

EASTER SUNDAY

Sunrise Service - 6:30 a.m.
Redeemer Lutheran - Milwaukee
April 2, 1972

"WE HAVE SEEN THE RISEN LORD"

"Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples,
'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that
he had said these things to her." (John 20:18)

WHEN DID YOU FIRST SEE THE ^{presence of the} RISEN LORD? Was
it when you were a child? Was it very
recently? Was it at Easter or just some other
ordinary time during the year? When did you
FIRST see the risen Lord?

WHERE WERE YOU WHEN YOU FIRST SAW HIM? Were
you in or near a cemetery like Mary Magdalene?
Were you right here worshipping? Were you at
your place of work -- or bending over the
kitchen stove? Where were you when you first
saw Him?

HOW DID YOU FEEL AFTER YOU HAD SEEN HIM?
Were you reassured? Were you filled with joy?
Did you feel a new sense of hope -- did you
really feel the new life that he had given you?
How DID you feel after you had seen Him that
FIRST time?

WHAT DID YOU DO AFTER YOU HAD SEEN HIM? Did
you, like Mary Magdalene, tell others what he
had said and done? Did you share his risen
life with someone else? Did you help someone
else ALSO see and hear and experience the
RISEN LORD?

I am confident that all of you remember when
you first saw the ^{presence of the} risen Lord and how you felt.
I am also confident that you told others about
it. Your very presence here this morning
witnesses to these facts. For you have come
here to give thanks to God for Christ's risen
presence in your lives.

You have felt his forgiving love. You do remember the place where he looked at you and lifted you out of your death of despair and guilt. You have experienced his healing power. And you are here today to again praise God for offering a risen Lord to you.

And I am here to do that very same thing. For I TOO remember the first time that I saw the ^{presence of the} risen Lord. Oh, I am sure I had seen him before ~~that~~ time, but I remember best that one particular time.

It was about six years ago. I was spread out on a hospital bed in Monroe, Wisconsin. I had tubes in and out of my body in almost every conceivable place. And I was crying much like Mary Magdalene -- only my cry was more like a groan. I was groaning tears of pain and fear and guilt. And I was groaning in my own heart and mind and even outloud-- MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME!

And then the ^{presence of the} risen Christ appeared. He was wearing the habit of a Roman Catholic nun. And His name, yes, Her name, was Sister Catherine. And she came over to my bed and said -- Peter, why are you weeping? And I said, "Because I'm scared!" And because I don't think that I've always done what God has wanted me to do! And because I don't know if God is still with me.

She just sat down and ran her fingers through my hair. But she looked right into my eyes. And all I could see was the look of understanding -- of reassurance -- yes, of loving-kindness. And she sat there for a long time. So long that I finally fell quite peacefully asleep.

That was the first ^{time} that I really remember seeing and experiencing the risen Lord.

^{presence of the}

And how did I feel after that? Need I even tell you how reassured and confident I was! I was no longer feeling a separation from God. I was singing Allelulia - Allelulia - Allelulia! I was even ready to die, because I knew that God cared -- that He did love and forgive me -- that He truly had given me new life, even though I was almost physically dead. I had seen the resurrected Christ -- and I was glad in it!

And what did I do about it? Much like Mary Magdalene, I told many others the things that the risen Christ had said and done for me. I told a lot of people about the risen Lord I had seen in that nun. NOT TO GLORIFY AND PRAISE THIS HOSPITAL SERVANT, BUT TO GLORIFY GOD IN JESUS CHRIST WHO HAD RISEN WITHIN HER. I proclaimed the risen Lord, and dedicated my life to His risen presence.

Is this how you first saw the risen Christ? Probably not! The details were most likely quite different. For maybe you saw and experienced his risen presence at a much less dramatic moment --- I truly admire you for it.

Maybe you FIRST SAW ^{presence of the} the Arisen Lord in your children. Or maybe in a pastor. Or maybe in a fellow worker. Or maybe in a worship service. Or maybe in your mommy or daddy. Or maybe in your wife or husband.

But I know and you know that we have seen the risen Lord's ^{presence} because we are here this morning singing and praying ALLELULIAS --- praising God for offering us the risen Lord's presence in our lives. This is the day the Lord has given us for rejoining and being glad for the risen Christ.

We are doing that right now -- we are truly thanking God for our risen Lord. But what we will do tomorrow -- and the next day -- and the one after that. Will Christ's risen presence live for more than one day in our lives? I SURELY HOPE SO!

I hope you and I will again be here soon to again thank God for His continued risen presence in our lives. But I hope we will even do more than that. I hope that ~~we~~, like Mary Magdalene and a nun I remember so well, will share our Lord's risen presence for much more than just the hours that we gather together here. We must share his risen presence far beyond these moments here -- and we must do it in a very personal *and real way.*

For each of us has known times when we have felt that Jesus has been carried away -- that his very presence has been robbed from our sight. We have all known those weeping moments -- those moments of loneliness and pain. Those moments of sadness and despair. Those moments of searching for love and compassion and forgiveness and healing -- and feeling that the search is futile, *and hopeless.*

I have had ^{a few of} those moments in the past several weeks -- and I am sure that each of you has also experienced them. Whether it was guilt or sickness or indifference or sorrow, we know the feeling that comes with an empty tomb and no risen Christ in sight. *But today is a different day!* ~~and we know what we have to do.~~ Because we have again heard and seen our risen Lord's *presence* this day. And He compels us to share His healing presence with all the weeping Marys in this world. And my dear brothers, I am not only speaking to the women among us. For we know that even within these walls there are many weeping -- hurting men.

I need not enumerate the pains and hurts and tears of our society. Pastor Witt and I try to keep you posted on these even if you don't read the newspapers or watch T.V. You have called us here to do that, because you desire to bring our risen Lord to all those who have lost his presence through the callousness of the world. And we will continue to bring the risen Lord to the hungry -- to the prisoner -- to the naked -- to the unloved -- to the sick -- to those in sorrow -- to the bureaucrats -- to the politicians -- to all who are searching for love, mercy and forgiveness.

"Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and then she told them that he had said these things to her."

We have seen ^{presence of the} the risen Lord. And we have felt his loving kindness. And we have come together to thank God for offering our risen Lord to us.

Let us now go and love one another as he has loved us. Let us forgive one another as he has forgiven us. Let us be present and alive for one another, as he HAS BEEN PRESENT and STILL LIVES, A RESURRECTED LORD in and for us.

AMEN.

EASTER SUNDAY

Redeemer Lutheran Church - Milwaukee
April 22, 1973

"CALLED BY NAME -- IN A GRAVEYARD"

sermon by Rev. Peter R. Martyn

"(And) Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabboni!'" (Jn. 20:15-16)

Before we make our claim with Mary this morning -- before we proclaim with her the risen Lord -- let's be sure that we are completely with her. Let us be sure we're in the same place with her -- let us be sure that we're IN THE GRAVEYARD as she is.

For with her, we know only TOO WELL that there is death before there is NEW LIFE. Yes, as she knew - so we know DEATH's cancelation of intimacy. Yes, whether that death be physical or relational, HE CANCELS OUT CLOSENESS -- HE CANCELS OUT TENDERNESS -- HE CANCELS OUT WARMTH -- HE CANCELS OUT LOVE. With Mary, we all know how that dismal demon destroys the tenderness of our time together.

With Mary, we know the speechless hours this DEMON DEATH has given us ALONE in the graveyard. Whether the graveyard is a cemetery, or the living room, or the office, or another familiar meeting place -- the demon has STILLED the voice that once tenderly called us by name.

The hours in the graveyard are the IF-ONLY hours: if only he would again touch me. If only he could again hear me. If only he would again embrace me. IF ONLY HE WOULD AGAIN CALL ME BY NAME.

And like Mary, we have called for him. And

all we've heard is our echo. And we continue to give, and give, and give to that love in the graveyard -- BUT NOTHING IS RETURNED. Finally, we give up to the darkness -- the demon denies our love.

And we nod ^{and} despairingly admit, "Death must have his day." But we give insufficient credit to death's ambition. For HE wants NOT MERELY one day out of a person's life -- he wants every day. He wants a denial of every moment of breath and bone and blood -- a denial of the flesh and taste and touch of love. Demon death wants darkness, now and forevermore!

II As we come to know this level of experience -- we know the Mary of that morning -- we can feel how she must have felt on this Easter morning. Surrounded by icy solitude and the morning mist of a graveyard. In that seclusion, she hears feet on dampened grass. She gazes through the tear-filled darkness. She sees a figure. It must be the gardener. And so she asks: "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

And then she hears: "MARY." Is it the same voice? It does look like his stature. Could it be him? Yes, it is! Rabboni! Lord and Master! Alive! HE IS HERE! I HAVE SEEN THE LORD!

For Mary the resurrection was not so much a rising-up as it was a returning. A RETURNING AND A NEW BEGINNING! An exclamation that nothing has been lost -- everything has been discovered.

He called her name and ^{her name} ~~A~~ became the flint that rekindled the fire. She was cold, and her name from his lips set fire to the world -- the world was made all over again for her. She could NOW find her way out of the graveyard of that world. She experienced the resurrection -- the opportunity to depart from the graveyard.

RESURRECTION - the opportunity to AGAIN hear your name called *in love.*

RESURRECTION - the opportunity to AGAIN be able to intimately share and communicate with him who was lost. To again laugh -- to again smile together -- to again touch - to struggle - to tease - to cry - yes, TO LIVE ANEW TOGETHER.

RESURRECTION - to open the door that DEATH slammed in your face AND SEE THE PERSON ANEW CALLING FOR US -- CALLING ANEW WITH CHRIST'S LOVE.

RESURRECTION - to AGAIN hear YOUR name called by him who was dead, but now lives! That's got to be the most AMAZING GIFT in the world!

CALLED BY NAME -- IN A GRAVEYARD! That's got to be the most unreal place to come alive in the world. But that's WHEN and WHERE the resurrection occurs -- AFTER THE GRAVEYARD! *after the death of gloom, despair, guilt, etc.*

III

You and I have been in THAT GRAVEYARD with Mary -- and we've been in many other graveyards since. Some that we've created -- and some that have been created by others.

Yes, we have been with ~~Mary~~^{cycle} Mary. We have gone through the LIFE-DEATH of Jesus with her. Like her, we know INTIMATELY the love of Jesus -- and ~~our~~ emptiness when that love is lost.

Like her, we know INTIMATELY the forgiveness of Jesus -- and ~~our~~ bitter tension when that is lost.

Like her, we INTIMATELY have known the mercy and compassion of Jesus -- and ~~our~~ helplessness that overtakes us when it is lost.

But Jesus said to her -- "MARY." And he calls out to me -- "PETER." And he calls out to each of you BY NAME -- he calls YOUR NAME

Called by Name . . .

NOT A CALL FROM THE CLOUDS -4-

to AGAIN offer you his love, forgiveness, and mercy. And with that call of his -- MANIFESTED IN AND THROUGH EACH OF US -- we know for certain HE IS ALIVE -- RISEN FROM THE DEAD.

To hear your name or mine called again WITH LOVE, FORGIVENESS, AND COMPASSION after that **call** had once died -- is truly resurrection. To call one another in love, forgiveness, and mercy IN HIS NAME is the way out of the graveyard.

IV

We have all had our graveyard experiences. Those experiences in which DEATH has destroyed the opportunity TO AGAIN hear our names called in love. Those **DEATHS** might have been physical death, marital death, business death, or some other relational death. We DO KNOW how death can momentarily destroy life. We do know what it means TO DIE BEFORE RISING AGAIN.

But through Jesus the Christ, God promises that we WILL BE out of EVERY graveyard FOREVER. He promises that one day we will again be able to call each other by name. He doesn't tell us HOW, but HE DOES TELL US -- and to **believe** so in trust. And THAT PROMISE is our ULTIMATE VICTORY -- that is our life in Christ, the resurrection from the dead.

But he also tells us that we DO NOT HAVE TO waste away before experiencing that victory. He offers us a fortaste of that victory RIGHT NOW.

For he knows, and we know, that we have often been DIGGING graveyards for one another in the past and present. He knows, and we know, that there have been deaths in our present relationships -- in the home, the school, the shop, the ghetto, and the world. Yes, HE KNOWS, AND WE KNOW, that he gives us the power to turn those dead relationships INTO RESURRECTED RELATIONSHIPS!

We need only do as his son did -- AGAIN
CALL EACH OTHER BY NAME. . . Face each other
and again speak in sincere love and truth.
Look to each other again with his forgiveness
and compassion. Reach out to each other again
with his mercy TO WIPE AWAY THE TEAR-FILLED,
HELPLESS, maybe even despairing condition of
another man or woman.

