun and games and boredom.

If nothing matters - ultimately, it is hard to see how anything, even personal pleasure can matter presently. Perhaps we believe that if we plunge into enough pleasurable activity that what's wrong out there will somehow go away....maybe it's only fiction after all.

1. I'm reminded of a cartoon which caught my eye recently which showed a motorist half underneath his station wagon which obviously had a flat tire. It was a hot, broiling August sun under which he worked off to the side of the turnpike. His children were peering out the rear seat window offering all sorts of helpful advice. The tag line has the exasperated father responding with these words, "But kids....we can't switch the channels; this isn't TV. This is real".

Most of us just rough it out, glad I suppose for the daily routine that keeps us busy. We try with a straight face to make "ultimate concerns" out of attempts to curb inflation; the next election; the next boycott; the latest scandal; the next vacation; the next raise. And occasionally we allow ourselves to become absorbed in the "non problem problems" of Madison Avenue as they invade our homes - ring around the collar; the deodorants that lose their power after five o'clock; the single razor that doesn't quite do the job the first time over.

The truth of the matter is that when your life and mine are void of any semblance or concern for the transcendent they sink slowly into the absurd.

"Peter followed Him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end".

Soon he would deny his Lord, which is to say, he would renounce His vision and his way, and walk away from it all. There was nothing left...just a hollow emptiness.

GOOD NEWS OF EASTER But then came Easter, and the good news of Easter is that Peter left too soon. It was that the world was not coming to an end, a stop, but rather it was coming to a start....a fresh beginning.

God intervened. He got into the act. He reversed the sentence that man had imposed on Jesus, and on all He had stood for. "On the third day He rose from the dead". Those who had come to Joseph's garden prepared to mourn left rejoicing. Those who had come walking in gloom left running with joy. "He is not here. He is risen."

Death had done its worst, and its worst was not enough. God had pronounced his divine "Amen" on all that Jesus came to do, to say, and to be. This kingdom He had been talking about did have a future. The twilight through which Peter had

passed was not the twilight of the night, but rather the twilight of the dawn!

MEANING ON TWO LEVELS

This event that we come to celebrate this day has profound meaning for us on at least two levels.

At the personal level Easter means that death need have no power over us. With even greater certainty than the Psalmist of Israel, we can affirm, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil". We place our loved ones to rest in the sure and certain hope of a resurrection to an eternal life - through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

But this Easter event also has something to say about the meaning of history. I think we dare not so privatize Easter that it has to do only with individual men and women and the life to come. Easter has a lot to say about history - personal, national and global. How we need to remember this.

This resurrection event affirms God's intention to establish His kingdom here on earth. God's aim is not to evacuate the faithful from this scene, but to work through men and women who share this glorious Galilean vision - to bring the kingdoms of this world beneath the rule of God.

This does not mean that every human alignment now standing will continue to stand - that current balances of power will prevail, that the institutions to which you and I are accustomed will survive unchanged, that familiar forms and structures (even the church) will continue as we have known them and loved them. But it does more assuredly mean that God's purposes for people will ultimately prevail; that service will triumph over exploitation; that generosity will triumph over greed; that freedom will triumph over bondage; that grace will triumph over sin; that love will have the last word ~~over the forces of hate; that right will win out over wrong~~. This is ~~part~~ of the meaning of Easter.

And to live by faith is to believe that this is so. Against Auschwitz and Hiroshima, against Belfast and Bangladesh, against assassinations in Memphis and Dallas and Los Angeles - yes, and against the petty hatreds and antagonisms of your heart and mine, God sets the resurrection of His Christ and invites our trust and our response. It was as one who trusted that Nicholas Berdyaev could say:

"It is not possible for my faith to be shaken by man, however low he may sink; for this faith is ground not on what man thinks about man - but on what God thinks about him"

In the light then of this Easter triumph, we are to keep busy with our Father's unfinished business here on earth - in this place, in this city. And we do this in the spirit of Paul who declared:

"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed".

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I've long been fond of the poem "Columbus" by James Russell Lowell. The poet in those lines feels his way into what it must have been like to have had the vision of Columbus and to have faced the obstacles - first on land, then at sea - that he had to endure. Toward the end of that poem the crew puts pressure on Columbus to go back. All those days at sea and no sign of land. Food supply, water supply diminishing. They plead with him, almost to the point of mutiny, to turn back and head for home.

