Easter Sunday
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Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

Mark 16: 6 . . . ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: He is risen . .

LIVING FOREVER

THE LORD IS RISEN! Would that we could recapture the thrill of that announcement when it was first made! The Lord is risen! Oh, it was not like that at all - a simple statement of fact. It was more like the bark of a gun on a quie summer evening. It was like a brilliant and unexpected flash of lightening across a black sky. The Lord is risen! I can't say it the way it was uttered on the first Easter, and you can't appreciate it as those did who heard it. It made thei whole being throb with excitement.

The Lord is risen! Consider the circumstances in which that proclamatic was first sounded. Christ, the Lord, was dead. He had died by crucifixion on Friday. Since then His partly embalmed body had been lying in a tomb sealed with a huge stone and the stamp of the Roman government. All the bright hopes and loft aspirations of those who had followed Him had been buried with Him. His disciples were like frightened and bewildered sheep bleating for the shepherd - and the shep herd was dead! Hope reaches out into the future. But the future was black! Ther were only haunting memories of yesterday. How a bride will cherish her wedding gown! But if her fiance has died the day before the wedding, the gown becomes a terrible reminder of plans that never materialized. The bride of Christ, His followers, were all the more disconsolate as they remembered ~~His life~~ their Beloved. The movement their Lord had started, the building of the Kingdom of God, and which they ha joined with high enthusiasm, seemed doomed to extinction.

Then it happened! The unbelievable report was heard: The Lord is risen! Faith and hope and aspirations took wing and soared as never before. The contrast between Good Friday, earth's blackest day, and Easter Sunday, earth's whitest day, cannot be fully conprehended.

As the first faint streaks of dawn are beginning to silver the eastern sky, several women are leaving the still slumbering city of Jerusalem and are taking the path that leads to an unforgettable tomb. Sleepless and restless with grief, they are on their way to complete the proper burial of their Lord, so

hastily begun on Friday. In their hands they carry the necessary ointments and spices; in their hearts they carry a sorrow as heavy as tomb stones. Whether the sun will shine that day or not makes no difference to them. Their bereavement darkens all the gay colors of a spring in Palestine and gives a somber tone to the chirping of the birds. At the tomb they hear the startling announcement of the angel: The Lord is risen! With hearts on edge they hurry back to the city. But before they reach it, Chirst appears to them, and they know without a doubt, the Lord is risen.

Mary Magdalene remains near the empty tomb. Through tear-stained eyes she fails to recognize Him who cleansed her from sin and seven devils, but her ear are familiar with the voice that speaks her name. Rabboni - My Master she shouts as she realizes that her Lord is risen. That afternoon two disciples walk with Christ to Emmaus but their eyes are kept from identifying Him. Not until they sit down to eat with Him do they know who He is and understand that the Lord is risen. That evening the disciples are together behind locked doors, discussing all that has happened. Their hearts are torn by three of the most unwholesome emotions tha destroy man's peace of mind. They are filled with fear because those who killed their Master may soon seek for them. They are disturbed with feelings of guilt because they were such traitors and cowards. They are suffering from intense grie because their beloved Lord is dead. Suddenly Christ stands among them and quiets their turbulent hearts with the assurance that He, their Lord, is risen. One week later the disciples are meeting again - and this time with Thomas - when Christ reappears. As the conviction sweeps over Thomas that the Lord is risen, his skeptical challenge, I will not believe unless ... gives way to the glorious confessio My Lord and My God! At least eleven times, according to the Sacred Record, the risen Christ showed Himself during the forty days after His resurrection, on one occasion to more than 500. No wonder the disciples were glad when they say the Lord.

That is how the thrilling message started: The Lord is risen. It became the favorite theme of the preaching apostles. It was heard in Jerusalem and was

carried to Corinth and Ephesus and Rome. It was told to jailers and prisoners, to rulers and soldiers, to masters and servants. It was taken up by the next generation and the next and the next. It is still on its way as it resounds toda throughout the world. The Lord is risen.

But today much of the thrill has gone out of it. At one time in the history of the Christian Church the greeting on Easter morning was: The Lord is risen, and the response was: He is risen indeed. In a small way those who salute one another thus must have caught something of the joy and excitement that was in the angel's announcement, He is risen. Happy Easter is our morning wish, but we think largely of the weather, new hats, candy, and family dinners. We still say every Sunday morning in the confession of our faith, ... the third day He (Christ) rose again from the dead; but we never hear the bark of a gun nor do we see the lightning flash. We repeat every Sunday also the statement that summarizes the glorious consequence of the Easter message, I believe in ... the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. But we do not always speak it with a ringing conviction.