We all know of our need to BE CALLED ON
in this way - regardless of our color, creed,
denomination, or dollar-power. God promises
that as we do this we WILL TURN death into life.
We will proclaim the resurrection of his SON
as we walk out of the graveyards of life
into the sunrise of paradise - God's heave on earth

Perhaps this is the hardest thing to understand
about this event we call the resurrection-- not
that Christ came back from the dead, BUT THAT
HE CAME BACK AS A PERSON SPEAKING TO OTHER
PERSONS. Calling them by name. Giving them
back the life and the love they thought they
had lost forever in the grip of death.

Yes, we know, like Mary, that as long as
we seek out THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST, he
will be waiting in love TO CALL OUR NAME -- even
at the end of time.

In his love, let us call one another BY NAME.
let us do so for the sake of him who first
called us by name. And let us do this so
THAT DEATH's tears may be wiped away -- so that
coldness may become renewed intimacy -- so that
we MAY REJOICE in this victory as we walk
with Christ out of the graveyard INTO A NEW
SUNRISE OF LIFE.

AMEN.

EASTER SUNDAY

Sunrise Service - 6:30 a.m.

Redeemer Lutheran Church - Milwaukee

April 14, 1974

"THE TURNING POINT"

"But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women went to the tomb, taking the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body. . . . Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles; but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." Luke 24:1-3, 10-11

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain." I Cor. 15:10

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER,
AND FROM OUR RISEN LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST.
AMEN.

. . . but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. Incredible! Unbelievable! How could this possibly be true?! The apostles claimed that the resurrection was an "idle tale." They didn't believe that the event had occurred!

Yes, this was the apostles' response to the Good News. They didn't believe it! Just imagine those guys as the first witnesses - a group of women - came hurrying to share the miraculous news. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and mother Mary catching their breath, shout: "He's not there! The stone's rolled away! . . . Did you hear us?!? He's not there! The tomb is empty! HE IS RISEN!"

And the apostles shrugged this off as an idle tale. Can't you just hear them saying: "Ah, come on now, gals, that's going just a little too far!"

Isn't such a response so consistent with man's typical comeback to the miraculous. The apostles

appear to be so very much like you and me -- they too wanted to be viewed as reasonable, rational men. And this miraculous news was just a little too much for their cognitive maps.

We can thank God that Luke was not afraid to tell it like it really was. He was not afraid to tell us that even the apostles FIRST response to the resurrection was doubt and disbelief. For whether a 1st century apostle or a 20th century disciple, the MAGNITUDE OF GOD'S POWER remains miraculous and incredible. God says "yes to us," and we respond "No" to him.

God says "Yes" to man when someone responds miraculously to surgical treatment - and we say "No" to him when we say: "I don't believe it.":

God says "Yes" to man in the birth of a child, and we say "No" to him when we fail to make God's love known to that child.

God says "Yes" to man when he reveals his love through creation, and we say "no" to him when we abuse ANY PORTION of his creation.

God says "Yes" to man in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and we say "No" to him when we doubt this reality of his power.

How easy it is to be initially UN-believing to the miraculous in life. But Luke does not leave us or the apostles WALLOWING in the grief and skepticism caused by a crucifixion. His next verse reports two of these apostles THAT VERY DAY on their way to a village named Emmaus. Along this journey they come into the presence of the risen Christ and FINALLY recognize him. Similarly, Luke reports the risen Lord's appearance to Simon Peter. And with these appearances, their disbelief turned to ecstatic joy.

Yes, the REAL turning point in the lives and mission of the apostles WAS WHEN THEY TRUSTED

IN THE MIRACULOUS POWER OF GOD. As long as they could cling to their grief and disbelief, there was NO resurrection for these followers of Jesus. But GOD DID NOT LEAVE THEM THERE. He offered them their ENCOUNTER with the risen Lord. And that encounter WAS and STILL IS the MOST MIRACULOUS turning point in the relationship of God and his people.

Paul says: "He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, . . . then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me."

Incredible?? Yes! Unbelievable?? Yes again! But true? Yes absolutely true, because these were the witnesses. Yes, these apostles could only believe what they had seen with their own eyes - CHRIST WAS RISEN!

They were now convinced of God's miraculous power over all creation. Doubt had dissipated. Grief had been turned into the glory of God. And these followers WERE NOW READY to commit themselves to making THIS DAY the turning point of the whole creation.

Could any other event have shown MORE CLEARLY God's eternal concern for his people? Is there any other historical happening which more vividly DENOUNCES the forces of evil and destruction due to MOB instincts? Could the apostles - or any one of us - after being witnesses to this event believe anything BUT THE FACT that we are created in the image of a forgiving, loving Father.

The apostles - after seeing the risen Lord - were absolutely convinced THAT GOD DID SO LOVE THE WORLD - LOVED HIS PEOPLE AND CREATION SO MUCH - that he sent his only begotten son. And through his life, death, and resurrection, whoever believes in HIS way will not perish, but have eternal life.

Yes, this day became the turning point of belief for many generations to follow. The sight of the risen Lord had turned the apathy and defeatism of his small band of followers into A DEDICATED ZEAL to let the whole world know of God's eternal mercy and love.

The pages of this book reveal the testament of belief in a resurrected and living Lord. The acts of those apostles manifest a commitment to a merciful and loving Lord. And through Christ's appearances to these same apostles, you and I again today become witnesses to his resurrection.

Yes, this resurrection day CAN AGAIN become the turning point in our lives. And not only this day. But EVERY DAY that we live and trust in the power of God's love made known through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. To live on this side of the Easter event - to live in the resurrected presence of Christ - means that each day CAN BE a turning point for us. Each day is a NEW DAY to turn darkness into light through the power of God's love.

But all of this is just a lot of pious talk until we ask ourselves - ARE WE SAYING "YES" TO GOD'S LOVE, OR ARE WE SAYING "NO" TO IT? Are we saying "He is Risen" in our words, but like the apostles initially - doubting in our actions the power of his resurrected love? What kind of story are we making of the resurrection of our Lord? Is it a LIVING DRAMA OF HIS LOVE? Or are we still making it AN IDLE TALE?

Our we still trying to put obstacles in front of the empty tomb? Have we allowed God to roll away the stone - or are we still trying to clog up the ~~doorway to~~ the resurrection with all of our old ways?

Are we still hanging onto our resentments? Or has the power of the risen Lord enabled us to put that power of damnation to death?!?

Are we still allowing yesterday's grief --
yesterday's loss -- yesterday's hurt TO BE
THE BARRIER TO TODAY'S POWER OF RESURRECTION?
Are we allowing the burden of yesterday's
sorrow and death - whether on Golgatha,
or here in Milwaukee -- to blot out the power
of God's resurrected love for us today?

Yes, my Christian friends - are you and I
rolling any stones in front of the empty tomb --
or will we allow God's power of love in the
risen Lord TODAY to again become the turning
point in our lives. TO TURN THAT WHICH WE'VE
ALLOWED TO DIE INTO NEW LIFE - to make each
day a new turning point of God's love in our
lives.

My dear friends - our relationships as
individuals - as different races - as husbands
and wives, parents and children - as
employers and employees - as the governed and
the governing - as children of God -- yes,
our relationships in all these DAILY NEED
TO RECOGNIZE AND SHARE the power of God's love
made known through the resurrection of Jesus
Christ.

This is the eternal promise we have committed
ourselves to as Christians.

Let us leave here today - proclaiming with
Paul and a multitude of Easter disciples --
But by the grace of God I am what I am, and
his grace toward me will NOT be in vain.

Amen.

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Yes, this was the apostles' response to the Good News. They didn't believe it! Just imagine those guys as the first witnesses - a group of women - came hurrying to share the miraculous news. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary catching their breath, shout: "He's not there! The stone's rolled away! . . . Did you hear us?!? He's not there! The tomb is empty! HE IS RISEN!"

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Isn't such a response so consistent with man's typical comeback to the miraculous. The apostles

appear to be so very much like you and me -- they too wanted to be viewed as reasonable, rational men. And this miraculous news was just a little too much for their cognitive maps.

We can thank God that Luke was not afraid to tell it like it really was. He was not afraid to tell us that even the apostles' FIRST response to the resurrection was doubt and disbelief. For whether a 1st century apostle or a 20th century disciple, the MAGNITUDE OF GOD'S POWER remains miraculous and incredible. God SO OFTEN, says "Yes" to us - and we so often say "No" to him.

God says "Yes" to man when someone responds miraculously to surgical treatment - and we say "No" to him when we say: "I don't believe it."

God says "Yes" to man in the birth of a child, and we say "No" to him when we fail to make God's love known to that child.

God says "Yes" to man when he reveals his love through creation, and we say "no" to him when we abuse ANY PORTION of his creation.

God says "Yes" to man in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and we say "No" to him when we doubt this reality of his power.

How easy it is to be initially UN-believing to the miraculous in life. But Luke does not leave us or the apostles WALLOWING in the grief and skepticism caused by a crucifixion. His next verse reports two of these apostles THAT VERY DAY ^{were} on their way to a village named Emmaus. Along this journey they come into the presence of the risen Christ and FINALLY recognized him. Similarly, Luke reports the risen Lord's appearance to Simon Peter. And with these appearances, their disbelief turned to ecstatic joy.

Yes, the REAL turning point in the lives and mission of the apostles WAS WHEN THEY TRUSTED

IN THE MIRACULOUS POWER OF GOD. As long as they could cling to their grief and disbelief, there was NO resurrection for these followers of Jesus. But GOD DID NOT LEAVE THEM THERE. He offered them their ENCOUNTER with the risen Lord. And that encounter WAS and STILL IS the MOST MIRACULOUS turning point in the relationship of God and his people.

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Could any other event have shown MORE CLEARLY God's eternal concern for his people? Is there any other historical happening which more vividly DENOUNCES the forces of evil and destruction due to MOB instincts? Could the apostles - or any one of us - after being witnesses to this event believe anything BUT THE FACT that we are created in the image of a forgiving, loving Father.

The apostles - after seeing the risen Lord - were absolutely convinced THAT GOD DID SO LOVE THE WORLD - LOVED HIS PEOPLE AND CREATION SO MUCH - that he sent his only begotten son. And through his life, death, and resurrection, whoever believes in HIS way will not perish, but have eternal life.

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*There are
lots of
ones on
the table.
How often
dedicated
zeal*

The pages of this book reveal a **New** Testament of belief in a resurrected and living Lord. The acts of these ^{same} apostles manifest a commitment to a merciful and loving Lord. And through Christ's appearances to these same apostles, you and I again today become witnesses to his resurrection.

Yes, this resurrection day CAN AGAIN become the turning point in our lives. And not only this day. But EVERY DAY that we live and trust in the power of God's love made known through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. To live on this side of the Easter event - to live in the resurrected presence of Christ - means that each day CAN BE a turning point for us. Each day is a NEW DAY to turn darkness into light through the power of God's love.

But all of this is just a lot of pious talk until we ask ourselves - ARE WE SAYING "YES" TO GOD'S LOVE, OR ARE WE SAYING "NO" TO IT? Are we saying "He is Risen" in our words, but like the apostles initially - doubting ~~by~~ our actions the power of his resurrected love? What kind of story are we making of the resurrection of our Lord? Is it a LIVING DRAMA OF HIS LOVE in our lives? Or are we making it AN IDLE TALE far removed from our lives?

Are we still trying to put obstacles in front of the empty tomb? Have we allowed God to roll away the stone - or are we still trying to clog up the *doorway to* the resurrection with all of our old ways?

Are we still *clinging* onto our resentments? Or has the power of the risen Lord enabled us to put that power of damnation to death!?

Are we still allowing yesterday's grief -- yesterday's loss -- yesterday's hurt TO BE THE BARRIER TO TODAY'S POWER OF RESURRECTION? Are we allowing the burden of yesterday's sorrow and death - whether on Golgatha, or here in Milwaukee -- to blot out the power of God's resurrected love for us today?

Yes, my Christian friends - are you and I rolling any ~~rocks~~ in front of the empty tomb -- or will we allow God's power of love in the risen Lord TODAY to again become the turning point in our lives. TO TURN THAT WHICH WE'VE ALLOWED TO DIE INTO NEW LIFE - to make each day a new turning point of God's love in our lives.

My dear friends - our relationships as individuals - as different races - as husbands and wives, parents and children - as employers and employees - as the governed and the governing - as children of God -- yes, in our relationships in all these, WE DAILY NEED TO RECOGNIZE AND SHARE the power of God's love made known through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is the eternal promise we have committed ourselves to as Christians.

Let us leave here today - proclaiming with Paul and a multitude of Easter disciples -- But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me will NOT be in vain.

Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY

Sunrise Service - 6:30 a.m.

Luth. Church of the Master - Troy

March 30, 1975

"WHAT A DISCOVERY!"

"So (Mary and Mary Magdalene) departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, 'Hail!' And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him."

Matthew 28:8-9

What a morning of discovery! Two women discovered what was utterly incredible -- a reality beyond empirical knowledge - the crucified King of the Jews was standing - erect - over their bending bodies. These two women were the first to discover the risen presence of Christ.

When did you first discover his risen presence? Were you a child? Was it recently? Was it at Easter or just some other ordinary time of the year?

How did you feel after this discovery? Were you renewed? Were you filled with joy? Did you feel that new life had been given to you?

What did you do after this discovery? Did you, like these women, tell others what had happened? Did you talk about the risen Christ -- or were you the risen Christ for someone else?

I am confident all of us remember AT LEAST ONE TIME when we discovered the risen Christ's presence. I am sure, we too at that moment, felt like these women - strangely fearful yet joyful.

Your presence here this morning witnesses to the fact that you've discovered the risen Lord. For like me, you've come to give thanks to God for making this ~~discovery a reality~~ for all of us!

A REAL DISCOVERY

Yes - you have discovered the resurrected power of forgiveness. And you do remember the times and places where you discovered Christ's risen presence lifting you out of your death of guilt. Yes - you have discovered his healing power. And you are here today to again praise God for LOVE'S TRIUMPH OVER DEATH!

And I am here to do the very same! For I too remember a time - like these women - that I discovered THAT CHRIST WAS RISEN! Oh - I'm sure there had been many times before this -- but this time stands out in my memory.

It was about eight years ago. I was spread out on a hospital bed in southern Wisconsin. I had tubes in and out of my body in almost every conceivable place. Like the two women - I was really afraid. And I was groaning tears of pain and fear. And in my heart and mind I was crying - MY GOD - MY GOD Why have you forsaken me!

And then I discovered Christ's risen presence. He appeared to me in the habit of a Roman Catholic nun -- her name was Sister Catherine. And through her countenance - her manner - her words - her touches -- I was being offered the risen presence of Christ!

I don't remember how long she sat at my bedside that night -- but it was mighty long! Yes - there in person was the patient presence of Christ's reassuring love.

What a tremendous discovery that was!! And how did I feel about that discovery?? Need I even tell you of my confidence and reassurance. I was no longer feeling separation from God or anyone. I was singing - Allelulia! Yes, I was even ready to die - because I was confident that God cared -- that new life was more than simply being able to breathe -- that NEW LIFE was being loved in the image of Christ!

And what did I do about this discovery? I am still trying to live that example -- I am still

trying to live out the risen presence of Christ that I discovered in Sister Catherine. And I'm not doing it to glorify this nun, but RATHER TO GLORIFY AND PRAISE CHRIST WHO HAD RISEN WITHIN HER!

Yes - I can truly identify with how these two women must have felt under the morning mist of that first Easter.

And I can only believe that all of you in this room have discovered that Christ Is Risen much in the same way that I did. Maybe not in a hospital bed. But possibly you discovered Christ's risen presence through your child -- or from a pastor long ago - or through a fellow worker -- possibly even through years of inspired worship -- or simply your spouse.

But you have made this discovery - your presence here attests to that fact. Yes - again today -- we re-inact the feelings of those two women who first discovered Christ was risen - we rejoice and give thanks for the most incredible reality of human history - the power over the dominion of death. For us - death does not have the last word!

So that's why we sing our allelulias today. ~~Power~~
But what about tomorrow? And the next day?
Does our Easter morning discovery last more than a little while?

After the ham and eggs have digested, will our Easter morning discovery be replaced by *the old* fearful, impulsive, greedy, violent and alienated living?

~~that there will be~~
We can be certain of future moments of loneliness - of pain - of sadness -- moments where the search for love and compassion and forgiveness seem to be without hope. How will we deal with these?

Hopefully - we will remember God's act in Christ at those times. We will remember that nothing can defeat God's power of love.

But hopefully - even more than that - we will do more than remember - we will be God's source of Christ's risen presence for those in need. Hopefully - we will be like a nun that I remember so well during my greatest hour of need.

That's the real meaning ⁱⁿ discovering that CHRIST IS RISEN. Discovery means more than talking about it - it means living the spirit of love triumphant - of forgiveness victorious - of living with the knowledge that life's purpose is greater than mere physical existence.

When do you think you will next be called upon to offer Christ's risen presence? ~~When~~ - the time is right now -- and for the rest of your lifetime!

We've discovered that Christ IS RISEN - his power lives - we can't escape it once we've discovered it. So we are called to share it -- here and now.

Two women did just that several hundred years ago. They had seen and touched the risen Lord. And they not only told others what they had seen - they became the RISEN TOUCH of Christ.

They not only discovered -- THEY LIVED the resurrection! Each time we gather - and that's a minimum of 52 Easters every year - each time we come to RE-DISCOVER God's resurrected presence in Christ -- and then to LIVE IT ANEW!

So - come - let us again re-discover his resurrected love -- and then live it for the entire Easter season - yes, all 365 days of *the* ~~the year~~.

Easter season

Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY

Lutheran Church of the Master - Troy
March 30, 1975 - 11:00 a.m. Worship

"A NEW BEGINNING"

"Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. They both ran, . . .
(John 20:1-4a)

Suppose you had been there with the disciples and the others grieving over the death of Jesus when a woman burst in on you with a story of an empty tomb? How would you have reacted? What would you have said?

Can't you imagine that we might have said: Poor excitable woman - her nerves must be overwrought -- given to seeing things that aren't even there. OR possibly we might have said: Just like so many women - making a mountain out of a molehill.

Imagine how Peter and John must have felt at this moment. A woman here with a story of an empty tomb after they had watched the man suffer agonies and insults before their eyes -- they had seen all their hopes and dreams brutally dashed.

And now - an empty tomb?!? Every known experience of life is against it... if it wasn't a case of nerves getting the better of this woman then it must be a trick or sheer superstition.

~~And~~ Many view the Easter story just that way. As a sheer fabrication of the early Christians - who couldn't handle the defeat of death. Others see it as a fantasy - a sugar coating to smoothe over the jagged edges of life.

Among these are even those who wander into an Easter celebration here or there -- but for them, there has been no struggle in the wilderness - no curses or jeers - no bloody sweat -- no dead and buried - no cross! It's no wonder that the resurrection seems to them to be a fairy tale.

But not so for the real followers - Peter and John - and the rest of us here this morning. They had gathered together - I'm sure their meeting must have been similar to that of corporate staff with their business on the brink of bankruptcy.

These eleven men had devoted themselves to the end -- and there they were - without their previous jobs -- without decisive leadership -- without any notion of what to do next -- even without knowledge of the scripture that Jesus would rise from the dead.

IMagine their predicament. And then came Mary Magdalene... She says the stone was no longer there - and neither was the Lord.

Sure - Peter and John in the back of their minds might have been saving -- could this be a hoax? Sure - they **didn't** have knowledge of his rising again. But they did have knowledge of one thing -- the stone had been sealed -- and that meant IT WAS NIGH HUMANLY IMPOSSIBLE TO MOVE IT.

And so they ran -- ran with abandon -- can't you just see Peter huffin and puffing to get to that empty tomb!! Yes - there was finally a ray of hope on the horizon -- this might be the start of A NEW BEGINNING!

And that Sunday evening it was confirmed -- death had not been victorious - the cross was not the last symbol of life - Christ was present!! Risen!! Standing there among them!! This was no fantasy!! It was fact -- seen with eyes, heard with ears - touched by Thomas' hands. Christ was risen!! NOW WAS THE TIME. NOW IS

THE TIME for A NEW BEGINNING!! That's what it was for those followers in that room. And that's what it is for these followers in this room!! A TIME FOR A NEW BEGINNING!!

Yes - that's what it means rhetorically - theologically -- but what does A NEW BEGINNING mean in reality.

Just as it meant that Sunday morning -- it also means this Sunday morning -- it means the stone IS ROLLED AWAY!! Yes, if Easter Sunday is the Day of Resurrection -- then the STONE IS NO LONGER PROCLAIMING DEATH'S VICTORY.

So let us ask ourselves ☹ are we putting any obstacles in front of the empty tomb. Have we allowed God to roll away the stone - or are we still clogging up the doorway to the resurrection with resentments - with bitterness - and with other powers of DEATH!!

Is yesterday's hurt STILL ~~stifling~~ stiffling today's resurrection. Is yesterday's death -- whether on Golgatha or in our own family -- is that death still blotting out the power of God's resurrected love?

Have we let God remove the STONES so that today can truly be A NEW BEGINNING?!!?

Like Peter and John - let's make this a real day of resurrection - A NEW BEGINNING - let's let God roll away the stones that have clogged up our lives -- that have kept us locked up in our tombs of misery, despair, and self-pity. *let's let God roll away the stone!*

And ~~beyond that~~ ^{then} - like Peter and John - let's RUN WITH ABANDON because of our faith. When Mary told them of the empty tomb, they didn't go INTO CONFERENCE for hours to decide if they should believe -- or whether they should cautiously meander over to the tomb. THEY RAN!! THEY RAN WITH ABANDON!!

A NEW BEGINNING -- the day of Resurrection -- means TAKING AGGRESSIVE ACTIONS as God's people rather than piddle-ling around with half commitments. Peter and John were willing to take the risk to make fools of themselves RUNNING TO THAT EMPTY TOMB.

How eager are we to make today A NEW BEGINNING at the Master? How anxious are we ~~will~~ we to tell others about our love in Christ? How will we respond when asked to share our commitment to the empty tomb - our commitment to share the power of God's resurrected love?

Will we piddle around -- hem-hawing with this excuse and that excuse -- yawning and sighing as we again say: Why don't they get someone else to do that? Or like Peter and John, will we SHOW in our very lives THAT TODAY IS A NEW BEGINNING - will we "run" - will we say "yes" to God and run to get it done!?

That resurrection spirit has characterized many families at the Master -- for several years. For these families - every day -- every program - every opportunity to serve and to share in this ministry has been A NEW BEGINNING!! God - am I thankful for these people who have not been piddling around with their faith. They have shared WITH ABANDON right up to our most recent AGGRESSIVE VENTURE of faith -- our new organ. Thanks be to God for inspiring such commitment!

And finally - A NEW BEGINNING - for Peter and John and Stephen and Paul and Luther and Bonhoeffer and who knows how many more -- for these followers A NEW BEGINNING meant in reality NO HOLLYWOOD HAPPY ENDING.

Instead of Easter meaning going to bed smelling sweet lillies and escaping from life -- Easter meant stonings, mobs, imprisonments, and death-- and yet with a song all the way through to the end.

Too often you and I are tempted to observe the Resurrection of our Lord on Easter in much the same mood as a couple on their honeymoon might observe the beauty of Niagara Falls at night. We too often turn Easter into gushy romanticism --- forgetting that a NEW BEGINNING means to **live** a resurrected life -- that means a willingness **NOW** TAKE ON THE SACRIFICIAL LOVE AND DEDICATION OF OUR LORD.

The Easter story has explosive implications. It is not fiction. It is fact. A frightening fact -- frightening because it means that all that Jesus said and did is ETERNALLY TRUE. Frightening because we NOW have the responsibility TO PULL IT OFF -- to make the resurrection a reality in our living.

No doubt its safer to keep the Resurrection as a pageant of sniffing ~~the~~ lilies, chanting a prayer or two, and singing a few well-modulated alleluias - and then going home un-disturbed.

But not for Peter and John - the resurrection meant A NEW BEGINNING -- now they had to carry out the mission of Christ. It was NO IDLE TALE - it was a sacrificial task.

And so again today - and every resurrection day - which is every time we worship - God invites us to again be nourished with his forgiving love -- so that we can make every day A NEW BEGINNING - a new moment to again take up the sacrificial task OF ROLLING AWAY the stones of death - and getting on aggressively with the hard labor of our Lord's love.

Amen

EASTER SUNDAY

Luth Church of the Master, Troy

April 18, 1976

"BEYOND BEWILDERMENT"

"And he said to them, 'Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. But, go, tell his disciples and Peter that ~~he~~ is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.'" And they went ~~out~~ and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Mark 16:6-8

The women were amazed, reports Mark. But that ^{just} doesn't do justice to the report on this day. Nowadays we find all sorts of items amazing -- detergents and cake-mixes, circus shows, rock stars and each year's new models of cars.

Mark's word here is more powerful - hinting that the women were only a step or two away from total collapse. They were terror-stricken, disoriented, and disorganized. We would call it -- "in a total tizzy." Maybe a more dignified word is "bewildered."

