

The So-What of Easter
Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20
April 21, 2019 – 8:00 a.m. – Easter Sunday

It's Easter Sunday. Christ is risen! So what? "So what?" Those are words that I often ask, when I teach classes in biblical studies. Okay, the bible says thus and such. So what? So what does this all mean for us today? And today is Easter Sunday, so I ask you the same question: So what? So how is your life different because of Easter?

Oh we know the traditional answer: Christ has conquered death. Words I quote at every funeral service: "Oh death, where is your victory; of grave, where is your sting." And, of course that is part of the wonder of Easter - the reassurance that we need not fear death. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, in the symbol of the empty tomb, we are assured that we will experience the joys of life eternal in the presence and the glory of almighty God.

I was a young teenager when I heard of a church service, the story relayed to me by my mother who heard it from my aunt. It seems my aunt had gone to church on Easter Sunday, and there in the front of the church was a burial casket. Can you imagine, arriving at church this morning and finding a casket in our sanctuary. People started to talk. What's the casket doing there? Is anybody in it? Well, as you might imagine, the preacher's message for that day was that the casket is empty; and indeed, the good news of Easter is that all caskets are empty.

Now, I have never barrowed a casket to use as a prop during worship; but I have frequently told congregations at funerals that the deceased is not in the casket. Their loved one has moved on; for, as Paul told his church in Corinth, "We know if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with human hands, but eternal in the heavens." (2 Corinthians 5:1)

But I'm here today to tell you that Easter is about a lot more than life after death, life eternal. Christ rose from the dead, not simply to demonstrate that there is life after death. Christ rose from the dead to be our companion, our savior, and our friend, after death, yes; but also every day of our life. And that's why, for this service, I chose Matthew's story of the resurrection. Matthew's resurrection account is much simpler than John's which we will hear at 10:30 today; and continue with next Sunday.

As Matthew reports the resurrection, Mary Magdelene and the other Mary discover the empty tomb. They meet the risen Christ and are directed to tell the disciples to go to Galilee. Jesus meets the disciples in Galilee and, in just a few verses, gives them "their marching orders" which we now call the Great Commission. "Go therefore and make disciples *of all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to

obey everything I have commanded you.” That’s still our commission for today. The official “mission statement” of the United Methodist Church is “to make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

But, as important as that is, the story of Easter is still more than a mission statement. So, I suggest, and personally, I strongly believe, the so-what of Easter is that very last verse in Matthew’s Gospel: “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The so-what of Easter is that the risen Christ is with us always, walking beside us, caring for us, guiding us, befriending us, leading us.

Do you believe it? Do you live it? How would our lives be different if we were constantly aware of Christ with us? How would our language be different? Would we treat others differently? Would we use our time differently? Would we be more generous or more compassionate? If you are like most people, if you are like me, your answer is probably “sometimes yes, and sometimes no.”

But this Easter, and this Easter season, I suggest that all of us make the commitment to an increased awareness of Christ with us, as we seek to walk the path that he would have us walk, leading the life that he would have us lead.

Christ is with you, always with you; and that’s the Good News of Easter.
Amen.

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