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A lavish day! One day, with life and heart,
Is more than time enough to find a world".

It is God's day! Well may the trumpets sound this day! Well may our hearts be glad. God has had the final word.

PRAYER Easter Day,
For this ~~Day~~, O God, opening as it does to us the larger areas of
life, we give thee our thanks. Take our natural impulses, O God, and
stretch them. Confirm and strengthen them on this day of resurrection. Let this
day and its glorious message turn things around for us, too, as it did for Peter.

And let that life that was in our Risen Lord now be in us, and let it be radiated from us and through us to others, that our world may be lifted from gloom and pessimism to new life, through Him. Amen

"THE MAN WHO LEFT TOO SOON"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
Easter, March 30, 1997

"THE MAN WHO LEFT TOO SOON"

INTRODUCTION

This is the one and only Sunday of the year when I am permitted to share with you a warm touch of humor involving a woman who once confronted me at the door following an Easter service, complaining..

"Why is it that every time I come to your Church you're always singing the same hymn, 'Christ, the Lord, Is Risen Today?'"

If I had been fast enough and quick enough, perhaps I should have responded with a "Happy Thanksgiving"...or, a "Merry Christmas"...and a few other thoughts.

TODAY'S TEXT

It's nice to have a full Church, and a Happy Easter to all of you. Today's text for this Easter message is taken from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 26 and verse 58 where it reads...

"But Peter followed Him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest....and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end."

My heart goes out to Peter...sitting there with the guards to witness "the end". Only those who have nursed "great expectations" can ever know the feelings of great disappointment. Yes, only those who have fought hard to win can ever really know the pangs of defeat. Only those who have dared to hope....can ever fully know the depths of despair. That's why my heart goes out to Peter...Simon Peter...one of the most tragic persons tied in with the events of Holy Week.

You know his story and how he had given it such a good try ever since that day back there in Galilee when Jesus first crossed his path and said to him, "Come, Peter...come and follow Me!" And he had and slowly, but surely all of this talk on the part of Jesus about a Kingdom was getting through to him...making good sense. Rough, blustery and burly type of man that he was, Peter had grown to appreciate those frail intangibles that Jesus was talking about....things like faith....and hope....and love....and trust.

But then after Palm Sunday, things had started to slip out of control and it had all happened so suddenly. The opposition lined up against Jesus. Oh, for His part He had ruffled a few feathers in Jerusalem earlier that week when he tried to toss the money changers out of the Temple and then curing a fig tree. He didn't make any new friends with that. And then, after that memorable Thursday night Passover Meal, Peter had tried in Gethsemane's Garden to help the cause by the swift use of his sword, but all he got for his trouble was a sharp reprimand from Jesus, "That those who take the sword shall perish by the sword...." Then in swift succession came the traitor's kiss, instant arrest, a mock trial before the authorities. Peter - the Big Fisherman - saw what was happening. He could read the handwriting on the wall.

He wanted to protect his own skin and so we read in Matthew's Gospel,

"That Peter followed Jesus, at a distance...as far as the courtyard of the high priest...and going inside he sat with the guards....to see THE END."

I'm sure he figured it was all over...not only the end of the life of this good man whom he had grown to love, but the end of all that He had stood for. The curtain was coming down with a real thud on this drama of Holy Week. What was ahead? Back to his fishing up in Galilee? He sat there with the guards to witness the end...the end of all of his hopes and dreams.

SITTING...TO SEE THE END

Perhaps, like Peter....you've been there, too. Your heart goes out to him. There are those in our midst, all around us...sometimes we fail to see them....people for whom life has lost its meaning, its challenge. Despair. Pessimism. Disillusionment. Sometimes as you try to listen to them...on the deeper levels....you sense that there's an uneasy feeling about the days ahead, the future....that some grim "inevitability" is moving in on them...moving in on you.

"Sitting"....it seems to be the appropriate posture, for there's "so little" that one can do. World events as well as personal concerns may be in the picture, too. World events cause concern and trying to help history along....why it's as futile for us...as trying to arrange the deck chairs on a sinking Titanic. "Oh, what's the use...it's just a matter of time". And it's a tough matter and a trying business to go on living with some faith and hope as we feel the "ends" of the world creeping in closer and closer to us. We throw up our hands...