Who would not have been bewildered - in a tizzy. Their tidy little universe had just been blown to bits, and a brand new one had been plunked down in its place over the weekend. Their smoothly spinning globe had just gone into reverse -- their whole reason for living had been crushed on Friday -- they were scrambling like lumberjacks on logs to regain some sense of equilibrium.

And then they encounter the tomb -- with the huge stone rolled away. And to top that off, in the tomb sits a messenger in a white robe -- nonchalantly telling them "not to be amazed" - not to be in such a tizzy -- because Jesus is not there - he is risen.

Is it any wonder that they fled trembling ~~z-~~ how

much can the human heart and mind handle when carrying the load of grief?? It took enough courage just to come back to the tomb to prepare the body -- but now this!!! This incredible news!

And with it - the messenger tells them - "Don't be bewildered -- but go, tell the disciples and Peter the Good News - and go to Galilee where you will see the risen Christ." Go and do this?!? Incredible?!? Who would believe them?!? They would be laughed at! Their minds and hearts had about as much as they could take. That was it!! And so, instead of running and sharing the Good News -- they ran away from it all -- ran in fear and confusion.

And which one of us ~~here~~ can't identify with their running?!? Which one of us hasn't run away from it all when stretched to our limits with grief? Which one of us hasn't closed our ears to the Good News of the resurrection even while it's being shared at the funeral service? Which one of us hasn't continued to run away -- **SOMETIMES FOR MONTHS** - from the resurrection because we've allowed fear - confusion - *death* bewilderment - to overtake us?!?

There's not one of us who can't identify with these women this Easter morning. But we know -- not only from Mark's later addition - but also from the other accounts -- that these women did not remain in fear forever -- in fact, they were **BEYOND BEWILDERMENT** within hours of the resurrection.

And that's where today's story takes us as well-- **BEYOND BEWILDERMENT - FAR BEYOND FEAR -- FOREVER TOWARD TRUST** in the resurrection.

Obviously - not everyone has reached that point. There are still some who choose to remain bewildered. Some are absent from today's celebration because they choose only scientific logic in life. Regretfully - they only accept a God who acts scientifically. So - their choice, like the two women at first, is to remain silent and separated from the resurrection.

and in other churches

And there are others - who are here ~~with us~~ this morning, but remain bewildered by the whole thing -- at least visibly and audibly. For like the two women, these Christians have heard the messenger's words - but they won't tell anyone else about it.

These Christians may come to church every Sunday, but Christ dies again as soon as they leave the church. Because these Christians are afraid to tell anyone about Christ's resurrection -- they're afraid to tell anyone that Christ is alive in them -- they're afraid that somebody might think they're "tizzy" or "off their rockers" just because they believe in the love of Christ.

It is God's hope that by again proclaiming that Christ is risen that these bewildered ones will begin to get out from behind their prisons of fear -- yes - it is God's hope that his word of resurrection will roll away the stone that is blocking his love in the lives of these bewildered ones.

then And of course there are ~~many~~ *the rest* of us here who *also* are still BEWILDERED and FEARFUL because we have allowed guilt or grief or depression -- or hatred to clog up the doorway of Christ's resurrected life in and through us. In short, many of us have allowed God's power of Easter morning to be "blacked-out" in our lives.

And that's why it's so important to again here the message of Easter morning. We can never allow ourselves to quit hearing the messenger in that empty tomb.

but it never gets stale -
His message is always the same - Christ is risen - he is no longer entombed - God has been victorious over death. Those who live in God thru Christ no longer need to be FEARFUL or BEWILDERED.

Death, guilt, hatred -- the powers that damn us and make us feel like worms HAVE BEEN DEFEATED.

God's power for life - in life - and thru life and beyond life is no longer dead in a tomb. He is risen - risen indeed. God's love is alive again -- resurrected - given to us again, and again, and again -- not only in this life, but eternally given.

That's worth living for! It's even worth dying for! It surely isn't worth running away from! It's something worth funning for!

If there's any spirit in '76 that we can all campaign for -- let's campaign for the spirit of the resurrected Christ. Let's live BEYOND BEWILDERMENT.

Let's let the world know that Christ is risen . That doesn't have to be done obnoxiously -- we don't have to be in a tizzy to tell others about the resurrected Christ.

All we need do is begin to show that GRIEF is not victorious -- that GUILT is not the winner -- that HATRED will never be supreme -- that DEPRESSION will not rule our lives.

Yes - we need only show that we have been loved and promised an eternal relationship with God --- we need only live with that confidence, and the world will know WITH A MINIMUM OF RHETORIC that Christ is risen --risen indeed!

AMEN.

EASTER SUNDAY

Luth Church of the Master, Troy

4-18-76

"A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH"

"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead."

I Cor. 15:20-21

About 30 miles southeast of Cleveland, there's a place called Lordstown. Whether originally the name meant, "This is the Lord's town," or something else, I don't know. But if it was originally "The Lord's Town," it now belongs to General Motors. For now a huge GM assembly plant stands in what was once corn fields and pasture.

I don't know anyone in Lordstown; you probably don't either. And yet, we know these people well. They're married - most of them. More rooted in their families than their jobs. Fathers play with children on Sunday afternoon, watch the Indians and the Browns. There's beer in the refrigerator, and often a Saturday night party at the neighbors.

We even know their worries, in part. Inflation has cut into their incomes - bills and payments are a constant threat. They wonder if the children will do all right in school, or get into trouble. They wonder if they **can** afford the summer cottage or trailer this year. They wonder if this is all there is. And as they wonder, they do their duty -- day by day, week by week.

Is it much different in Troy, Royal Oak, or Birmingham? Just doing our job, most of us. Like those in Lordstown, this week we swept the floors, as we did last week and will again next week. We have our circle of friends, occasional movie or theatre, television programs - some even regular.

Some of us bowl. Some are club members. Some are golfers. We have deadlines to meet, and we meet them; taxes to pay, and we've paid them. And through it all - we wonder - wonder about

the meaning of our lives. Wonder sometimes if this is all there is, as we lock our doors for another night. And as we wonder, we carry on. Day by day, week by week. The basic rhythms remain the same.

I know in Lordstown this morning children will run through the house and backyards in search of Easter baskets. And many of us will do, or have done the same. A nice custom.

All of this - rabbits, eggs, jelly beans, flowers, even worship - brings Lordstown into touch with our town. Axles to frames - wheels to axles - and roll-on another Chevy. Saturday the country club, Sunday the Browns, Monday the plant or office. Saturday to Sunday to Monday to Saturday. Winter, Spring, Winter.

These are the rhythms of our lives. Bills come, bills are paid, and bills come -- the cycle of another month is complete. Parents get up, children get up, parents to work, children to school, children come home, parents come home, supper, paper, television, bed. The cycle of each day, broken by the cycles of Saturdays and Sundays, and holidays to holidays.

Yes, axles to frames, wheels to axles. Chickens to eggs to chickens to eggs. The never ending cycle of life.

And then comes this Easter announcement -- so out of touch with everything else -- "He is risen - he is not here." That just doesn't fit into the cycle -- "dead and risen." That's all!?!? Risen and Living -- that's all!?!?

Easter eggs, rabbits, flowers -- that's part of the cyclical nature of Easter. That pattern is true and tested, whether Lordstown or Troy.

But - "he is risen, no longer dead" -- what kind of witness is that in our cyclical world??

Well, to many in Lordstown, and to most of us here - that witness tells us THAT WHAT WE SEE IS NOT NECESSARILY ALL THAT THERE IS. *TO BE SEEN.*

The cycle of work, rest, work -- the cycle of

birth and death - of Winter, Spring, Winter -- these cycles are true enough, but not the WHOLE TRUTH.

To say that Christ is risen/no longer dead is to say THAT FOR YOU AND ME there is a major breakthrough beyond our cyclical routines. It is to say - that your life and mine - are set within a larger scheme of things.

For through the resurrection, our lives are no longer simply on the cyclical treadmill -- they are moving to a new destination point -- never before experienced -- not part of the present cycle of things. Through the resurrection our lives are MOVING FROM death to life - from disorder to order, from discord to love, from war to peace.

To ANNOUNCE that Christ is risen is to announce a new understanding of things -- the resurrection announces a new vision for Lordstown - and Troytown -- a vision where swords will become plowshares - where tears will be wiped away - where there is no more death and dying.

No more Winter, Spring, Winter - no more axles to frames, wheels to axles, and roll-on another Chevy.

TO believe that Christ is risen IS TO KNOW, as the Gospel proclaims, that the basic movement in our lives IS NOT from life to death. The basic movement is not the circles of endless repetition -- the basic movement is from DEATH to life.

The resurrection announces that we are on a journey that's going somewhere -- not just going around in circles. We're going from the captivity of circles to the promised land, from the pit to paradise, from the tomb to eternity.

We're going to a destination where sin and death are not always sending us back to the beginning -- where we have to pick up the pieces and start all over again.

That's a major breakthrough -- a journey that just does not end at a beginning that we've already been through many times. That's the radical significance of "He is risen - he is not here."

Though our love decays and is sometimes demonic, nevertheless, an undying and unchanging love IS the future through THE RESURRECTION, So, in this hope we do our current loving, as incomplete as it often is.

Though the peace we create NOW may be shortlived, peace is the ultimate future in Christ -- a peace which will last. And in this hope, we keep striving to make peace NOW.

Though our present building of relationships comes undone - the future promises a lasting habitation - and in this hope, we keep on building *new relationships NOW*

Love, peace, relationships make a difference -- BECAUSE through God's act on Easter morning, our lives CAN NOW move from death to life. Through God's Easter morning action, our lives do not end in meaningless circles.

Through the resurrection, God has announced that he will shape the present circles of our lives into a future of love and peace and wholeness.

The secular realities of eggs, rabbits; Winter, Spring, Winter; axles to frames, wheels to axles will be the same next Easter. But the Gospel of Easter is different. Its rhythm is death to life. Christ stands risen, alive, coming toward us. Coming to straighten our circles into an arrow of hope for something new and lasting.

Yes, something lasting. Life that lasts, and peace that lasts, and joy without ending.

Life to death. We're all too familiar with that cycle - and all the other routines that go in circles. But today's celebration is something different. CHRIST IS RISEN. He moved from death to life. And if things around here are ever to be different, it will be because Christ is risen-- our future is not circles, BUT LIFE. AMEN.

EASTER SUNDAY

Sunrise Resurrection Communion - 7:30 am

April 10, 1977

THE REAL FACTS OF "LIFE"

"First and foremost, I handed on to you the facts which had been imparted to me: that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised to life on the third day, according to the scriptures, that he appeared to Cephas and afterwards to the Twelve." I Cor. 15:3-4

Isn't it great to be alive!?! When it's springtime and the sun is shining and the birds are singing and everything is going well for you and me -- it's so great to be alive! It's really a shame that feeling doesn't last.

But as we well know in Michigan - even on April 10th - the cold winds may yet blow, And it won't be long before it's gloomy and rainy. And surely, the boss may soon chide us at work, our spouse may yet get ~~as~~ grouchy as a bear today -- the children will get sick -- and we may catch the flu or some other virus. And then - who can say it's great to be alive???

~~YET~~ -- shouldn't the joy of life depend on something more substantial than the weather OR the disposition of our spouses OR the workings of our digestive systems?? Isn't there more to life than just the joy of spring and a healthy body?

Well, for us gathered here this morning - it's great to be alive, but for more reasons than sunshine, good dispositions, healthy bodies, or any of the other superficial circumstances of life. LIFE for us is more than all these fleeting realities -- because we know that none of these conditions of life ARE LONG LASTING.

Sunshine is here today, gone tomorrow. Human relationships and health are the same. For us, these are JUST NOT THE REAL FACTS OF LIFE.

For us - not only today, but every day -- the REAL facts of life begin with one simple affirmation -- HE IS RISEN. And coupled with that fact is a second FACT of real life -- HE HAS RISEN FOR YOU AND ME. And yet to that fact is still another -- because he has risen, WE TOO HAVE RISEN FROM THE DEAD.

Now with those three facts -- it's not only great to be alive NOW, but it is and can be great to be alive AT ANY TIME. Because those facts are not altered ONE BIT by the weather, or a spouses' disposition, or our physical health, or by how things are going at the office. So let's look briefly at THE REAL FACTS OF 'LIFE" -- let's see how they make it eternally great to be alive.

Fact number one. He is risen from the dead! Nothing really too new about that fact for most of us here. But think about it. RISEN FROM THE DEAD. Yes, from the dead!

