

**Resurrection-That’s No Laughing Matter**

**Matthew 28:1-10**

**April 16, 2017**

**Easter Sunday**

Grace and peace to you from the Resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

He is risen! He is risen indeed!

We always start out with some humor on Easter. This tradition was started with a former Pastor who said Easter was the biggest joke God played on the devil. I’ll tell you why Easter’s God’s joke in a minute, but first here we go…

So, why do we celebrate Easter? Easter commemorates when Jesus hid eggs for the disciples to find, and then for his greatest miracle, he turned all the rabbits into chocolate, right?

Everyone should know this one considering we do an Easter egg hunt every year. Why do the Easter eggs hide? Well, of course it’s because they’re a little chicken…

You know we all come here for our Easter breakfast, but where does the Easter Bunny go for breakfast? At the IHop of course…

Here’s one for Roxanne. Why’d the Easter Bunny bang his head on the piano? He was playing by ear…

So, Jesus walks into a hotel. He puts three nails on the counter and says to the clerk, “Can you put me up for the night?”

I’m no comedian so I think I’ll stick to my calling to proclaim the Good News. That News is that He is risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia!

The Easter claim we all believe and trust is the ultimate test of faith. The one great defining moment that ultimately divides believers from unbelievers. Is the resurrection of Jesus from death real? There’s not much room for middle ground on this central question of our faith. St. Paul confirmed this reality when he wrote in I Cor. 15:14 “If Christ has not been raise, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.”

You can’t have it both ways: Either Jesus actually rose from the grave or he didn’t. You can’t say he rose in spirit, but not body, although some try… Even after 2000 years the event of the Easter resurrection of Jesus brings joy to broken hearts and confidence to souls worried about their eternal destiny. The physical resurrection of the body of Jesus from death has shattered the grip of fear that confronts every living human being. People want to know what happens when our heart stops beating. Is there hope? Is there nothing? Is there Valhalla? Is their “reincarnation”? What is waiting on the “other side”?

Christianity along with other religions have values for moral behavior. They have their leaders and religious teachers. Other religions even talk about forgiveness and serving the poor. There’s one big difference between Christianity and every other religion... The graves of the other religious founders are still occupied. Christianity has an empty grave because Jesus lives. He is risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia!

Early in the morning. In the dim first light of dawn. Trudging feet. Drooping shoulders of sadness. With tear filled eyes, two Marys were walking to the garden where the body of Jesus had been placed in the tomb. All the tombs were in the shadows, but they saw well enough to discern a great miracle. The earth quaked and an angel came from heaven to remove the stone. The angel did this, not to let Jesus out, but to let us in. The angel said look, he is not here. He has been raised from the dead, just like he said was going to happen.

So powerful is the celebration of Easter -- so overwhelming has the resurrection of Christ proven to be, that even secular institutions have had no choice but to stand up and take note. I have one more joke to finish on this year. Three Unitarian Universalists died and went to heaven. At the Pearly Gates they were asked by Peter one question before being allowed to enter paradise. Saint Peter asked the first one if he could tell him what Easter is. Well of course, he answered. That’s the spring holiday where you dress in green and drink green beer. No! Saint Peter said and refused to let him enter heaven. Then he asked the second Unitarian Universalist the same question. He replied that’s easy. Easter is the holiday where you put up a tree in your house and decorate it with lights and celebrate the birth of Santa Clause. Saint Peter was really disgusted with that answer and slammed the gate on the man. Then he turned to the third Unitarian Universalist and asked him the same thing. The third Unitarian smiles and looks St. Pete in the eye. "I know what Easter is. Easter is the Christian holiday that coincides with the Jewish celebration of Passover. Jesus and the disciples were eating at the Last Supper, and He was later deceived and turned over to the Romans by Judas, one of the disciples. The Romans took Him to Pontius Pilate, made Him wear a crown of thorns, and He was hung on a cross until he was dead. He was buried in a nearby cave which was sealed off by a large boulder. Every year the boulder is moved aside so that Jesus can come out, and if He sees his shadow there will be six more weeks of winter."

I have nothing against Unitarian Universalists, but I wanted to make a point. Easter is the defining event in all human history. It’s so significant, but unfortunately even we Christians don’t always fully understand all God did for us. So, once again we celebrate by retelling the familiar story in liturgy, sermon, and song. The soberness of Good Friday, the tomb like solemnity of Holy Saturday, is followed by the radiance of Easter Sunday -- a proclamation of Christ's resurrection: New life by the power of God. It’s exactly as the apostle Paul insisted, the risen Christ is the center of the Christian faith, the mystery without which there would be no church, no hope of eternal life, no living Christ to encounter in Communion bread and wine. By any measure the resurrection of Jesus is the most radical of Christian doctrines, but what changes everything for the human race is Christ’s promise that he did it all for you, so that you would inherit eternal life and be with him forever. The fact is, each of us are joined to Jesus Christ in his death and in his resurrection.

The bible tells us that by one man sin entered into the world, and death is the result of sin; so death passed to all human beings. All people are doomed to die, infants, teenagers, old people, good people, bad people, religious people, atheists, everyone. However, 2,000 years ago a Man lived who went about doing good. He healed the blind, enabled the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and He even raised people from death. His name was Jesus. He was arrested, condemned to death. His followers watched him die on a Roman cross. He died on Friday. One of his followers took his body down and placed him in a grave. But this was not the end of the story. If it were… we would be hopeless, wanderers, searching for peace of mind and soul. Nor would we be here singing songs of joy.

Resurrection Sunday marks the greatest battle in human history. It was the outcome of the battle we celebrate on Easter. The battle between Satan, who “holds the power of death” and God the Father waged in the darkness of the tomb. God the Father defeated our greatest enemy, death, by raising Jesus from the tomb of death. On that day the earth and the heavens shook and the body of Jesus of Nazareth came to life. On this day death was defeated!

I promised I’d tell you why this is the biggest joke ever. You see the devil thought he was obtaining the greatest coup ever. The devil was willing to trade every last human soul for just one, the soul of God’s only Son. I mean Jesus Christ the Son of God succumbing to death just like every other human that ever lived and ever will live. That was a prize Satan was willing to pay heavily for. Just when all seemed lost and Jesus was in the hands of Satan once and for all there was one little catch. You see the devil didn’t know that Jesus was really God. Totally human, but also and at the same time totally and fully divine. And guess what? Death couldn’t hold the divine. God had pulled the divine wool over Satan’s eyes and death couldn’t keep God down. Was it a joke, well maybe not, but it certainly was a trick of sorts… And so we continue with a little divine humor every Easter Sunday.

Here’s your take away for this morning. You matter to God. He loves you so much that Jesus came to die and rise from the grave so that you and I can be assured of peace with God. On this day, the last enemy of humanity has been defeated in the resurrection of Jesus. And that my friends, like most of my jokes, is no laughing matter! He is risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia! Amen.