

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD (A) *The Rev. Peter C. Jacobson, STS*
 Acts 10:34a,37-43; Col 3:1-4; Matthew 28:1-10 Gloria Dei Lutheran Church
 April 24, 2011 Wichita, Kansas

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

We've said it. We've announced it. Do you believe it?

More than a few churchgoers these days have gotten the idea that you can't believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus if you want to be a sophisticated, educated person. And it's certainly not just laity. Many clergy are leading the way. Consider a few examples from actual Easter sermons:

"On Easter Day, the world takes a turn for the better."

"In their table fellowship after the crucifixion, the heartbroken disciples gradually came to sense that Jesus was still with them."

"The early Christians came to believe that love is stronger than death."

"The disciples came to believe that Jesus lives forever in the faith of those who trust his message."

or even:

"[Easter is about] the enduring symbols of ultimate truth."

Those statements aren't necessarily false, but the problem is, they're not the Gospel either. They are pleasant enough. They are nice ideas and philosophies, but again, they're **not** the Gospel! The good news of Easter is not a philosophy. The good news of Easter is not a pleasant idea. The Easter Gospel is simply this: Jesus of Nazareth — crucified — is ***risen from the dead!***

In her book, *The Undoing of Death*, Episcopal priest, Fleming Rutledge writes:

*"I believe in the resurrection of the **body**"...*

That's what we say when we recite the Apostles' Creed...

*"I believe in the resurrection of the **body**"...*

*Immortality of the soul was such a commonplace belief
 in the Hellenistic world of Jesus and the apostles,
 that even though it was not a Jewish idea,*

*no one would have been surprised to hear it.
Similarly, we today hear people talk of rebirth, life after death,
personal immortality, reincarnation,
and all kinds of other generic religious beliefs
almost as a matter of course.*

*[But] Only Christianity speaks of the resurrection of the **body**.*

*Suppose for a moment that the angel in [the Gospel] story
had stood outside the...tomb and said to the women,
“The spirit of your Master lives on,”
or “The immortal soul of Jesus has gone into heaven.”
Maybe this would have comforted the women.
Maybe it would have encouraged them to pick up their lives,
warmed them with a religious glow and a sense of possibility.
Maybe.*

*In view of what they had witnessed at Golgotha, **I doubt it.**
In any case, this is **not at all** what the [Gospel writer] describes.*

(pp. 241-242)

Fleming Rutledge surely writes the truth. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is **not** some kind of **symbol** of faith reborn. It's **not** a symbol of hope revived in the face of death. It's **not** a symbol of the new life of spring. The resurrection of Jesus **isn't a symbol** of anything! It is what it is: God's incarnate Son, Jesus, conquering sin and death! God's incarnate Son, Jesus, **bodily raised from the tomb!** And this bodily resurrection of Jesus is nothing less than the fulcrum — the hinge — of world history. It is **the singular event** which changes everything! The power of sin, death, and the devil is defeated, because Jesus is risen from the dead!

The Rev. Franklin Clark Fry, was the first president, back in the early 60's, of the Lutheran Church in America — the church body to which Gloria Dei belonged. One of the stories told about him is of the time he and his wife went to a funeral director to pre-plan their services.

Now, Pr. Fry was already dying of cancer, and among others things, they went out to the cemetery to choose a burial plot. Pr. Fry inquired about the price of a particular plot. And when the funeral director told him the price, he was quite surprised at how expensive it was. Indeed, he gasped for breath. “*That much!*” he exclaimed, “*and for only three days!*”

It is said that the funeral director failed to see the humor in his comment.

Without a doubt, the serious and somber events of Holy Week — culminating in this morning's proclamation that “Christ is Risen!” — they are what gave Pr. Fry his sacred sense of humor, and allowed him to tease the funeral

director — even as he stood looking down at his own grave site. Taking the cross and resurrection seriously, meant that Pr. Fry didn't have to take himself so seriously — even in such a weighty moment as facing the inevitability of his own death.

And it works for us too. When we begin to take seriously all that God the Father has done for us in the death and resurrection of his only Son, then we can begin to take ourselves a little less seriously — even when it comes to matters of life and death — even indeed, if we find ourselves staring at our own graves.

In today's Gospel, when the women hear the good news from the angel that Jesus "*has been raised from the dead,*" they run to tell the disciples. And notice, St. Matthew says they do so "*with fear and great joy.*" This wonderful, incredible good news that Jesus has risen, fills them with *great joy!* **But** they still also have some *fear*.

Faith in the resurrection of Jesus doesn't mean you've got it all in hand. Faith in the resurrection of Jesus doesn't mean you never fear or wonder or doubt. But, in the midst of any such fear, or wonder, or doubt, Jesus promises *deep and abiding joy*. It is his gift to you — this morning, and every morning.

Jesus has been raised! And because he has been raised, you will be raised as well!

Jesus lives! And because he lives, you will live as well!

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

