

"WHAT THE RESURRECTION DOES"

INTRODUCTION

Today is the first Sunday after Easter. By now, most of the churches across our land, are pretty much back to normal. The services are back to their usual number and length. The congregations are back to their normal size; in some instances, I fear, they may be less than their normal size. The flowers and the music are the same today as they are on most Sundays of the year.

The world around us looks just about the same now as it did the Sunday before Easter. The war in Vietnam continues; men are still being killed. A site for the proposed peace talks has not yet been arranged. Racial tensions still continue here at home. As a matter of fact, the Mayor of Chicago announced earlier this week that the police of that city have permission to "shoot to kill" arsonists and looters. Senators Kennedy and McCarthy are still warming up for the big one in Indiana - the primary scheduled for early in May. And about the only things that have changed since Easter as far as I can see are that we've paid our taxes, a telephone strike has occurred, Linda LeClair of Barnard apparently is going to be disciplined by the Judicial Council for her violation of housing regulations, and that both the Mets and the Yankees have managed to win a game or two this past week.

So quickly and so completely have the church and the world returned to normal that one might well ask this question: what difference did Easter make? Did the event of Easter make any difference at all. To be sure, it was a day of rare beauty and brightness in a dark and troubled week that witnessed the assassination of Martin Luther King. I'm sure that Easter gave a real boost to the spirits of a great many people. But I cannot help but wonder as to whether Easter made any real difference in the life of the church - this church, for instance - or whether it made any real difference in the lives of people - the people, for instance - who helped to fill this church last Sunday. Did Easter make any difference in the life of the world. Did it come and go without leaving any trace of its passing? Or are there, if we look closely enough, signs of its movements across the waters of life?

WHAT DIFFERENCE DID THE FIRST EASTER MAKE

Perhaps before we attempt to answer that question, we should ask ourselves another question: what difference did the first Easter make? On the surface, I think, we would have to acknowledge that it didn't seem to make a great deal of difference to the world in general - at least not right away. Pilate was still the governor of Judea after Easter as he had been before, and he went on serving as governor for another five years. Caiaphas was still the high priest and he continued to preside over the rites of the Temple in the same rigid and inflexible manner as he had always done. The Scribes and the Pharisees were still the same. That long, winding road that ran from Jerusalem down to Jericho was, I dare say, still unsafe for travel. The tax collectors still bled the people whenever and wherever they could; the money changers were soon back at their tables in front of the Temple in Jerusalem. Rome still ruled with an intelligent, but iron hand, and the Jews still fretted and chafed under that rule and if the common people ever knew what had happened on Good Friday and Easter Sunday, they soon forgot about it.

But having said this, we must go on and acknowledge that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead did make a tremendous amount of difference in the lives of a few people. For instance, it made a tremendous difference in the life of a man whose name was Paul. Of all of the people to whom the resurrection of Jesus did something, Paul was certainly the most outstanding and the most articulate. It converted Paul from a persecutor of the faith to an apostle of the faithful.

What I should like to do here this morning is set before you two things that the Resurrection of Jesus did to Paul. He was very explicit about it. He wrote about it as something he expected to happen to the people who were to read his letters, and we have every reason to infer that what he expected from them, he had experienced himself.

WHEN JESUS DIED, SOMETHING IN PAUL DIED, TOO

And so this is what we find, and I'm not at all sure as to whether this is the best way to express it. In the first place, we find that when Jesus died, something in Paul died, too. Jesus, mind you, really died. He actually stopped breathing; it was a physical death and he ceased to exist as a human being. On the other hand, when I suggest that something in Paul died, I am speaking figuratively. What Paul was suggesting was, I think, what you and I have heard people often say in one way or another. For instance, a husband and a wife whose lives have been intermingled for fifty years or more come to the moment when the husband dies. The wife may say something like this, "When my husband died, something in me died. I go on existing from day to day, but my life in so many ways ended when my husband died". And so you see when Jesus died, something in Paul died, too. The NY Times editorial page on the Fri. morning after the Thurs. night

But we must move on from this parenthetical point about the figurative use of this word to this important consideration. Paul did not see Jesus die; he only heard about it later on. He was not one of the actual witnesses of the event. He wasn't on the scene that Friday in Jerusalem, and he didn't hear about it until it was all over. But once he did hear about it, it made all of the difference in the world. The death of Jesus was something with which he could identify himself. And when Paul identified himself with the death of of Christ, something died in him. He died, or as he tried to explain it to his followers later on, he said that sin died in him. The appeal of sin no longer had any real power over him at all. Seeing what human sin and selfishness did to Jesus, to a good man, he was so sickened by it that it never again made any real appeal to him or had any real power over him.