What do we do as this blanket of despair descends? Some, of course, will grab "all the gusto they can"....taking pleasure in the pleasures of the moment. "You only go around once". Fun and games and ultimately boredom. We seem to feel that if we plunge into enough pleasurable activity that what's wrong out there will eventually right itself and all will be well....maybe it's only fiction, after all.

Remember that cartoon that showed a harassed and upset motorist next to the rear tire of his station wagon which obviously had a flat tire. It was a hot, broiling July Saturday afternoon out there on the Thruway...cars whizzing by at 70 miles per hour...nobody stopping...kids peeing out the back window offering bits of advice. And the tag line on the cartoon has this exasperated dad responding with these words,

"But kids....we can't switch the channels. This isn't TV....this is the real thing...."

There are times when it is not easy and somehow we rough it out, glad I suppose for the daily routine that keeps us busy and from having to dwell upon "ultimate meanings". We manage to keep a straight face as we make "ultimate concerns" out of attempts to curb inflation or find a job, or seek a raise, or focus on the next election, the next vacation, the next trip to the doctor, the next pennant race, or the final game of March madness. We all do it!

The truth of the matter is that when your life and mine are void of any semblance or concern for the "transcendent", they sink slowly into the absurd. Peter followed at a distance and sat with the guards to wait for the end. You may be sitting there, too...with him. Soon Peter would deny his Lord, which is to say he would renounce His vision and His way and walk away from it all, feeling that there was nothing left. Just a feeling of hollow emptiness and the atmosphere around you filled with despair.

GOOD NEWS OF EASTER

But move with me to the next page. And remember that Easter came, and Peter got up from where he had been sitting and ran to the garden tomb and there received the "Good News"... the "Great News" that his world was not coming to an end. Christ had risen. Peter...almost left too soon. But he came back and discovered that things were just beginning to start, to take off.

God had gotten into the act. God had intervened. He reversed the sentence that man had imposed on Jesus, on all that He had stood for! Those who had come to "Joseph's lovely garden" that morning to mourn left running and rejoicing on all that they had seen and heard. "He is not here. He is risen". Death had done its worst and its worst was not enough. God had pronounced His divine AMEN on all that Jesus had stood for and had said. This Kingdom He had been talking about did indeed have a future. He was there...with them...and this twilight through which Peter had passed was not the twilight of the night, but rather it was the twilight of the dawn!

MEANING ON TWO LEVELS

For myself, this event that we come to celebrate has profound meaning for us all on two levels.

First, at the personal level....yes, it means that death need have no power over us. Because of Easter, I can believe that, with even greater certainty than the Psalmist of Israel, we can affirm:

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death....I will fear no evil...for Thou art with me.."

We need to remember that...not just today, but all year long. Always. We need to remember that we can place our loved ones to rest in the sure and certain hope of a life beyond this, an "eternal life", brought to light through the death and the resurrection of Jesus, our Lord.

But, this Easter event also has something quite profound to say about the meaning of history. I think we dare not so "privatize" Easter that it has to do only with individual men and women and the life to come. Easter has a lot to say about history - personal, national, global. There is ultimate meaning to it all. We do "reap what we sow". There is a moral law. This resurrection event affirms God's great intention to establish His Kingdom here on earth. It is not His aim to "evacuate the faithful" from this arena, but rather it is to work through men and women who share this glorious Galilean vision - to bring the Kingdoms of this world beneath the rule of God.

It may not happen in our lifetime, but one day it will. This does not mean that every human alignment now standing will continue to stand and that current balances of power will prevail, that the institutions to which you and I are accustomed will survive unchanged and that familiar forms and structures will continue as we have known them and loved them.

But it does more assuredly mean that God's purposes for people will ultimately prevail and that service will triumph over exploitation and that generosity will triumph over greed and that freedom will triumph over bondage. It means that grace will triumph over sin and that love - yes, LOVE - will have the last and final word. All of this is caught up in the meaning of Easter. All this we would celebrate.

The English poet, G. A. Studdert-Kennedy, captures it all so well in his poem, The Gambler, which some of you heard in our Good Friday service. But hear it again,

"And sitting down, they watched Him there,
The soldiers did;
There, while they played with dice,
He made His sacrifice...
And died upon the Cross to rid
God's world of sin.

