

Easter Sunday 2022: Holy Trinity Church: April 17, 2022

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

My brothers and sisters, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

When I worked in a medical clinical laboratory, I had the privilege of meeting, Dr. Zygmunt Friedman, a professor emeritus of Political Science who taught from 1956-1990 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, tortured 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 painful pleurisy. He laid 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. Ziggy told me, he asked his doctor to discontinue life-support systems, or to at least show him how to do it himself, to, relieve the doctor of any moral responsibility. However, his 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 his work as a professor. 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 all of 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 Jesus 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 humanity 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 evening/this morning to consider two vitally important messages for this Easter; first is the power of our immortality and second is the power of the risen and present Jesus Christ. The Resurrection of Jesus from the dead affirms what the New Testament speaks 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.

It is our faith in the Resurrection of Jesus the Christ 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 (PAUSE) 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 Evening/Morning. Because Christ lives, we can be forgiven, we can be healed, and we can be transformed into new people.

There is a beautiful valley in Switzerland which is deeply hidden in that mountain range known as the Alps. That valley is completely surrounded by steep mountain walls. If you enter this valley, you will move along the only road until it ends at the base of a steep wall of rock. The Swiss call this place the "End of the World." However, if you are willing to climb by foot, Swiss guides will show a determined hiker the path that leads up and over that mountain barrier. Reflecting upon this natural phenomenon, I believe that life is like a road that runs through the valley of time. We cannot turn back but we must continue walking onward. The days pass quickly. Then comes the end of the road. We stand at the sheer rock wall we call death. It is the end of our world, for it is the end of life.

But just remember one thing from this sermon, Jesus Christ has been raised

from the dead and we have through him received the gift of eternal life, we find a way up and over that wall of rock because Jesus said, *"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though we die, yet shall we live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die*

Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin was once one of the most powerful men on earth.

He was a Russian Communist leader who took part in the Bolshevik

Revolution of 1917. He was the editor of the Soviet newspaper Pravda. He

was a member of the Politburo. His works on economics and political science

are still read today. There is a story told about a journey he took from

Moscow to Kiev in 1930 to address a huge assembly of factory workers on the

subject of atheism. Addressing the crowd, he aimed his heavy artillery at

Christianity hurling insult, argument, and proof against it.

An hour later he was finished. He looked out upon at what seemed to be the

smoldering ash heap of the factory worker's faith. "Are there any questions?"

Bukharin demanded.

Deafening silence filled the auditorium, but then one man approached the

platform and mounted the lectern standing near the communist leader. He

surveyed the crowd looking first to the left and then to the right. Finally, he

shouted the ancient greeting known so well in the Russian Orthodox Church:

"CHRIST IS RISEN!" The crowd came to their feet and arose as one man

and woman and the response came crashing forth like the sound of thunder:

"HE IS RISEN INDEED!" My brothers and sisters in the risen Jesus Christ, I

say to you Holy Trinity Church: CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN

INDEED! SAY ALLELEUIA! SAY AMEN!

Amen.