I tried to think of something that would bring this a bit closer to us and help us to visualize it. I thought of the time that Lincoln as a young man traveled down the Mississippi to New Orleans. He had been accustomed to slavery as a system of society all of his life. But there in the city he saw something that shook him to his foundations. There he saw slaves being sold in the open market. What he saw so disgusted him and sickened him that any and every appeal that slavery might possibly make to him died in him forever.

crucifixion

And so when we try to see exactly what the resurrection did to Paul, we must begin with some experience such as that, enlarged a thousand times. When Jesus died, the appeal and power of sin in Paul died, too.

WHEN JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD, SOMETHING IN PAUL ROSE, TOO

Then, in the second place, we find that when Jesus rose from the dead, something in Paul also rose from the dead. He was not present at the event of the resurrection any more than he was present at the site of the crucifixion. But once again, identifying himself with the events in the life of our Lord, he found himself strangely, almost miraculously charged with new life! We gather that only once did he have any direct experience with the risen Christ and that was on the road to Damascus. All the rest of the time he only saw the reflections of that life in the lives of his followers. But as he identified himself with both the death and the resurrection of Christ, he could say that he was dead unto sin and alive unto God.

This, I think, is what we would have to say the resurrection did to him. It stirred into life all of his finer potentialities and qualities. It quickened his response to the highest that there was. He was never perfect, and the baser elements in him were never completely conquered, but they no longer made any basic appeal to him, they no longer made any real claim on his life. He was dead unto them and live unto God. In one of his letters he described it as putting off the old and putting on the new. In another place, he spoke about "a new man in Christ".

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And in his letter to the Colossians, a part of which I read earlier in the service, he made it quite clear what that new man was like. I have never done this before, but this time I put down on paper the characteristics of this new man and in so doing I found that you could arrange them under three headings - these differences between the old man that Paul had been and the new man that he became. These are the three things:

First: As a new man in Christ, he had a control over his body that he had not had before. He was now the master of his passions and his emotions in a way that he had never been before the resurrection. His emotional energies were channeled in a new direction. This was the first thing.

Second: As a new man in Christ, he had an entirely different attitude toward his fellow human beings. He had no real malice toward anybody. He showed no real discrimination between people regardless of their religion, their race, or their social position. And that - mind you - was a great achievement for a Jew, a strict Jew like Paul - to say that he had no feeling at all that there was any difference between himself and a Gentile. For an aristocrat like Paul to take in a slave and treat him like a brother....this was a tremendous change, and this actually took place. His attitude toward his fellow human beings changed - kinder, more forbearing, forgiving, generous. All of this as a result of the resurrection.

Third: As a new man in Christ, he had the peace of God in his heart. He had been so restless - so full of worries and anxieties about himself. But now - as a result of this event, he suddenly had the peace and the power of God at the center of his life. And what a change this was. The old Paul was dead. This was a new man who stormed on to the Biblical stage after his experience with Christ on the Damascus Road. Something in him had died when Jesus died. Something in him came to new life when Jesus came to life in the events of that first Easter.

SOMETHING NEW FOR EASTER

We turn now to consider what all of this means to us, for once again I think our interest in these things is from the point of view of our own lives and the problems that you and I face as we make our way through life.

As I was thinking about this I was reminded of something that took place a number of years on an Easter Sunday in our Sunday School. One year we had an early service for the boys and girls of our church, one floor above us in Fellowship Hall. I didn't preach a sermon or make a talk (in the formal sense of the word) - but rather I talked to them informally, moving up and down the aisle and speaking to different children. I remember them well; they all looked so bright in their new Easter outfits. I asked how many of them were wearing something new for Easter. And hands went up all over the room. I asked one seven year old boy what he had on that was new and he showed me his necktie and took off his belt. Both of them were new.