What does death mean to you? I mean, other than being afraid to die, what does death mean to you. Well, for the Christian, death means the ultimate victory of sin -- the power of corruption. Without Jesus Christ, God's last word on life is DEATH. There would be nothing more. And that's not much to look forward to.

But this day - the day of resurrection - declares that Jesus HAS ALREADY DIED that death for us. When you and I were baptized into Christ, we were baptized into his death. That's why we proclaim IN BAPTISM that we have already died with Christ.

So, we are DEAD TO SIN -- meaning, sin has already done its worst to us. What more can it do but kill us? And it has already done that in Christ -- we have died to the power of corruption with Jesus Christ.

It is like when you and I owe someone money and haven't paid it. How do we feel when we see that person? Guilty and ashamed, right??

In fact, we do all we can to avoid that person. BUT - when we have paid him back, we are free of guilt and shame.

So it is with God. When we were **controlled** by sin, when that power alone had control of our lives -- we felt guilty and **ashamed** before God. We were afraid of God, avoided Him, even hated Him.

But the price has been paid. Sin is no longer in charge of our lives. You and I have died to it with Christ. So - there's no need to be obsessed with guilt, and shame, -- no need to avoid God. **The facts are that** Christ has died for our sin -- we can consider ourselves DEAD TO SIN.

But that's not the only **REAL FACT** of resurrected life. That's not the only reason it's great to be alive. Death to sin has occurred so that there can be a resurrection to new life.

Through Jesus Christ and our baptism, God has acted to give us **NEW LIFE**. It's like a television set. When it isn't plugged in, it's dead. But when plugged in it has the power to receive signals directed to it.

HE IS RISEN means we are plugged into Him -- no longer unplugged. We are alive to His signals **NOW** -- moving us into his action.

And that's the most **REAL FACT** of our resurrection faith -- it's great to be alive **TO GOD**. Because He's the only eternal power that can get us beyond bad weather, irritable spouses, poor health, and yes, death itself.

That's why God calls us to be his images on earth -- to broadcast his power. Because his power is the **ONLY POWER** that will make us alive **EVEN AFTER DEATH**. Moreover, his power is the only power that will free us **NOW** from the powers of death on earth -- guilt, shame, and worthlessness.

Yes, these are the REAL FACTS OF LIFE! Of resurrected life! That's why it's great to be alive ALL THE TIME. Because God loves, forgives, heals, and ultimately saves us THROUGH OUR OWN RESURRECTION.

So it is that we hunger and thirst for his powerful Word. So it is that we love the world, forgive those who trespass against us, heal and help our neighbor, and proclaim salvation to everyone who will hear us.

Yes, it's great to be controlled by the power of God's merciful love -- rather than the power of deadly corruption. Oh - that's not to say that we will never be sinful, or corrupt, or that we won't die. It's only to say that these powers WILL NEVER HAVE THE LAST WORD.

The last word will be -- HE IS RISEN, AND SO WILL YOU AND I as we remain in Him. Those are the real facts of LIFE. And regardless of previous tragedy, loss, shame or guilt -- those *will not be* the controlling powers of our lives.

The power of the resurrection controls the present and the future. And that's why it's ALWAYS great to be alive through Jesus Christ.

AMEN

EASTER SUNDAY

Luth Church of the Master, Troy
11 a.m. Festival Resurrection Communion
April 10, 1977

AN UNEXPECTED VICTORY"

"... But these words seemed to the (disciples)
an idle tale, and they did not believe them"
Luke 24:11

If 2½ weeks ago, the morning headlines had
read: "TIM KING -- ALIVE AND WELL - NOT
HARMED, MOLESTED OR IN ANY WAY MISTREATED,"
how would you and I have reacted to that News?
Many of us would have said: "Incredible!"
"Unbelievable!" "It's got to be a mistake!"

No doubt about it. It would have been an
unexpected victory. And let's face it -- few
of us were expecting such a victory.

Let's try another headline. "200 SNAPDRAGONS
HALT CONSTRUCTION OF A \$600 MILLION HYDRO-
ELECTRIC PROJECT IN MAINE!" Sound incredible
enough? Should we call it an idle tale?
Well, for its supporters right now, it's an
unexpected victory. Because on Jan. 23rd of
this year, the New York Times carried this
headline. It seems that there are only 200
snapdragon plants known to exist in the world.

Or another headline that may appear soon in
THE LUTHERAN magazine. "YOUTHFUL BUNNIES FROM
CHURCH OF THE MASTER TURN THE SECULAR INTO THE
SACRED." Does that sound like an idle tale? Well
there were some real reservations expressed
when I suggested the idea around here.

But another unexpected victory. Incredible
as it may seem - the youth were more enthusiastic
about this witness than I was. Sure there's
some novelty to it -- and probably there aren't
mobs of people here today because of it -- but
it showed in a personal way that our youth care
about our neighbors and care about their Lord.

But in light of the way we deal with the unexpected victories - is it any wonder that when the women went to the disciples with their story that these men retorted: "Hmhp - that's an idle tale if I've ever heard one." "Too unbelievable to be true."

It seems to me we can almost make a generalization about this reality that Luke reports -- we have lots of trouble handling UNEXPECTED VICTORIES. And yet conversely -- we all seem to yearn for these dramatic turning points.

For instance -- what person suffering with an incurable disease has not hungered desperately for an unexpected victory. He/She wants the dramatic turning point -- even if it's not perfect health.

Or take those who play the Lottery. What's that person really looking for? That's right-- an unexpected victory. The odds are really against them -- but they're playing for the unexpected victory.

Which Detroit Red Wing fan wasn't looking for an unexpected victory for the Wings this past season. Just ONE unexpected victory every other week would have sweetened the season a little bit.

Yes - we yearn for the unexpected victories-- Even when the odds are against us -- be that U of D against Michigan, or Church of the Master against the well established tabernacles of Troy and Bloomfield Hills -- we all yearn for the dramatic victories ~~NOT EXPECTED~~.

And why? Because let's face it -- we need them to survive. We need to know that there really can be a turning point for our lives -- a time, a place, a moment when things will be better. Whether we're terminally ill or just doing o.k. -- we're still all looking for that better day and better way.

And I can only believe that the eleven disciples were looking for the same kind of reality. They had given up what little security and comforts they had reaped from their vocations. All of this to follow Jesus. And now -- there was no easy return to their former professions. They had become too deeply identified with this radical who claimed to be King of the Jews -- and now, who had died a humiliating death. Is it any wonder that they were hiding -- and hoping for an unexpected victory?

And along come the first official evangelists of the resurrection -- yes, the first pastors to preach the Good News of Christ Risen. Mind you - they were women. (Strange that there should be so much of a tizzy about women pastors when it's so solidly biblical.) Anyway, they announce the unexpected victory. And the response -- "Sounds like an idle tale to me."

And even though these eleven soon changed their minds -- the fact is, that many have remained where they were at that moment. Like them - many people feel trapped by their circumstances of life -- whether guilt, boredom or failure. Many people are searching for a turning point power.

So - God delivers. And the package is the life, death, and resurrection of a man named Jesus. And millions respond to this deliverance by passing it off as an idle. Whether heathen or Christian - when we choose to live by the power of put downs, guilt, and indifference -- then we have passed off the resurrection as AN IDLE TALE.

And yet we shouldn't be too surprised by this response. In a world dominated by sin and hell (and living around here we surely can't deny sin and hell), this news is too good to be true.

Let's fact it - this mighty act of God just does not fit in with our common human experience. Who could believe such a story? Who could believe that God desires to deliver us -- when we know that friends and foes are desiring to shaft us every day? Anyone wonder why the Good News sounds like an idle tale? We've been too conditioned by the Galvaries of life.

So it is that God says "yes" to our search for a turning point. And we often turn around and say "no" to his offer. God offers his best in human form -- and we give him our worst expression of humanity -- crucifixion, hate, and blasphemy.

But- God will not be stiffeled by our attempts to put him down. Three days after our worst, God again offered his best -- he again said "yes" to us.

Now - God in human form was not only claiming to be King of the Jews. That was incredible enough! Now - he had manifested himself again - in human form - as the resurrected Lord of Life. And 2000 years of faithful testimony has shown that TO BE MORE THAN AN IDLE TALE.

Incredible? Yes! But God will not be put down by our worst. He continues to say "Yes" to us even as we say "No" to him.

My friends - because you and I are honest in our search for a better day and better way -- because we really do hunger for a turning point-- an unexpected victory -- then we will say "Yes" to God's resurrected power of love in Jesus Christ.

And even amidst the hell and death of life, this is the one UNEXPTED VICTORY that we will not allow to be defeated.

AMEN

EASTER SUNDAY - 11 A.M.,
LUTH CHURCH OF THE MASTER, TROY
MARCH 26, 1978

"THE FINAL VICTORY"

"DO NOT BE AFRAID; FOR I KNOW THAT YOU SEEK JESUS WHO WAS CRUCIFIED. HE IS NOT HERE; FOR HE HAS RISEN, AS HE SAID. COME, SEE THE PLACE WHERE HE LAY. THEN GO QUICKLY AND TELL HIS DISCIPLES THAT HE HAS RISEN FROM THE DEAD, AND BEHOLD, HE IS GOING BEFORE YOU TO GALILEE; THERE YOU WILL SEE HIM."
MATTHEW 28:6-7

A CHAPLAIN AND ANOTHER MARINE WERE LAYING IN THE BOTTOM OF A FOXHOLE DURING AN ARTILLERY BARRAGE. THE MARINE STRUCK A MATCH, LIT HIS CIGARETTE, AND THEN HELD THE BURNING MATCH UP IN FRONT OF THE CHAPLAIN'S FACE, AND WITH A QUICK PUFF OF BREATH, BLEW IT OUT. THEN HE SAID, "THAT'S LIFE, ISN'T IT, PADRE?" THE CHAPLAIN REPLIED: "YOU'RE WRONG. REMEMBER THOSE LITTLE TRICK BIRTHDAY CANDLES THAT WE USED TO HAVE - WHERE YOU SUPPOSEDLY BLEW OUT THE CANDLE ON THE CAKE AND IT WOULD BE DEAD AND SMOLDERING?? THEN YOU WOULD TURN AWAY FOR A MOMENT, AND YOU'D LOOK BACK, AND YOU'D DISCOVER THAT THE CANDLE WAS NOT OUT AT ALL. THERE IT WAS, BURNING BRIGHTLY. THAT'S LIFE, MAC, AND DON'T EVER FORGET IT!"

THE MARINE IN THIS STORY IS NOT MUCH DIFFERENT FROM HOSTS OF SKEPTICS IN THIS WORLD. THEIR MESSAGE IS ALWAYS THE SAME: THE WORLD HAS STILL NOT CHANGED VERY MUCH. MANY PEOPLE WILL OBSERVE EASTER IN SOME FASHION THIS SUNDAY -- AND MONDAY IT WILL BE BACK TO BUSINESS AS USUAL. NOTHING IN THEIR LIVES WILL HAVE CHANGED. LIKE THE CLASSIC SKEPTIC -- THEY WILL CONTINUE TO LIVE AS IF NOTHING

SUBSTANCIAL HAS REALLY CHANGED. I THINK IF YOU AND I ARE REALLY HONEST WITH OURSELVES -- THERE ARE SOME DAYS THAT WE ALL FEEL LIKE THOSE SKEPTICS.

AS I LOOK OVER THE LAST 40 DAYS OF LENT, I'M TEMPTED TO ASK: HAS ANYTHING SUBSTANCIAL REALLY CHANGED? OH - THERE'S A NEW FACE HERE AND THERE -- A SIGN OF RENEWED COMMITMENT HERE OR THERE. BUT GENERALLY SPEAKING -- SO MUCH LOOKS LIKE BUSINESS AS USUAL. HAS ANYTHING REALLY SUBSTANCIAL CHANGED??

THE FACTS ARE -- THAT FOR MANY PEOPLE -- AND FOR MANY SO-CALLED CHRISTIANS -- NOT ONE DAMN THING HAS CHANGED! THEY ARE STILL LIVING "OBSESSED BY THE THINGS, AND FEARS, AND PROBLEMS, AND GUILTS, AND HURTS, AND BITTERNESSES ALL AROUND THEM." YES - NOTHING HAS CHANGED FOR THESE PEOPLE. AND THEY'LL PROBABLY LEAVE THEIR EASTER CELEBRATIONS TODAY WITH STILL NOTHING CHANGING FOR THEM.

THESE PEOPLE WILL GO ON LIVING THEIR TWO-BIT LIFE. THEY WILL CONTINUE TO BE OBSESSED BY THEIR OBSESSIONS -- WHETHER GUILT OR PETTINESS OR LIES OR BITTERNESS. BECAUSE FOR THEM, THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST IS NOT A VICTORY -- IT IS JUST A PRETTY EASTER STORY.

