

“Jesus Is Risen - For All”

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March 27, 2016

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I. INTRODUCTION

A minister was writing his Easter sermon. The minister was writing his Easter sermon all about the resurrection of Jesus. The minister was writing his Easter sermon at home and his young daughter was watching him. His young daughter asked, “Dad, how do you know what to write?” Her Dad said, “Why, God tells me what to write.” His young daughter said, “Then why do you keep crossing things out?”

Where does resurrection come from? Well, Lazarus was resurrected from the dead by Jesus, although resurrection is found in more than just Christianity. Jews and Samaritans believe God will one day resurrect the righteous. Muslims and Buddhists believe in resurrection. Ancient Greeks believed in resurrection, men and women becoming immortal. Cryonics, the freezing of the human body, to one day bring it back to life, is a form of resurrection. Zombies, which are a fictional idea of resurrection, have made quite an impact on the thinking of people, particularly young people. Lots of zombie movies have been made over the years, including funny ones, like Young Frankenstein and Shaun of the Dead. But again those are fiction. Still, we can see the reality of resurrection all around us. From caterpillars resurrected as butterflies, to bulbs resurrected as flowers, and to seeds resurrected as vegetables and trees.

II. A MODERN-DAY EXAMPLE

I saw a resurrection this past week. Apple sent me some update for my iPhone. Evelyn Wood would've been proud of how I read the agreement in a couple of seconds before I hit, “Agree.” After the update was installed, the proverbial stuff hit the fan. My Calendar was empty. My Contacts were half empty. I had had it. I resolved to give up ALL of my electronic devices. I would get my Grandma's 70-year-old typewriter fixed and write my sermons on that. I'd use a paper calendar. And I'd get a land line and an address book. Then, I took a breath, sanity returned, and I brought my iPhone to a nearby Apple store. Within 15 minutes an Apple Genius had it fixed! My Calendar was back! My contacts were restored! All was right with the world! My iPhone had been resurrected! It was an Easter miracle! I told the Genius at the Genius Bar, “Thank you.” Then I told her that if Apple ever puts in an Idiots Bar, I'd apply for a job.

Why does resurrection have such appeal? Well, probably because we don't want to see things die. We don't want to see our loved ones die. We don't want to see ourselves die. I didn't want to see my iPhone die. My wife gets all sad when we have to put out our dead tree after Christmas. When I was a TV news reporter, I did a story once about people who had their dead pets stuffed. They would put Fido by the fireplace, as if their dog was still alive. They would put Tigger on the couch, as if their cat was still alive. Their pets may not have been resurrected, but for them it was the next best thing. People watch reruns of old TV shows perhaps because they don't want to see their favorite TV characters die. Occasionally I watch reruns of “Boston Legal” and “Arrested Development.” Denny Crane, Alan Shore, and the Bluth family may not be resurrected, but it's the next best thing. Christians 2000 years ago did not want to see Jesus die, but he did. And believers believe he was resurrected.

III. A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE

Luke tells us about Jesus' resurrection. Women - not men? oh my - women went to the tomb on that Sunday morning about 2,000 years ago. Women found the stone rolled away. And women did not find the body of Jesus. The women, instead, saw two men in dazzling clothes. The women were frightened. Then the women heard the men say, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."

What does the resurrection of Jesus mean? Well, to some Christians, the resurrection of Jesus means that he was physically resurrected and is in heaven, seated at the right hand of God. To some Christians, the resurrection of Jesus means that he was spiritually resurrected and is all around us. And to some Christians the resurrection of Jesus means that he wasn't actually physically or spiritually resurrected, but he's alive in our hearts whenever we follow the teachings of Jesus of peace, love, and joy. In one of my seminary classes we had a discussion one day about: Where is the body of Christ? The Bible tells us that Christ ascended to the heavens, so the body of Christ must be somewhere, up there, in the heavens. But where is it? After listening to my classmates and our professor discuss this for a while, I raised my hand and said, "Well, I thought that we are the body of Christ, that the church is the body of Christ." The professor kind of rolled her eyes and said, "Yes Bill, but some of us take the Bible literally, and therefore, Jesus' body must be up there somewhere." And then the discussion continued without any real conclusion. Now you can believe whatever you want to believe about the resurrection of Jesus. That's the beauty of being at a UCC church. So, do you believe that Jesus was physically resurrected? Do you believe that Jesus was spiritually resurrected? Or do you believe that Jesus just resides in each one of our hearts?