I went from child to child until we had established that almost everyone had on something new. And then I asked them why they were wearing these new things on Easter Day. One little girl put up her hand and said something like this:

"Everybody was bright and happy when Jesus rose from the dead. We are bright and happy now and that's why we are wearing these new things"

And I thought to myself that she was quite near the truth. And here this morning at the end of this service I would like to ask you this same question with a deeper meaning, of course: are you wearing anything new as a result of Easter? For instance, are you wearing a coat of new confidence so that you can walk without fear through the darkness of life? Are you wearing a new garment of understanding of your fellow human beings? Are you less prejudiced, less bigoted? Are you clothed with a new humility - a new gentleness - that perhaps you didn't have before. Has the resurrection given you anything new to wear, or are you wearing the same old rags, the same old jealousies, the same old fears, the same old twisted up thoughts. There are so many different ways of manifesting this new life which Paul describes as "the new life in Christ".

One final word. The children give us the last clue, as they so often do. Their parents gave them the clothes. They didn't provide them themselves. They couldn't. You can't either. You can't weave these garments entirely on your own, out of your own materials and by your own efforts. The parents provided them with the clothes, but the children had to put them on and wear them gladly. God has provided us with the clothes we should wear in the man from Nazareth whom he raised from the dead. But we have to put them on and wear them - gladly and proudly. And here at the end of this service, I would suggest that we bow our heads and in the privacy of our own lives, pray that this be done - that we may put on the garments of this "new life in Christ".

LET US PRAY Let the life that was in Christ Jesus, O God, be in us, and let it be radiated from us and through us to others. Give us the power and the grace to go out into our world and live as through Christ were living in us, that our world may be raised from death to new life. In the spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen

"If then....you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above....Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth.

Put to death therefore - what is earthly in you: immorality, impurity, evil desire, and covetousness. Put them all away - anger, wrath, malice, slander....

Put on then, as God's chosen ones: compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another, forgiving one another.....

And above all these, put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your heart.

WHAT THE RESURRECTION DOES

INTRODUCTION Today is the first Sunday after Easter. The churches all over the land are pretty much back to normal by now. The services are back to their usual number and length. The music and the flowers are the same as they are on any ordinary Sunday. The congregations, too, are back to their normal size and in some instances, I fear, they are considerably less than their normal size.

The world around us looks just about the same now as it did the Sunday before Easter. The tension in South Africa and in certain parts of our own country continues to exist. Senators Kennedy and Humphrey are still at it in West Virginia. Violence continues to erupt in different parts of the world; missiles are still being developed in all sorts of strange places; we still haven't reached the Summit. And about the only things that have changed as far as I can see are that we've paid our taxes, Gambi and Andrei are no longer making the headlines, and that Yankees managed to win a ball game this past week. Otherwise things look just about the same.

So quickly and so completely have the church and the world returned to normal that one might well ask this question: WHAT DIFFERENCE DID EASTER MAKE? Did the event of Easter make any difference at all? To be sure, it was a spot of beauty and brightness in a dark and dreary world, and on this particular occasion it did seem to take the chill off of what otherwise might have been just another ordinary Sunday in the life of New Yorkers. I'm sure it gave a real boost and a temporary lift to the spirits of a great many people. But I can't help but wonder as to whether Easter made any real difference in the life of the church - this church, for instance - or whether it made any real difference in the lives of people - the people, for instance, who worshipped here in this place last Sunday. Did Easter make any difference in the life of the world? Did it come and go without leaving any trace of its passing? Or are there, if we look closely enough, signs of its movements across the waters of life?

WHAT DIFFERENCE DID THE FIRST EASTER MAKE?

Perhaps before we attempt to answer that question, we should ask ourselves another question: WHAT DIFFERENCE DID THE FIRST EASTER MAKE? On the surface, I think, we would have to acknowledge that it didn't seem to make a great deal of difference to the world in general - at least not right away. Pilate was still the governor of Judea after Easter as he had been before Easter, and he went on serving as governor for another five years. Caiphas was still the high priest and he continued to preside over the rites of the Temple in the same rigid and inflexible manner as he had always done. The Scribes and the Pharisees were still the same. That long, winding road that ran from Jerusalem down to Jericho was, I dare say, still unsafe for travel. The tax collectors still bled the people whenever and wherever they could; the money changers were soon back at their tables in front of the Temple there in Jerusalem. Rome still ruled with an intelligent, but iron hand, and the Jews still fretted and chafed under that rule and if the common people ever knew what had happened on Good Friday and Easter Sunday, they soon forgot about it.