YOU SEE THE ISSUE AT STAKE TODAY IS NOT WHETHER JESUS CHRIST ROSE FROM THE DEAD OR NOT. THE RESURRECTION IS A FACT OF HISTORY -- LIKE ANY OTHER EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT. BUT WHAT'S AT STAKE TODAY IS - WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE? JUST ACCEPTING THE HISTORICAL FACT OF THE RESURRECTION IS NO GREAT THING -- WHAT YOU AND I MUST ADDRESS IS THE QUESTION: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?
DOES IT CHANGE ANYTHING?

RESPONSE

THE ANSWER TO THAT TWO-FOLD QUESTION IS A TWO-FOLD ANSWER: THE RESURRECTION ASSURES ME OF A FINAL VICTORY AND ALSO GIVES ME THE OPPORTUNITY FOR THAT SAME VICTORY RIGHT NOW.

FIRST, THE EASTER MESSAGE OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION ASSURES ME OF LIFE AFTER I DIE. SOME PEOPLE MIGHT ASK, IS THAT REALLY IMPORTANT -- OR IS THAT JUST A PSYCHOLOGICAL NEED THAT HAS BEEN CONTRIVED TO MAKE DEATH MORE EASY?? THAT'S A FAIR QUESTION. AND I CAN ONLY ANSWER IT IN ONE WAY! ETERNAL LIFE IS VERY IMPORTANT -- AND A LOT MORE THAN A FIGMENT OF MY IMAGINATION.

TELL ME WHAT THE PURPOSE OF LIFE WOULD BE WITHOUT THE EASTER MESSAGE. YOU KNOW AND SO DO I. WITHOUT THE RESURRECTION LIFE IS NOTHING MORE THAN ONE LONG PROGRESSION TOWARD FINAL DEFEAT. BECAUSE DEATH IS DEFEAT! WITHOUT THE RESURRECTION, WE MAKE DEATH THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF LIFE. ONLY A FOOL OR A SKEPTIC WOULD CHOOSE THAT ALTERNATIVE.

YES - EASTER ANNOUNCES NOT ONLY SPRING -- BUT THE FINAL VICTORY FOR EVERYONE WHO TRUSTS IN GOD'S PROMISE. DEATH WILL NOT HAVE THE LAST WORD -- DECAY WILL NOT BE THE LAST REALITY OF LIFE -- EASTER ANNOUNCES ETERNAL LIFE AFTER DEATH. AND THAT MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE -- BECAUSE IT IS GOD WHO IS GOING TO DO SOMETHING -- IT IS GOD WHO IS GOING TO REFASHION THIS BODY EVEN IF IT GETS SMASHED TO SMITHEREENS ON SOME MICHIGAN HIGHWAY. HE PROMISES TO RE-MAKE IT, WITH EVEN SOME RESEMBLANCE TO ITS PRESENT FORM. THAT'S TRULY INCREDIBLE -- BUT THAT'S ONE DIMENSION

OF ETERNAL LIFE.

THE SECOND DIMENSION DEALS WITH THE HERE AND NOW. JESUS SAID: "AND THIS IS ETERNAL LIFE, THAT THEY KNOW YOU AS THE ONLY TRUE GOD, AND JESUS CHRIST WHOM YOU HAVE SENT." PAUL SAID IT THIS WAY: "IF YOU HAVE BEEN RAISED WITH CHRIST, THEN SEEK THE THINGS THAT ARE ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST IS ..."

ETERNAL LIFE BEGINS NOW! IT BEGINS AS SOON AS WE GIVE UP BEING OBSESSED WITH THINGS BELOW -- AND LET OUR MINDS BE CONTROLLED BY THE THINGS ABOVE. ETERNAL LIFE IS NOT JUST BEING CONCERNED ABOUT MORE TIME ON EARTH -- BECAUSE BEING CONCERNED ABOUT MORE TIME IS BEING OBSESSED WITH THINGS BELOW. ETERNAL LIFE IS LIVING OUT A LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD RIGHT NOW!

MAYBE I CAN ILLUSTRATE THIS BY RELATING OUR LIVES TO THE PAST 40 DAYS. WHAT HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT DURING THE PAST 40 DAYS OF LENT? HAVE YOUR THOUGHTS BEEN ANY DIFFERENT DURING THE LAST 40 DAYS THAN THEY WERE BEFORE THAT?

FOR ME, I HAVE THOUGHT A LOT ABOUT MY DEATH DURING THESE PAST 40 DAYS. MAYBE I'VE BEEN DOING THAT JUST BECAUSE I'VE BEEN PUSHING MYSELF A LITTLE HARDER. MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE OF THE TIGHTNESS I FEEL EVER SO OFTEN IN MY CHEST. WHATEVER, THIS PAST LENT HAS CAUSED ME TO THINK A LOT ABOUT MY OWN DEATH -- HOW IT COULD COME AT ANY MINUTE.

AND ALONG WITH THOSE THOUGHTS I'VE ASKED MYSELF TWO QUESTIONS: AM I READY FOR THE FINAL VICTORY? AND HOW

HAS CHRIST CHANGED ME DURING THESE 40 DAYS?

TO THE FIRST QUESTION THERE'S BUT ONE ANSWER FOR A TRUE DISCIPLE: I'M READY! THAT DOESN'T MEAN I WANT TO DIE TOMORROW -- IT SIMPLY MEANS THAT I'M ALWAYS READY! IF THAT'S YOUR ANSWER TO THAT FIRST QUESTION, THEN CHRIST HAS RISEN! THEN EASTER IS MORE THAN JUST A SENTIMENTAL GARDEN STORY.

TO THE SECOND QUESTION - HOW HAS CHRIST CHANGED ME DURING THESE LAST 40 DAYS? - WELL, THAT'S A MORE DIFFICULT ONE. THAT'S A DANGEROUS ONE, BECAUSE THAT QUESTION CAN TRICK ME INTO BEING SELF-RIGHTEOUS. I CAN BE VERY TEMPTED TO START NAMING MY VIRTUES -- AND HOW I HAVE GIVEN SACRIFICIALLY. BUT THAT'S NOT THE PROPER ANSWER -- CHRIST DOES NOT WANT TO HEAR HOW GREAT I AM -- BECAUSE HE REALLY KNOWS THAT I'M NOT THAT GREAT ANYWAY.

NO - THAT'S NOT HOW THE LAST 40 DAYS HAVE CHANGED MY RELATIONSHIP TO HIM. THESE LAST 40 DAYS OF LENT HAVE AGAIN MADE ME AWARE OF HOW MUCH I NEED GOD'S MERCY AND FORGIVENESS. THEY HAVE AGAIN REMINDED ME THAT I AM NOT PERFECT. THEY HAVE AGAIN REMINDED ME THAT I MUST DIE AGAIN TO MY OWN LUSTS! AND IN MAKING ME AWARE OF THESE THINGS -- GOD HAS BEEN RENEWING ME.

BY NO MEANS HAS HE MADE ME PERFECT -- AND HE NEVER WILL AS LONG AS I'M ON EARTH. BUT EVERY DAY HE CHISELS AWAY AT ME -- RESTYLING WHAT HAS BEEN MUDDIED UP THE DAY BEFORE.

THAT'S ETERNAL LIFE HERE AND NOW! CONSTANTLY SUBMITTING ONESELF TO GOD FOR RESTYLING & REMODELING.

IF YOU HAVE BEEN DOING THAT NOT ONLY FOR 40 DAYS, BUT FOR THE LAST 365 DAYS -- THEN CHRIST IS RISEN -- BECAUSE HE HAS CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE HERE AND NOW. AND THAT MEANS THAT YOU AND I ARE ALREADY SHARING IN THE FINAL VICTORY. BECAUSE WE ARE ALREADY SEEKING THAT POWER OF LOVE THAT IS FROM ABOVE -- RATHER THAN SIMPLY RELYING ON THE POWERS OF GREED AND GUILT THAT REIGN HERE ON EARTH.

IT MAKES A REAL DIFFERENCE TO KNOW THAT GOD WILL GIVE ME THE FINAL VICTORY AFTER I DIE - JUST AS HE GAVE HIS SON THE FINAL VICTORY. AND IT MAKES A REAL DIFFERENCE TO LIVE NOW SEEKING THOSE POWERS FROM CHRIST ABOVE -- BECAUSE THAT'S LIVING WITH A FORETASTE OF VICTORY EVERY DAY. THAT MAKES EASTER MORE THAN A SENTIMENTAL SPRING DAY -- EASTER STANDS FOR A DAILY CELEBRATION OF GOD'S VICTORY --

OVER PHYSICAL DEATH,

AND OVER SPIRITUAL DEATH.

CHRIST IS RISEN! ALLELUIA! AMEN

Easter Sunday
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
April 6, 1980

"THE VICTORY OVER DARKNESS"

Darkness -- dawn -- daylight - and dusk.
Four great gifts from God -- four gifts that
we experience each day -- yet four gifts that
each of us often takes for granted.

Which of the four do you like the best.
Darkness? Dawn? Daylight? or dusk?

Obviously - darkness is good for some things--
most of us like darkness when we're hiding
from someone or something. We like darkness
when we're with a boyfriend or girlfriend --
because it gives us some privacy. But most
of us would not want constant darkness.

Likewise for daylight. We really like day-
light for doing our work. Obviously - we need
daylight for getting suntans. Daylight is
great for sporting events. But if all the
time were daylight -- our lives would get
too filled up with awareness. We need a
rest from daylight --- even darkness has
a beneficial place in our lives.

Then there's dusk. This is often a pretty
time -- a time to unwind from a busy day of
activity. But beautiful as dusk is -- it also
reminds us that we are another day older - and
maybe deeper in debt. Yes - dusk reminds us
that what we did not do on that day WILL BE LOST..
that day will not give us another opportunity.

So - dawn is left. And as we navigated our
way here this morning -- even in our sleepiness--
dawn became the reminder in the most vivid way
OF GOD'S CONSTANT ORDER OF RENEWAL. Dawn
awakens us to the new day -- separating us from
the bleakness of night -- It splinters the
darkness and reminds us that there are new
opportunities and new hopes and new challenges
ahead of us. Dawn beautifully captures the

mood of the resurrection: because the resurrection tells us that we shall never have total darkness again.

Dawn is the time of discovery. It is the time to discover the awakening of life in its many forms. It is the time that confirms the orderliness of God's creation. It is the time that awakens us to the realities of life and the world around us. Dawn is part of God's good news -- because it reminds us that the shadows of yesterday's failures are to be wiped away -- and that today is a new opportunity to rise to new heights of God-likeness.

Yet -- as great as dawn really is -- why is it that we seem to be so obsessed with darkness in life. Why is it that we often want to hide in the darkness -- rather than offer ourselves in the light?? Why is it that we choose the darkness of pessimism -- instead of the light of Christian hope.

In short - why do we seem to choose death over life?? I'm not talking about physical death as much as I'm talking about talk, actions, and thoughts which negate life rather than lift up life.

For instance -- when you talk about other people -- what is the content of that talking?? Do you talk about their faults -- or about their strengths? Do you run them down -- or do you lift them up.

I don't know about you -- but I often find myself talking dead-talk -- in other words, saying things that put others down. For instance even last night as I was preparing for this morning -- I was really putting Hope's youth down -- because I felt you should be doing more set-up for the breakfast.

Obviously -- that may be a true reality -- but what I was overlooking was your willingness

to be here -- to be here to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Just your presence alone is a blessing to me -- and to everyone in this church.

So you see -- even though I still haven't changed by mind on the issue of responsibility-- I can share that by not making it all dead-talk-- I can thank God for your presence- and your loving support.

Yes - so often we seem to get hung up in darkness -- in celebrating the death of life. Recently -- Sue and I have been talking a lot about her father's lung cancer. And even in that talk -- I've noticed how we are subtly saying things which seem like hopelessness -- we are talking almost as if death is almost inevitable!

How sad that we should face serious illness by talking DEATH BEFORE WE TALK LIFE. Obviously, we dare not deny serious realities -- but how sad when we make the challenges of illness so damn dismal that we don't even give LIFE A CHANCE.

It's no wonder that people give up so easy -- there's nobody around to encourage them. Everybody writes off life before they even give it a good fight.

What's one of the most common expressions you often hear from people: I often hear things like --

What's the use, I might as well give up!
or Nobody cares if I live or die!

OR I'm not going to give it a try -- because I'm afraid I might fail.

You see -- all that kind of talk is dead-talk. It's all about darkness. Amazing isn't it -- we're often trapped by the darkness -- by a power which is all around us that seeks to divide - to destroy - to belittle -- to cause us to give up -- to make us feel hopeless -- to make us feel that life's ultimate expression is death itself.