He was a gambler, too...my Christ,
He took His life and threw
It for a world redeemed.
And ere His agony was done,
Before the westering sun went down,
Crowning that day with crimson crown,
He knew that He had won!"

To live by faith is to believe that this is so! Against the antagonisms and the hatreds of people, God sets the resurrection of His Christ and invites our trust and our response. As one who trusted and believed that that Nicholas Berdyaev once wrote,

"It is not possible for my faith to be shaken by man, however low he may sink...for this faith is grounded not on what man thinks about man, but rather on what God thinks about him...."

And so it is dear Easter friends....in the light of this glorious Easter faith that we are called to remain faithful and to remain busy with God's unfinished tasks here on earth - of which, yes, there are many.....but we do this remembering something that Paul said,

"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed...."

ONE DAY One day turned it all around for Peter. And what a day it was! There may be some present this day...to let the message of this Easter Day turn it around for them. From where you have been sitting....in despair, feeling alone...let it get you up and get you running and moving. Let it put new faith in your life and in all you do. Remember that Easter is God's great, "NEVERTHELESS" flung into the face of all that would assert itself against His will. Yes, Peter...Peter

Almost... left too soon but one day brought him back...and to think that he might have gone the way of Judas and possibly missed that day. That day brought him back and it can do as much for us.

James Russell Lowell's poem, "Columbus" has long been a favorite of many. The poet in the lines of the poem feels his way in to what it must have been like to have had the vision of Columbus and then to have to face the obstacles he endured - first, on land...then, at sea. Toward the end of the poem,

the crew puts pressure on Columbus to go back. All those days at sea...and with no sign of land. Food supply diminishing. Water reserves disappearing. They plead with him, almost to the point of mutiny...to turn back, to head for home, to give up the dream, the vision. But Columbus begs for one more day and he cries out,

"God...let me not in their dull ooze be
stranded;

....

One poor day!
Remember whose and how how short it is!
It is God's day. It is Columbus'.
A lavish day!

One day, with life
and heart - is more than time enough to find a
world."

Friends. This is God's day. And well may the trumpets sound this day. And well may our hearts rejoice and be lifted....and made glad. For God - not man - has had the final word. Amen. And AMEN.

PRAYER

Make us sensitive to Your nearness and to Your presence in these moments as we thank You for the life, the love and the death and the risen Jesus...opening as it does to us the larger areas of life. Help each of us to make the most of them...never to be satisfied with the shallows of cynical, doubting and skeptical minds.

Take our natural impulses, O God...and stretch them. Confirm them and reassure them on this day of resurrection. Give to each of us the power and the grace to go forth from here....into our world...and to live as though Christ were alive in us...that our world may be lifted to new levels of life and love. In the spirit of the Risen Christ, we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

As we now prepare to celebrate our Easter Faith and its glorious message of new life, let us begin our worship by coming together in a time of silent meditation.

Let it be for each of us a time in which we prepare ourselves expectantly that the spirit of the Risen Christ may be very real to us in this time of worship. In silence...in quietness, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

MEDITATION

We rest our hearts in the Promise of Jesus who said:

"I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in Me, though he were dead....yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

Said Paul:

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us....."

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life - nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers....nor things present, nor things to come - nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature - shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

"For this day of days, O God, we bless Your name. With angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we rejoice that death is finished..that love prevails....that Christ is alive and present here....to help and to heal."

PRAYERS / LORD'S PRAYER

Touch with healing those whom we mention in our prayers this Easter Day:

JIM AND DANA RANDALL / FRANKLIN KEYSAR / CHARLES SCARDINO / ERIC DE FREITAS ?
ROBERT, BROTHER OF NORMA / JOE WEDDINGTON, SR...FATHER OF LYNN WEDDINGTON TUCKER /
MARY TUCKER, MOTHER IN LAW OF LYNN TUCKER / JEAN LLOYD / JOSEFINA GARCIA / DAISY
HERRICK / A FRIEND OF CATHY BOSE / BETTY STAGEMYER / ED ECKLUND, FATHER OF JULIE KLEIN

beloved members and friends of this congregation. Comfort the bereaved and the broken hearted among us....be close to those who in recent days have lost a loved one. Heal each of us at the point of our deepest need....for we ask all of this in the powerful name and the lifting spirit of Jesus who taught us to pray, saying:

"Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name.
Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever. Amen."