But after having said all that to you, I must go on and say this that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead make a tremendous amount of difference in the lives of a few people. The resurrection of Jesus

made a tremendous difference, for instance, in the life of a man whose name was Paul. I think of all the people to whom the resurrection of Jesus did something, Paul was certainly the most outstanding and the most articulate. As you know it converted Paul from a persecutor of the faith to an apostle of the faithful. And what I'd like to do this morning in the next ten or fifteen minutes is to briefly set before you two things that the Resurrection of Jesus did to Paul. He was very explicit about it. He wrote about it as something he expected to happen to the people who were to read his letters, and we have every reason to infer that what he expected from them, he had experienced himself.

WHEN JESUS DIED, SOMETHING IN PAUL DIED TOO

And so this is what we find, and I'm not at all sure as to whether this is the best way to express it. In the first place, we find that when Jesus died, something in Paul died too. Jesus, mind you really died. He actually stopped breathing; it was a physical death and he ceased to exist as a human being. On the other hand, when I say that Paul died or that something in Paul died, I am speaking figuratively. What Paul was suggesting was, I think, what you and I have heard people often say in one way or another. For instance, a husband and a wife whose lives have been intermingled for fifty years or more finally come to the point where the husband dies. The wife may say something like this, "When my husband died, something in me died. I go on existing from day to day, but my life in so many ways ended when my husband died". And so you see when Jesus died, something in Paul died too. I think you know without my telling you what he was trying to say.

But we must move on from this parenthetical point about the figurative use of this word to this important consideration. Paul did not see Jesus die; he only heard about it later on. In other words, he was not one of the actual witnesses of the event. And I think that this brings him closer to us. Sometimes we think that if we had been there, perhaps, it would have reached us and influenced our lives more than it actually does. We are so far away, so removed from it all that we can only catch a glimpse of it. And so remember this, that Paul in a sense was just as far away from it as we are. He wasn't on the scene, and he didn't hear about it until it was all over. But once he did hear about it, it made all of the difference in the world. The death of Jesus was something with which he could identify himself. And when Paul identified himself with the death of our Lord, something died in him. He died, or as he tried to explain it to his followers later on in the various churches that he established - he said that sin died in him. The appeal of sin no longer had any real power over him at all. Seeing what human sin and selfishness did to Jesus, he was so sickened by it that it never again made any real appeal to him or had any real power over him.

I tried to think of something that would bring this a bit closer to us and help you visualize it. I thought of the time that Lincoln as a young man traveled down the Mississippi to New Orleans. He had been accustomed to slavery as a system of society all of his life. But there in the city he saw something that shook him to his foundations. There he saw slaves being sold in the open market. What he saw so disgusted him and sickened him that any and every appeal that slavery might possibly make to him died in him forever. And so when we try to see exactly what the resurrection did to Paul, we must begin with some experience such as that, enlarged a thousand times. When Jesus died, the appeal and power of sin in Paul died.

WHEN JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD,
SOMETHING IN PAUL ALSO ROSE

Now in the second place, we find that when Jesus rose from the dead, something in Paul also rose from the dead.

He was not present at the Resurrection any more than he was present at the Crucifixion. But once again identifying himself with the events in the life of our Lord, he found himself strangely, almost miraculously charged with the new life. Only once did he have any direct experience with the risen Christ and that was on the road to Damascus. All the rest of the time he only saw the reflections of that life in the lives of his followers. But as he identified himself with both the death and resurrection of Christ, he could say that he was dead unto sin and alive unto God.

This, I think, is what we would have to say the resurrection did to him. It killed something in him, something that needed to be killed. And it stirred into life all of his finer potentialities and qualities. It quickened his response to the highest that there was. He was never perfect, and the baser elements in him were never completely conquered, but they no longer made any basic appeal to him, they no longer made any real claim on his life. He was dead into them and alive unto God. In one place he described it as putting off the old and putting on the new. In another place, he spoke about "a new man in Christ".

In his letter to the Colossians, he made it quite clear what that new man was like. I have never done this before, but this time I put down on paper the characteristics of the new man and in so doing I found that you could arrange them under three headings-- these differences between the old man that Paul had been and the new man that he became. These are the three things. Listen to them because this might happen to you.

FIRST: As a new man in Christ, he had a control over his body that he had not had before. He was now the master of his passions and his emotions in a way that he had never been before. His emotional energies were channeled in a new direction - a better direction. This was the first thing.