Dear friends -- you and I need to be delivered from that kind of darkness -- we desperately need to be saved from the darkness of dead-talk and death itself.

And that's why we're here this morning -- here at dawn. Because the dawn of Easter proclaimed that God would no longer let us live in darkness -- the resurrection of Jesus Christ clearly means that death is not the ultimate expression of life -- "he is risen" means that we will choose life-talk rather than dead-talk.

We have not come here today to seek the dead-- we have come here this morning to see the living -- especially the living Christ.

And the living Christ is here this morning -- in this bread and wine -- and in this body of people -- and in his living word.

And that living Christ says -- you shall not choose indifference as your way of life -- because I have come here this morning to tell you that you make a difference.

And that same Christ says - you shall not live in the darkness of despair -- because I have come here to tell you that you are not rejected by me or my people.

And that living Christ says - you are no longer in the darkness of isolation -- because I am here amidst these friends -- and now they are your friends.

And that living Christ says - you shall not give up in the darkness of disease -- because it is my will that you should be well -- and I will heal you.

And the risen Christ says - you will no longer merely live to die -- because that kind of life is darkness. I have risen from death to let you know that you too will rise with me.

Yes - the dawn of this day confirms that Christ is risen -- and his resurrection is the ultimate victory over darkness. Let us live in the light and spirit of this morning's victory!

EASTER SUNDAY

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

April 11, 1982

"RISE AND SHINE!"

"If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For 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."

I Cor. 15:19-22

If there is one Sunday of the year that Christians follow God, i e, they do what God did for Jesus that first Easter -- this is the Sunday. On this Sunday Christians "GET UP WITH JESUS." On Easter Sunday, Christians "rise up" -- they RISE AND SHINE like no other Sunday of the church year.

One need only look at the attendance statistics for Easter year after year. Last year at Hope Church, our average attendance for the year was 311.3 (and don't ask me about the .3 person). But last Easter our attendance was over 820 (counting those in the nursery). The facts speak for themselves: three-times as many people rise and shine on Easter for worship than any other Sunday of the year.

Why is this so? Why do so many appear for worship on this day? Is it the news of the empty tomb? Is it to hear the dramatic music of Easter? Is it because the church offers the best breakfast in town for the price? Or is it simply because it's just the social custom to rise and shine on Easter morning?

Well, each of us knows our own motivation. But I do want you to know that I've made a special Easter study this past week. I've listened with special attentiveness to the talk shows on radio and TV for their content about Easter. And believe me - there's been a lot of talk about Easter on the talk shows this week. But not once did I hear anything about the resurrection ... or Jesus Christ ... or even God and Easter. I heard a lot of talk about Easter

being the day of bunnies and jelly beans ... of family get-togethers and new wardrobes ... of Easter being that special day to feast and frolic. But there was no mention of God's involvement in this day; the day was called a holiday, but not a holy day.

Well, I guess we have to fess up, don't we? For many, this day is a hollow-day -- a day in which the ultimate hope is not the resurrection, but merely a basketful of Jelly beans or Easter eggs. Or if you're really lucky, today's the day of a big chocolate bunny.

But thank God! We're here for more than that! Our reasons to rise and shine may be many -- but we all know there's only one that makes a difference not only for today ... or next week ... or next year ... but for all the days of our lives. *And that's the victory over death.*

Unlike the "talk of Toledo" or any other media event, we have not gathered to discuss the ultimate significance of jelly beans or Easter eggs or the latest spring fashions. Nor have we gathered to debate the historical reality of the resurrection. Jelly beans and Easter eggs are factual realities of this day! Like them or not, they are here to stay! Likewise, the resurrection! Like any other eye-witness account, it remains a verifiable fact! It does not matter what the world says about life after death -- God has spoken definitively about it -- he has verified it as the ultimate truth!

The fact of our rising and shining on this day then is not for a jelly bean discussion or theological debate of the resurrection. We have risen for one reason ... and for one shining truth: to be assured that the final victory is ours! And that's the only news and talk of Toledo that we're here to share today.

The good news of Easter is that the last enemy has been destroyed! Easter is God's day to shine! Easter is the day he did the most marvelous thing -- he put all things under his feet, but most especially DEATH! That's why we rise and shine with Christ today -- because we have been given the assurance of victory over death!

The worldly wise will say to this -- "Christians,

resurrection is just your psychological need to make death more easy." Maybe for some people -- that's the truth!?! But it's not a factual reality for the faithful.

To be among the faithful is to be reminded of a never-ending question: Without Easter what is life's purpose? Every honest person knows the answer: Without Easter, life is a long or short progression toward ultimate defeat! Without the resurrection, death is the victor. Without the resurrection, death becomes the ultimate reason for living. And only a fool or a skeptic would choose that alternative.

God has a better way! He gives us reason to rise this day and everyday regardless of our life condition... because he gives us the assurance that death will be swallowed up by the resurrection to new life. And that's worth getting up for a lot more than bunnies or jelly beans.

As Paul says - to be faithful is to hope not only for this life, but to be certain that God can refashion this body into a resurrected life. The Easter news is that even if this body of mine is smashed to smithereens on I-75 -- God can be trusted to re-make it --- to re-fashion it as he has already done for his Son, Jesus Christ.

And that's not only good news for those who have died, it's great news for us who are living. But of course, the question remains:

How does the resurrection news help me to live between now and the final victory. Quite simply - it helps you and me live "with confidence" - "with hope."

Living with confidence or hope does not mean the elimination of tears or trembling. Living with confidence in the resurrection does not mean an end to frustrations or fears. Easter does not mean that we live our lives in heaven; we must still live out lives in the valleys and mountaintops of this earth.

It was Easter six years ago in which I faced the death of my mother. The fact that my mother was dying and I was

preaching the resurrection did not change the valley of death for my mother. She still died. Likewise, in this Lenten-Easter period we have just faced the death of Sue's father. Again, the promise of the resurrection did not change his life circumstance; he still died. And I know several of you today have faced or are facing similar illnesses or deaths in your families.

The good news of the resurrection does not take away the sting of death for any of us. We still feel the hurt; we still cry the tears. But the resurrection does take away the defeat of death! It does not leave us in a cold tomb or frozen grave. It leaves us risen ... and shining with Christ.

That's the talk of the towns of the world this day: that resurrection people can rise and shine even in the midst of tragedy and death. Because their hope is not built upon the foundation of that which decays on earth; their hope is built upon God who has the power to destroy even death.

And so we rise and shine today ... and in the days ahead. We rise and shine to face the valleys and the mountaintops of life on this good earth. But we rise and shine everyday with the confidence that God has already defeated death; and so we face life's joys and defeats with the assurance of winning the final victory with Christ!!

AMEN

EASTER

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

April 3, 1983

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"THE TURNING POINT"

"Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise. ... but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them."
Luke 24:6-7,11

A week ago Good Friday, the church telephone rang about mid-afternoon. As Frances answered it, she was told by another church secretary that our organist, Paul Dickinson, had been in a tragic car accident on Thursday night. He had been transferred by air ambulance to an Ann Arbor hospital, where his condition was considered "life threatening" and he was in need of immediate blood units.

Needless to say, Frances' reaction to this news was utter shock and disbelief! When she phoned Bill Shock and me a few moments later -- we both responded with similar grief responses of denial: "It just can't be!!" "I really don't believe it!" "It must be an idle tale!" "Have you checked it out with the Ann Arbor hospital?!?" Finally I urged Frances to call the Ann Arbor hospitals direct to see if we could get more current reports on Paul.

About an hour later, Frances called me at home. She had not had any luck with the Ann Arbor hospitals. So she finally called Paul's apartment, hoping to talk to his roommate and find out where Paul really was. As she inquired about Paul through his roommate -- the roommate answered: "Oh, he's right here; do you want to talk to him." More miraculously shocking news -- how could he be at home in life threatening condition?? Well - the story finally got clarified: yes, Paul had totaled his car, but he had been miraculously spared any serious injury. And all of us in Toledo sighed with grateful relief for this turning point in the story!

But the story illustrates for us our reaction to incredible news. Much like those first disciples, our first reaction to an incredible story is SHOCK! Disbelief! Denial!! Whether the tragic news of a friend's accident -- or the miraculous news of Jesus being raised from the dead -- our human response

we are numb! often dumbfounded!
is much the same: we need time to process the news! And
therefore our first reaction to a shocking, out-of-the-ordinary
story is negative -- "It just can't be so!!"

But whether it's a friend's story or the Easter story --
that's not where God wants us to stay -- to stay stuck in
the negative. He recognizes our need for adjustment time --
he surely recognized the disciples need for adjustment time
after the horror of Good Friday. But God desires that we
move beyond the adjustment period -- namely, God seeks to
turn Good Friday grief into Easter morning joy! God would
not allow the eleven to wallow in their Good Friday grief.

And so it was that God offered each of them an encounter
with the risen Christ! And that encounter became the most
historic turning point in human history. St. Paul said it
this way: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what
I also received, that Christ died for our sins ... that he was
buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance
with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to
the twelve. Then he appeared to more than 500 brethren, then
to James, then to all the apostles... and last of all, as to
one untimely born, he appeared also to me."

Some still call that an idle tale, but those who were there
were graphically convinced that God had asserted his power
over death itself. Doubt soon dissipated! Grief soon
became glory for God. And those same followers who first
said it was an "idle tale" **made the resurrection the turning**
point for our faith and history.

For those followers - there was now no other historical
event which more vividly denounced the forces of evil and
death! For those followers - nothing more categorically
proclaimed the fact that God was alive and living. These
same apostles NOW KNEW that God did so love the world that he
gave his only begotten son -- not to condemn the world, but
that everyone in the world might have eternal life!!

Yes - this day became the TURNING POINT of belief for
that first generation of followers. And it has become the
same TURNING POINT of belief for all the generations that
have followed!

Easter morning became not just one morning to celebrate once each year -- but rather a TURNING POINT to celebrate every morning of our lives! To live on this side of the Easter event is to live with Christ alive! Each day becomes a NEW DAY to turn darkness into light through the power of Christ's love and forgiving compassion.

But all of this talk about Christ Alive can be just like all the talk we hear today about Toledo Alive. It can just be a lot of pious P.R. -- a lot of religious rapture -- just an idle tale to be told and retold on Easter Sunday. Each year we run the serious risk of making our Lord's resurrection into nothing more than a holy hot flash-- rather than a turning point for our lives in history!

too

Let me illustrate. There are still many in the life of this congregation for whom Christ has not yet risen!! Because they are still clinging to yesterday's grief -- to some bygone hurt, or disagreement, or pastoral failure, or some other disappointing happening of the past! The bottom line for these IS THERE HAS NOT YET BEEN A TURNING POINT. The resurrection of Jesus Christ does not yet mean enough in their hearts to get on with living ... to get on with loving ... to get on with the newness of life!! They are still wallowing in yesterday's sour milk -- in yesterday's grief -- in yesterday's guilt or shame!! For them -- Christ is dead!! Not risen, indeed!

But don't get me wrong -- I know how tempting it is to get stuck in yesterday's grief! There's nothing the devil likes better than to see us cling to the negatives of the past. How easy it is to allow the negative power of yesterday's disappointments to rule over tomorrow's future!! How easy it is to allow yesterday's sin and grief and greed and heartache totally dominate and destroy THE HOPE FOR A BETTER TOMORROW! When we allow yesterday's cynicism to rule in our hearts -- then we have denied the resurrection of Jesus Christ -- then there is no TURNING POINT FOR TOMORROW!

But just like those first disciples -- God will not let us stay stuck in the negative! Paul Dickinson could have allowed his negative encounter on the highway to cause him to give up on driving ... or to give up on playing in Toledo. But that would be the spirit of defeat -- the spirit of crucifixion. And that's not the Spirit of Easter that God calls us to live everyday!!

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ -- God has made his message crystal clear for us: he will not allow us to live or to die defeated. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ -- God has given us his turning point power for our lives ...

the power to turn greed into renewed giving...

the power to turn arrogance into compassion ...

the power to turn grief into merciful LOVE IN

ACTION...

the power to turn defeat into victory...

and death into life.

That turning point is so classically illustrated in the story of the philosopher teacher who became a hermit. This old traveling teacher had been given a power with words. He had often spoken great comfort to the dying; he had often given hope to the poor. But as he got older, his own health began to wain and his poverty clung to him that much greater. He became deeply discouraged -- so discouraged that he silent and withdrew into the desert -- forever to remain wordless. He convinced himself that he would be content to subsist on sips of water and handful of dry berries.