We must not try to explain nor completely to understand what happened on the first Easter. No one saw Christ emerge from the tomb. It was empty when the angel rolled away the stone. What men are able to accomplish they are usually able to explain. What God does is usually beyond man's comprehension. Place a seed into the ground. Watch it sprout and grow into a plant that produces other seed, while the original seed decays. We cannot understand it, but God can. Look at our earth. Men have spun fanciful theories about its origin, but while they ar as fascinating and intricate as a spider's web, they are also as flimsy. We cannot understand how it came into existence, but God can. Man himself remains a great unknown. We cannot understand his life; it is a mystery. One hundred years from now practically all humans living today will have come to an end. But human life will have been handed on to others. We cannot understand it, but God can. The world, the plant, the life of man - we meet them all as something that already

exists. Their beginning is a mystery and it belongs to God.

Exactly the same holds true of the incarnation and resurrection of Christ. They are mysterious but accomplished facts. There is no room for reasonable explanation; there is no need for scientific proof; there is no place for demonstration; there is only room for faith. Ours must be a faith that relies implicitly on God's Word as it unveils the secrets and mysteries of life to us. All of us have had enough experience with human life to know that it must inevitable end. Life expectancy in our country has been increased amazingly during the last century, but it is still less than the Biblical three score years and ten. Science may push the battle front between life and death back farther and farther, but there will always be a battle front. One remembers in this connection the statement of Shakespeare: By medicine life may be prolonged, yet death will seize the doctor too. That which is born of human parents is mortal.

This inescapable knowledge that life must finally end has always distressed men. From earliest times they were haunted by the impending and awful finality of death. Their hearts cried out for life that was unending. They turned to nature to bolster their belief in immortality. They noticed how the beautiful butterfly emerged from an ugly chrysalis. They observed how the elegant lily grew from an unlovely bulb. Yet such reasoning by analogy proved nothing, for they must have known that the butterfly in the chrysalis and the lily in the bulb are not lifeless, while man, when he is placed into the grave, is dead. They told the myth of the phoenix, a miracle bird, which burned itself after a long life, and then rose from the ashes a new bird in youthful freshness. But the phoenix was never seen; it remained a fable character. They searched the world for elixir and for the fountain of youth; but they never found them.

The age-old question, If a man die, shall he live again? remained a perplexing question, except for those who found an answer in faith. Job was one of them. He could say with certainty and conviction, as he looked into the eternity of the future: I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the

latter day upon the earth:... Whom I shall see for myself. Then the Redeemer came He assumed a mortal, human body. His enemies killed Him. His friends put Him into a grave. But Christ had foretold that the grave would not be able to hold Him. On Easter morning His prophecy was fulfilled and the question was answered for all time: If a man die, he shall live again. He that promised to rise from the dead made another promise: I am the resurrection and the Life; He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. The Christian's belief that he will live forever is not a guess; it is not an evidence of wishful thinking; it is firmly founded on the irrefutable fact that the Lord is risen and on His never-failing promise: Because I live, ye shall live also.

The Acts of the Apostles give an impressive demonstration of the power that comes with the conviction that one will live forever. No doubt, at first the disciples were happy with the realization that their Lord was again alive. But gradually an understanding of all that was involved in Christ's resurrection took hold of them and they became changed men. With a boldness and a confidence that amazes us and with a zeal that puts us to shame, they went out to turn the world upside down because their Lord had turned the grave inside out. Courageously they faced danger and persecution, prison and death itself, because they really believed that they would live forever.

Living forever is not a theological concept that a man accepts and then simply lets it go at that. Belief in everlasting life in Christ is dynamic. It exerts a powerful influence also in this life. Often we are inclined to think of immortality as something that begins when life on earth has ended. Yet Jesus said He that believeth in Me has everlasting life - right now! We are immortal at this moment. Therefore, we ought to live as though we expected to live forever. The resurrection and eternal life are not to be associated with the last day, but with Christ. Where He is accepted, there is life and salvation. St. Ambrose, early church father and bishop of Milan, wrote: If we wish not to fear death, let us

stand where Christ is; Christ is your life; He is the very Life which cannot die. Faith in Christ is salvation and salvation is the gift of eternal life in the midst of time - yea, in the midst of death.

The message of Easter is The Lord is risen! and Because He lives, we, too, shall live! There is nothing in all the world that will be more effective i relieving our anxieties, in lightening our trials, and in softening our sorrows. The Lord is risen - there is nothing beyond that! The Lord is risen and we shall likewise live forever and ever. Isn't it wonderful? Isn't it thrilling?

Amen.