SECOND: As a new man in Christ, he had an entirely different attitude toward his fellow human beings. He had no real malice toward anybody. He showed no real discrimination between people regardless of their religion, their race, or their social position. And that mind you, was a great achievement for a Jew, a strict Jew like Paul - to say that he had no feeling at all that there was any difference between himself and a Gentile. For an aristocrat like Paul to take in a slave and treat him like a brother. This was a tremendous change, and this mind you actually took place. His attitude toward his fellow human beings changed - kinder, more forbearing, forgiving, more generous. All of this as a result of the resurrection.

THIRD: As a new man in Christ, he had the peace of God in his heart. He had been so restless - so full of worries and anxieties about himself. But now - as a result of the resurrection - he suddenly had the peace of God at the center of his life. And what a change this was. The old Paul was dead. This was a new man who stormed on to the Biblical stage after his experience with Christ on the Damascus road. Something in him had died when Jesus died. Something in him came to new life when Jesus came to life in the events of that first Easter.

CLOSING SECTION

We turn now to consider what all of this means to us, for once again I think our interest in these things is from the point of view of our own lives, and the problems that you and I have to face as we move through life. This past week as I was thinking about all of this I was reminded of something that took place several years ago on Easter Sunday in the church where I served before coming here to this church. I was the Associate Minister in a large suburban church in upper New York State, and my responsibilities there were mostly with the boys and girls of the Sunday School, and the teen-agers of the youth fellowship programs. The year I was there we had an Easter Service for the children of the church. It was an early service before the regular hour of worship. I was in charge of the service. I didn't preach a sermon to the boys and girls or make a talk - (in the formal sense of the word) - but rather I talked to them informally...moving up and down the aisle and speaking to different ones. I remember them well; they all looked so bright in their new Easter outfits. I asked how many of them were wearing something new for Easter? And hands went up all over the church. I asked one little boy what he had on that was new and he showed me a necktie and took off his belt. Both of them were new.

I went from one child to another until we had established the fact that almost everyone had on something new. And then I asked them why they were wearing these new things on Easter Sunday. One little girl put up her hand and said something like this: "Everybody was bright and happy when Jesus rose from the dead. We are bright and happy now and that's why we are wearing these new things". I thought to myself that she was quite close to the truth.

And here this morning at the end of this service I would like to ask you this same question with a deeper meaning of course: are you wearing anything new for Easter, anything new as a result of Easter? For instance, are you wearing a coat of new confidence so that you can walk without fear through the darkness of life? Have you somewhere close to your heart the peace of God? For instance, are you wearing a new garment of understanding of your fellow human beings? Are you less prejudiced, less bigoted, less pig-headed than you were before Easter? For instance, are you clothed with a new humility - a new gentleness - that you didn't have before? It makes you stop and think doesn't it! At least I hope it is. Ask yourself: has the resurrection given you anything new to wear, or are you wearing the same old rags, the same old jealousies, the same old fears, the same old twisted up thoughts. Like Paul, can you say that you have better control over yourself now than you had before - over your body, your passions, your emotions. You see, when you come down to it, there are so many different ways of manifesting this new life which Paul described as "the new life in Christ".

One final word here at the end. The children give us the last clue, as they so often do. Their parents gave them the clothes. They didn't provide them themselves. They couldn't. You can't either. You can't weave these garments entirely on your own, out of your own materials and by your own efforts. The parents provided them with the clothes, but the children had to put them on and wear them gladly and proudly. God has provided us with the clothes in the man from Nazareth whom he raised from the dead. But we have to put them on and wear them gladly and proudly. And perhaps this is what we ought to be doing a great deal more than we are - in our own lives, in our common lives together here in this church - in the life of our country. And here at the end of this service I would suggest that we bow our heads and in the privacy of our own thoughts pray that this be done - that we may put on the garments of this "new life in Christ".

LET US PRAY:

Lord of all life, as we walk day by day, help us to
live this new life -

Not disappointed when we fail.....
Not expecting perfection.....

But looking always toward that newness of life
which is in Christ Jesus - in which we approach
all men without malice and in which we approach
each other with infinite kindness, understanding,
tenderness and tactfulness.

And by which we will walk with confidence through
the darkness and even through death. We ask this
in the name of Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord.

AMEN