IV. ANOTHER BIBLICAL EXAMPLE

First Corinthians has a message for us all. Paul tells us that if we hoped for Jesus in this life only, we are to be pitied. Paul tells us that Jesus has been resurrected. And Paul tells us that we all die - like Adam. And Paul tells us that we all live forever - like Jesus. In other words, because we come from the dust of the earth, we all die - like Adam. And because we come from God, we all live forever - like Jesus.

Does all mean all in this passage? In other words: Did Jesus lead the way from death to eternal life only for Christians? Or, did Jesus lead the way from death to eternal life only for Christians and Jews? Or, did Jesus lead the way from death to eternal life for Christians and Jews, Buddhists and Hindus, Muslims and all of us? If Jesus was a universal Savior, you'd think he would want all of us - all of us - to live in heaven with him forever. If Jesus was a universal Savior, you'd think he would want all of us - all of us - his neighbors and his enemies, to live in heaven with him forever. And if Jesus was a universal Savior, you'd think he would want all of us - all of us - Americans, Mexicans, Canadians, Europeans, Africans, Asians, Russians - all the children of the world - to live in heaven with him forever. Jesus did not exclude anyone in his earthly life. So why would Jesus exclude anyone in his resurrected life? Jesus said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." There's that word again. All. Not some. Jesus did not say: Come to me, some who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Jesus said: Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. By "rest" he doesn't mean, I'll let you take a nap. He's talking about heavenly rest. Somewhere over the rainbow. With God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and all the angels and saints. Everyone of us. All of us.

V. A CONTEMPORARY COMMENT

I had a friend in college. In our freshman year, he was visited by a couple of Christians in his dorm room. The Christians told him about Jesus. The Christians told him about heaven. And the Christians asked him repeatedly: Don't you want to go to heaven? Don't you want to go to heaven? Don't you want to go to heaven? Finally, my friend had had enough. So he asked the Christians: If I go to heaven, are you guys going to be there? The Christians said, "Well, yes, of course we will." So my friend said, "Then I don't want to go to heaven."

What will we do on this side of heaven? So Jesus is risen on this Easter morning, so what? Will we spend our time eating Easter candy, eating Easter dinner, and watching television? Probably. But what else will we do? Will we do justice, will we love kindness, and will we walk humbly with God? Hopefully. Will we feed the hungry, will we clothe the naked, and will we welcome the stranger? Hopefully. Will we love our neighbor as ourselves, will we love our enemies, and will we forgive everyone? Hopefully. Otherwise, what did Jesus die and rise again for? So that we can only eat Easter candy, eat Easter dinner, and watch television? Hopefully not. We don't have to give all that up. But we do have to do things to demonstrate that we follow the teachings of the one who is risen on this Easter morning.

VI. CONCLUSION

It's like an Easter hymn. "Christ The Lord Is Risen Today." Where we sing, "God has opened paradise, Alleluia!" But God hasn't opened paradise just in the hereafter. God has opened paradise in the here and now. Heaven is above us. And heaven is all around us. If we have eyes to see. And ears to hear. And we need to share that heaven on earth with others.

How do we get others to see heaven on earth? By loving others. By helping others. By forgiving others. By showing others the risen Jesus in ourselves. As Paul says, Jesus is resurrected. Yes. Jesus is risen - for all - so we will love all. Which will bring joy to all. That's why they call the story of Jesus: the good news.

VII. CLOSING PRAYER

Let us pray: God of Love,
Help us to spread the good news.
Help us to know that the good news is: Jesus is risen - for all.
And help us to love all and to have a Happy Easter!
Now and forevermore. By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus. Amen.