

4 April 2010
The Resurrection of our Lord

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Vienna, VA

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“Not Better; All New!”

Text: Luke 24:1-12; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 (Isaiah 65:17-25)

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
[He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] Alleluia.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

There is a lot of talk this time of year, and indeed, all throughout the year, that the role of religion is to make this world a better place. Whatever the religion, whatever the beliefs, however it is taught to do that, and by whom, that that is the goal and purpose of religion: to improve ourselves, to improve the world, to make a difference.

But Jesus did not come to make this world a better place. I'm sorry, he didn't! As we heard again last night, He made this world a good place in the beginning - a very good place - and we ruined it with our sin. Adam, Eve, you, me - the list of sinners is long and distinguished. And if Jesus had come to make this world a better place, you know what? We would simply ruin it again. It happens in our lives, it happens in the world. Sin breaks our lives, our relationships, our marriages, our families, our friendships. Sin tears people apart and causes division. Sin causes strife between nations and ethnicities. Sin seeks to divide, to conquer, to use, and to manipulate.

And so - the religions of man, the religions of the world say - we must overcome these things. We can, and we must. Through brotherhood, through greater effort, by reaching down to the good that is in us all.

Well, it's been tried. And it has failed. *For thousands of years* it's been tried, and it has failed. It cannot be done. The poison of sin runs too deep, and breaks out always, everywhere. In us, in others. Despite our good intentions. Despite our *best* intentions. Trying to stop sin is like the little boy who tried to plug the leak in the dam by sticking his finger in the hole, only to have another hole pop open, and then another, and then another. And soon, the whole dam comes down.

That is what sin is doing to us and our world. Poking holes in us. Decaying us. Killing us. . . . *Ah, there it is!* For even if we could fix every other problem, we cannot fix that. We cannot fix death.

So make this world a better place? No. ***“If in Christ we have hope in this life only,”*** St. Paul told us today, ***“we are of all people most to be pitied.”*** What a little and pitiable hope that is.

So no; let other religions and teachers set such little goals - Jesus has not come to make this world a better place, but to rescue us from what we have done. To rescue us from our sin, from the death that is a result of our sin, and from hell that is our destination because of our sin.

For you see, what Jesus has done today - this day of resurrection - is not repair the dam, but poke holes in hell! He has come to destroy the devil, his work and his kingdom, that he have no more power over us. And so give to us not a patched up, repaired world, but a new kingdom - as He promised through Isaiah: ***a new heavens and a new earth.*** Something so completely new and different that not with these old bodies could we live in it - no, but with bodies resurrected and made new. New, with sin forgiven. New, with sin, death, and the devil banished, from our bodies and from our lives.

For, St. Paul said, ***“Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”*** That means that Christ is just the *first* of those who will rise from the dust of death, which now to Him is nothing more than rising from sleep! ***“For,”*** St. Paul continues, ***“as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.”*** And so yes, *our bodies too* will rise from the sleep of death to live in the new heavens and the new earth with Jesus in righteousness and purity forever.

But so new! So wondrous is this! That’s why they didn’t get it. The ladies who went to the tomb that morning of the third day. They were expecting everything to be the same as when they left it on Friday; they were looking for the old - old body, old death, old grave, same old, same old. That’s why the angels ask: *what are you doing?* ***“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”*** Or in other words, why are you looking for the old? He has made all things new! (Rev 21:5)

That’s why the disciples didn’t get it either, and thought the women were spinning idle tales. And that’s why so many today don’t get it, who think Jesus is here to fix the old - that He is a great moral teacher. No! Today we proclaim something much, much greater than that! **Jesus is risen from the dead** to make everything new. **Jesus is risen from the dead**, and so nothing can ever be the same again. He bore our sins on the cross and atoned for them. He broke the grip of death in His

resurrection. And in His descent into hell, He humiliated satan and stripped him of his power.

What other person or power could accomplish that? Could deliver us from such enemies? Could promise us such a future? Truly, there is no other. Therefore, He is our hope in the sickbed and at the graveside. When enemies threaten and foes growl. When burdens loom large and seem about to crush us. They cannot win. We have the One greater than all, and **He is risen!** He has won.

And not just some fairy tale or future hope is this, while we languish here in this world and life. For, in fact, already now Christ is working in us, raising us to a new life and giving us His resurrection and victory - though it may, for now, be hidden in flesh that grows old and wears out.

But in your baptism, you have been given this victory and life now. For just as Pharaoh and his army could pursue Israel only to the Sea and no further, and were drowned in those waters, so too your sin can pursue you to these waters but no further! For here they are drowned, and can hound and pursue you no more. You are forgiven and free. Free to live your new life. A Christ life.

Though, to be honest, that's frightening, isn't it? Living a new life in an old world. A loving life in a hate-filled world. A forgiving life in a revenge world. A generous life in a selfish world. Or, as one recent book put it, "*Living a Good News Life in a Bad News World.*" That's why the women and the disciples were frightened. The new is frightening because the old is so comfortable. The new is so different than we know; so different from what we're used to.

But look around. Shall we go back to the old? Shall we live a *Bad News Life in a Bad News World*? Shall we cower at sickness and death as if *they* had won? No, no, NO! **The last enemy to be destroyed is death**, and it *has* been defeated. For Christ is risen, He is risen indeed, and nothing is the same.

And so today we rejoice! We rejoice with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, as we join them and they join us at the Supper of our Lord, where our risen Lord Jesus gives us His Body to eat and His Blood to drink, forgiving our sins and making us new. Putting into us that Life that cannot be extinguished, that Life that died and rose again, that Life that trampled down satan, that Life that left the grave behind and ascended into heaven, where we one day too will rise. Our journey complete, but our life just beginning. A life begun here, already now, and lasting for eternity.

And the funny thing is, as you live this new life here and now, you *do* make this world a better place to live. As you live the life of Christ, as you speak the Word of

Christ, as you give the love of Christ, and as you forgive with the forgiveness of Christ. For in all these ways, you are showing the world that new life, that better life, that life of the world to come. And how can that *not* make a difference?

So rejoice this day! And belt out your alleluias! For Christ, your life, has made you new. For Christ, your life, has changed everything. For Christ, your life, is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] Alleluia! Alleluia!

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.