PASTORAL PRAYER: April 12, 1998

O GOD, OUR FATHER...FATHER OF OUR SPIRITS and FATHER OF ALL MANKIND -

We thank YOU that we may gather here this hour,

Not for a MEMORIAL SERVICE to a dead prophet,
But for a FESTIVAL OF THANKSGIVING for a conquering Christ!

Remind us, once again, of the empty Cross,
of the empty Tomb, and
of that truth of all truths,

That the Spirit of Jesus is ever alive in our world, present where
we are to have dealing with our trials and troubles, our lust and
our loneliness, our sin and our sorrow...and to have ULTIMATE
DEALINGS with our death.

In all we do this EASTER DAY, make real to us HIS SHINING PRESENCE,
and HIS RESURRECTION'S quiet joy.

WHEN days of discouragement come to us, give us the Easter assurance that
Your eternal purposes are at work.

WHEN we struggle with the difficulties of life and do not know which way
to turn, turn us again to the Easter Faith that sees Your Presence
quietly removing heavy stones that block a path to life and greater
meaning.

WHEN days of sorrow come to us...and when our loss seems unbearable...like
Mary let us hear You call us by name. Assure us that all is not
lost, that the grave is not the goal of life, and that we are not
alone!

WE NOW OFFER to YOU our thanks for this Easter Day in April and for all that
it means to us.

WE PRAY for the hungry and hurting, the homeless of our society.

WE PRAY for peace among the nations of the world and our prayers
this hour reach out to include the leaders of our land,
and for all in positions of authority and responsibility.

WE PRAY for loved ones, no longer with us, but now "gone home" to
be with You - a part of Easter past ... in the great Kingdom
of light.

TOUCH OUR restless, doubting minds with the profound message of this Day,
that we may depart from here BELIEVING that with YOU there is no
death, that with YOU "all things are possible...that all things
work together for good to those who love and serve You". In
the strong name and lifting spirit of the Risen Christ, we offer
You our prayers.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: April 12, 1998 / Easter

PARISH CONCERNS

- A. Our parish concerns are "lifted up" for you in the bulletin, and I would invite you to review them on "your own"...noting:
- That next Sunday evening the Membership Committee will be holding its Spring "Conversations in Membership"...at 6 pm...for new friends who are interested in learning more....strengthening a tie with it.
 - Also, next Sunday, we shall welcome William Proctor back to our church...to the pulpit....author of the book, The Resurrection Report, the book the Tuesday evening study group has been reading and reviewing. Gifted writer and speaker, it will be good to welcome Bill, a former Lay Leader, back to this church.
 - Thanks to all who helped make the 144 Easter baskets at last Sunday's coffee hour for the children of the YCP...and also thanks to all who shared in making it possible for this beautiful Easter altar and chancel.

GREETING / VISITORS

- A. We greet all of you - young and old alike - on this Easter Day. To each and to every one of you go our warmest wishes for a joyous and lifting celebration of the Easter Faith!
- If you're a visitor...take a moment to fill out...or sign....BE FREE in the sharing....Come, worship...come, work with us.....time permitting, join us....
- B. It's nice to have a full church....if you can't hear..up there in the balcony, lift a hand....
- C. We've been doing the Lord's work at this busy corner...1837. 4th building...roots are deep in the soil....we minister in the name of Christ and it is in His loving spirit that....

EASTER APPEAL

- A. Easter offering this year will help us meet our responsibilities both here at home and in other places out there "in the city... and the world". Grateful for your response to our Easter appeal.

(over)

B. Jesus said:

- "Give and it will be given you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together...running over... will be put into your lap, for the measure you GIVE will be the measure you get back."
- Indeed, as Jesus said: "It is more blessed to give than it is to receive". In this spirit, let us worship God with our gifts, our tithes, our offerings to His work....

FORMER MEMBERS PRESENT

A. Always a joy to welcome back dear friends from other years, other days....active here in this city.

- George and Sally Gill...Sarah's mother and dad... are with us....having recently moved from the Chicago area back to the Easter....Farmington, CT.
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