

Easter Sunday 2018: Holy Trinity Church: April 1, 2018

John 20: 1-18: *Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!*

Preached

By

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In the Name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen

When I worked in the laboratory, I had the privilege of meeting up with Dr. Z an economics professor at Providence College. As a 16 year old boy he was part of the Polish resistance during the 2nd world war. He was eventually captured by the SS and sent to Auschwitz where he had been examined on three different occasions by the notorious Dr. Josef Mengele. Mengele told him he had the body of an Aryan, but the pedigree of a mongrel. When I met him again years later, he was near death. The treatment for his congestive heart failure had triggered a stroke. His left side and vocal cords became paralyzed and he suffered from a very painful pleurisy. He lay for weeks in pain and misery connected to life-support systems in the hospital. At one point his heart stopped beating, but just as he lost consciousness, his heart was shocked back to life once again by the doctors. During this ordeal, Dr. Z told

me he asked his doctor to discontinue life-support systems, or to at least show him how to do it himself, so as to relieve the doctor of any moral responsibility. However, the doctor refused. He said that someday Dr. Z would appreciate how unwise was that request when made in a state of pain and suffering. One month later Dr. Z was discharged from the hospital, and in six months' time he had regained the use of his arms and legs and voice. He went back to work as a professor economics. He knew he still had contributions to make. He reflected upon his healing with me one morning after his visit to the lab. Dr. Z said that some people might see his experience as an argument against allowing the requests of patients who want to die to be honored. But, he said that he does not. Having lived a full and happy life, he does not wish to suffer another heart attack, or to burden his wife and children any longer with his infirmity. In his maturity of 80 plus years, he realized that death in Auschwitz at 16 or in a hospital at 80 plus years is not the worst thing that can happen. He quoted to me the Roman philosopher, Seneca who wrote, "the wise man will live as long as he ought, not as long as he can."

I share this story with you because it helps us to appreciate one of the great themes of the resurrection story and the entire Easter event, which is that death, is not the final word in life. In the story of Christ's rising from the dead

we receive a hope that can sustain us and uphold us no matter what happens to us, no matter how difficult our circumstances become in life. People who have lived their lives in faith and are at peace with God and themselves have no need to stand in fear of death. Easter Day is that time when you and I gather together in this church among our families and friends to reflect upon what God has done for us. We come together to worship in wonder and amazement at the resurrection of God's Son Jesus. This is also a time to reflect upon the resurrection of the human race and God's message to us that indeed we can be forgiven for our sins and freed to live in love and peace for all of eternity. So, I ask you tonight/this morning to consider three vitally important messages of this Easter; first is the power of our immortality. The Second power is the ever present Jesus Christ. The Third power is that the way of the cross is the way of love and hope.

First, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead affirms what the New Testament speak of as "eternal life," the belief which Christian disciples hold that our souls are truly immortal and will live forever. But as we travel the rough and rocky roads of life; it is sometimes very difficult to remember that fact. No man or woman here today needs to be lectured on the frail and precarious nature of life on earth. Illness or accident can cut down any one of us at any time. But, when people see themselves as immortal and conceive of

life as eternal, then they will never view death and defeat as the final chapter in human existence.

Second, it is our faith in the resurrection of Jesus that enables us to see disappointments and defeats as simply the conditions of our discipleship. They are the terms on which we must live the life that God has given us. So, we need not let the shattering of our dreams or even the onset of age and illness disillusion us or leave us in despair. Although we know that this life is on the whole very good indeed, we also realize that this life is very short and very important for our afterlife to come.

The fact that our nature is immortal and that God is with us at all times means that we can face the troubles of the world head on. We can take on life's problems courageously, because we need not be afraid to take risks. We need not be fearful, because God will be with us no matter what we do if we follow the way of his Son Jesus. When we make God part of our lives and accept the gift of immortality, then we are freed to make a life of service and sacrifice for other people. You all know how difficult service and sacrifice can be because many times we don't see any immediate results. But seeing the results is not the point. Most likely we will never see results.

Sacrifice in a marriage can be incredibly difficult at times. Sacrifice in time spent with children may appear to be a waste of time if those children reject

their parents and seem to care only about themselves. Taking care of elderly and sick relatives may seem to be a useless drain of time and money, leading to resentment. The energy expended in working with the people with special needs, constant needs or physically handicapped people may seem to be of little value, for the work can be so terribly frustrating and lonely. Your service to the mission and support of your Holy Trinity Church may seem endless and thankless, but just remember a disciples life is meant to be filled up with prayer and love for God and then poured out every day in service and love to one another and a world which hungers for God. Remember those people you sacrifice for and serve are angels sent amongst us, and sent to us and our seeing the results of our work is not important.

Of critical importance is your response in time, service and sacrifice to another human being. Never forget, your response is the result Almighty God wants to see and that in and of itself must be enough for us.

We may not be able to ever see any results, in our own lifetime, but as we grow in age and maturity, we will come to know that many of those people we have known and loved and served in life gather in eternity and wait for us.

Easter is not a "happily ever after" ending to God's story in Jesus Christ. The risen Lord himself calls all of us to live in his joy now and forever. That is what it means to participate in the joy of eternal life. Easter presents us with

an opportunity for a joyful new beginning which can enable us to make sense out of our past and to have hope for the future. The greater message is that we can experience the power of the risen Christ here and now. This is the reason why we are here in Holy Trinity Church on this glorious Easter. Because Christ lives, we can be forgiven, we can be healed, and we can be transformed into new people.

Finally, it is easy to overlook, and sometimes convenient to forget, that Jesus was executed, Jesus was crucified by an unholy alliance of religion, politics, and economic self-interest.

Politics represented in Pontius Pilate, governor of the Roman Empire, representative of that very empire and all of its power.

King Herod, who heard Jesus at one of the trials, representative of the Herodian and economic self-interest at the time.

The Chief Priest, representative of religious aristocracies who had a vested interest in the status quo.

These three powers came together - economic, religious and political - to crucify the one who taught love, the lord your God, love your neighbor, and actually live that way. The truth is the message of Jesus was unsettling to the world then as it is unsettling to the world now. And yet that very message is the only source of hope in life. For the way of the cross, the way of unselfish

living, the way of sacrificial living, always seeking the good, always seeking the welfare of our neighbor before one's own self-interest. The way of the cross is the way of love. The way of the cross is the very nature of God's love. And that way is the only hope there is for the entire human family. The reality of the cross is Jesus way and that way threatens the ways of the world. Look around my brothers and sisters, look at our divided nation. Look at world and the world's ways. I say the way of Jesus is the only hope for this world. On that third day after the crucifixion, when by the titanic power of God, by the power of the love of God, Jesus was raised from the dead. God sent a message and declared that death does not have the last word. Hatred does not have the last word. Violence does not have the last word. Bigotry does not have the last word. Greed does not have the last word. Sin, does not have the last word. Evil does not the last word. Racism does not have the last word. Oppression does not have the last word. The last word is God, and God is love. My brothers and sisters, evil could not stop Jesus. Death could not stop Jesus. . Violence could not stop Jesus. For the love of God, the heart of God, the reality of God is stronger than anything else. And Jesus really rose from the dead on that first resurrection morning. God love you. May God bless you and your families. And, may this Easter season be the first day of the rest of

**our lives. My sisters and brothers in the risen Christ, I say to you: CHRIST IS
RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! SAY ALLELUIA! SAY AMEN!**