One day - a stranger was crawling toward him across the burning sands. The stranger was equally desparate and beaten. When he reached the hermit -- he merely yearned for a word of encouragement. But the hermit uttered no sound. Finally - the stranger, studying the hermit's face, said: "Your wordlessness is killing me, and I see from your eyes it is killing you as well ... Do you want me to die???"

The old hermit began to weep. From the deep cave of his being, came a low moan which his dry lips shaped into a single word: "NO!"

Both men died that night. But as James Carroll, the story teller says, "when they might have died dead, instead, they died alive!"

They died allowing the power of God's compassion through Christ to be alive! They experienced the turning point of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even in the midst of death, they had experienced new life. That new life is ours to share every day!! And that's no idle tale!!

AMEN

EASTER SUNDAY
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
April 22, 1984
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"FROM EMPTY TOMBS TO LIVING ENCOUNTERS!"

"Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above..." Colossians 3:1

"Woman," Jesus said, "Why are you crying?" Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, Mary said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned to him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!"
John 20:15-16.

There are empty tombs all around us. Whether we want to face them or not -- they are there. Widows and widowers face the empty beds that beloved spouses once shared. Middle-aged parents face the silent homes empty of the children who once gave them purpose. Infertile women curse their empty wombs. Divorced adults and their children face the end of a shared vision that once sustained them. As individuals and families, we know what it is to face empty tombs.

Empty tombs also abound in our faith and religious life. Pews full at Easter and Christmas often become amazingly empty throughout the rest of the year. Commitments made at the beginning of the year seem to become so secondary as the year progresses -- esp. as summer fun makes its advance. Rituals once considered unalterable are now altered. Traditions once highly revered are now challenged and changed. As a church --- we have faced and will continue to face many empty tombs!

As we approach the 21st century -- society cannot avoid peering into some very real empty tombs. Nuclear war -- although greatly feared by us all -- looms over us like an infinite tomb of nothingness. Climate and pollution alterations threaten the environment. Wildlife daily faces extinction due to human encroachment. Assassinations, terrorism, technological unemployment, simmering cold wars and never ending middle east strife -- these and many other things MAY MEAN A 21st CENTURY WITH MANY EMPTY TOMBS.

There are empty tombs all around us. None of us wants to face them. We want to run. We want to avoid them. We want to make believe that they don't exist.

That's exactly what Mary Magdala was about on that first Easter morning. She had come to complete the burial of Jesus. Instead she found an empty tomb. It was all that Mary of Magdala could take. She ran for refuge to the familiar, to that which was alive. Instinct sent her rapidly and immediately from the loneliness and emptiness and futility of the empty tomb to the circle of Jesus' close friends. She ran back to reality, as she knew it ... back among people. Back among that which she perceived to be alive!

We would have done the same. When the empty cavity of the tomb strikes us, we run away from it -- looking for life. We turn on the light at three o'clock in the morning when awakened from a terrifying dream. We vigorously shake our heads to clean out the thoughts of nothingness. We click on the T.V. or pick up a magazine or turn on the stereo.

~~Or we make the great escape of our day--lose ourselves in busyness. If we have enough meetings to attend, enough things to do, enough places to go, enough, enough, enough, ... just enough so that we don't have to think about the haunting emptiness we feel. We do not want to face the mocking emptiness of the tomb.~~

Yes - we've all been there at one time or another. We know what Mary felt like as she went to the tomb that morning. We have all faced that kind of empty tomb experience. And no matter how many trips we make back to the tomb -- it remains an empty reality for us! We must GET BEYOND THE EMPTY TOMB if we are looking for hope, for new life, for resurrection. Empty tombs just won't do it for us!

As Mary is weeping in the garden, she hears something behind her. She sees what appears to be the gardener. He asks her why she's weeping. She merely asks him where they have put the body of her Lord. And then comes the ENCOUNTER! He speaks but one word to her ... her name, "Mary!" Immediately she recognizes his voice and cries, "My Master!" "Rabboni!"

Her Lord is alive! And she is shocked! God's love for her is so full, so merciful, so complete that he has risen to offer her the same resurrection from the grave. The emptiness of the tomb recedes into the background. Her focus is no longer on an empty tomb but a living Lord! The empty tomb is pushed out of the Easter picture forever!

Just so the empty tomb is out of the picture for us. We do not look for hope, for new life in an empty tomb! Martin

Luther said it better than anyone: "We do not believe in the resurrection because of an empty tomb but because of a Christ-filled world!"

Mary believed after ENCOUNTERING Jesus in the garden. The disciples believed after ENCOUNTERING Jesus in the room. Those on the road to Emmaus believed AFTER ENCOUNTERING Jesus on the road. It is not through the details or descriptions of an empty tomb BUT THROUGH ENCOUNTERING the living Christ that we come to resurrection faith.

There is no proving of the resurrection, not by sacred stories or an empty tomb or detailed descriptions of discarded grave clothes. Not even the amazing case of the Shroud of Turin, with all of its scientific details, can prove the resurrection as a fact of history. Only the appearance of the living Lord in our daily experiences can assure us that the resurrection is a reality!

And how do we have those daily encounters?? How do we know that our Lord is LIVING and LOVING us? Well, the fact that his word is being preached ... that his Sacraments are being rightly administered ... that his love is being witnessed to -- THESE ARE ALL FACTS OF ENCOUNTER! These are all the methods by which he enters into hisotry ...intervenes into our world ... and enters into our lives!

But these are theological and possibly not personal enough! How do we ENCOUNTER the living Christ in a personal way much as Mary did in the garden. As Richard Hoefler says, we encounter the Christ in our day-by-day experiences of forgiveness, freedom, and fellowship!

~~WE~~ ENCOUNTER THE LIVING CHRIST THROUGH -

Forgiveness. Which one of us can say that we have never experienced the forgiving love of God for the wrongs that we have perpetrated?? There's not one of us in this room! The resurrected Christ is our guaranteed absolution! He is our living declaration of grace! Because we are forgiven, we know HE HAS RISEN!!

~~WE~~ ENCOUNTER THE LIVING CHRIST THROUGH -

Freedom. Which one of us hasn't been burdened by the endless laws and rules and regulations which weigh us down worrying whether we have been good enough...or done enough ... or pleased God enough. The law is so essential - but it can also weigh us down so that we feel helpless and hopeless. The crushing

load of legal morality and the burden of petty piety can imprison us into a perfectionistic religion. Christ rises from the dead to announce our freedom -- freedom from the letter of the law. When we have encountered that freedom, then we know that HE HAS RISEN ... RISEN INDEED!

FINALLY - WE ENCOUNTER THE LIVING CHRIST THROUGH
fellowship! We encounter Christ as a living Lord when we experience his presence through the fellowship of the Body of Christ, the Church. The church is the fellowship of saints, reborn sinners for whom Christ has died and in whom Christ lives. The church is a flesh-and-blood fellowship of warm bodies that can be reached out to and touched. The church is a living organism. Christ is the head and we are the body. Christ is the bridegroom and we are the bride. Christ is the vine and we are the branches. We are grafted together by HIS grace. We are in Christ and he is in us. We are one in Christ!

We need to remember that "raised" does not simply mean lifted up from the grave; it means "exalted." Christ has been EXALTED -- he has been raised to offer us a new and better life. Or as Paul says in Colossians, "since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts and minds on things above." In short, Christ has lifted us out of the doldrums of our empty tombs; we have encountered a living Lord who calls us by name; we belong to HIS FELLOWSHIP which day-by-day seeks to lift us by loving us and caring for us! This fellowship is the assurance that CHRIST HAS RISEN from the dead!

Forgiveness, freedom, and fellowship -- these are the basis for our faith in the resurrection. These are not the experiences of an annual visit to an empty tomb. These are day-by-day, week-by-week realities of participation and sharing! These are the experiences of word and sacrament and the warm sharing of forgiveness, freedom, and fellowship! These are the undeniable assurance that Christ HAS RISEN and that Christ IS RISEN! *THESE ARE THE ASSURANCE THAT WE HAVE MOVED FROM EMPTY TOMBS TO A LIVING ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST*

Resurrection is not the casting out of all our fears and doubts; nor is it the promise of no more darkness. There will still be many empty tombs to face; and as we face them, they will be no less dark or damp or frightening.

But Easter morning is the assurance that because Christ is risen, we are never alone at our empty tombs. We are with Him. He is there with us -- to offer us forgiveness, freedom, and an eternal fellowship that will never be taken away! AMEN

EASTER SUNDAY
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
April 7, 1985
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"SHOW AND TELL"

"And the angel said, 'Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter. He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid." Mark 16:6-8

Have you paid close attention to how Mark ends his gospel ... how he ends the story of the resurrection?? Listen again to his ending: "Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."

The women "ran! They said nothing to anyone! They were afraid!" That's where Mark leaves it! And that's also where many other people leave it. They just don't know what to make of our Christian faith. The resurrection is just too irrational! Just too unbelievable! Just too incredible! It's simply too unreal to affirm that a whole body of people believe in the resurrection from the dead. It's too astonishing! So many people just RUN AWAY FROM IT! They say NOTHING! They live totally AFRAID TO BELIEVE!

And that's exactly where many people left it in Jesus' world! It doesn't take a genius to realize that the world didn't come to attention that first Easter morning. No one of great importance even took notice of the resurrection. Only a few guards at the tomb. Only a few women who were frightened by an angel. That was it! No one else took notice. There was no great outpouring of the faith! There were no choirs, no brass, no bells, no exaltations, no choruses singing festival "Alleluias!" It was an Easter without any fanfare!!

Skeptics today are saying that nothing has really changed. They are saying that many will celebrate the resurrection today, but it will be back to business as usual tomorrow. Headlines will still be the same -- stories of strife and conflict, division and divorce, hatred and horror --- the struggle for existence will go on. Yes, skeptics will say that nothing really substantial will change from today to tomorrow!

Maybe it's good that Mark officially ends his gospel

where he does -- with "efobunto gar" ... and they were afraid. Mark does not determine or dictate the response of the faithful. He leaves the reality of the resurrection in our hands. In essence, he's asking: WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THE RISEN CHRIST? WILL YOU RUN AWAY? WILL YOU SAY NOTHING? WILL YOU REMAIN AFRAID TO "SHOW AND TELL" YOUR FAITH??

Well, thank God we know those women and disciples did not remain fearful and quiet. That quiet Easter morning was only a temporary lull. The women (being true to their form) did not remain silent or afraid. They soon got over their startled state. The day had not darkened before they were SHOWING AND TELLING the Good News! They soon said to the disciples: "Come, we want to SHOW you 'He is risen!' 'GO AND TELL others that he is risen! He is not here! See where they laid him! He is risen, indeed!"

The message hasn't changed from that morning. We are still called to SHOW AND TELL the resurrection in our lives. The resurrection announces that ALL THINGS ARE NEW! Christ is alive! Death is no longer the victor! The world of life and death has been turned upside down! Death no longer has the last word; life has that word! Life from God, life with God, life in God! That was and still is the Good News ... the best news yet! That's NEWS that needs to SHOW from our lives! That's NEWS that needs to be TOLD to others! We are to SHOW AND TELL our resurrection faith. So how will we go about it??

Well, I must confess (as I think you must) that there are some hours, some days, even some weeks when I will do very little with the resurrection. I will be like those women first were -- do nothing and say nothing. We all have times when we rebel against God's news of NEW LIFE, NEW HOPE, NEW OPPORTUNITY. Some days the discord, the disappointments, the disillusion, the disagreements, the disenchantments are too much. In the face of life's defeats ... resurrection is sometimes too much! Too illogical; too unscientific; too impractical; too demanding; too alien! "That Jesus should rise from the dead?" Just too much! And that "Jesus gives us the same resurrection hope!" Now that's really too much!! It's all too much to SHOW AND TELL! We live in fear of being laughed at ... ridiculed ... put down for our faith ... it's all too much!

But there are others in the world who don't even have this momentary lapse -- for them the resurrection is nothing ... no news! Nothing to show or tell about. They don't even sit on it or hide it. Their lives will never be changed. They will continue to hold to their grudges; they will to be afraid to love or show compassion

to others. They will reject opportunities to forgive or be forgiven. The Easter news will just be another irrelevant story for them -- no personal impact, no uplifting power, no living hope, no change from their cynical, dismal, demoralized view of life.

But, thank God, there are those of us most of the time for whom this Easter news has great meaning today and tomorrow! It will have great meaning because we have faced terminal illness; we have faced agonizing suffering; we have faced depression and loneliness and abandonment; we have faced the defeats of life including the death of a loved one ... or maybe even our own death. We have faced the dismal realities of life ... and the resurrection is the only assurance given which OFFERS NEW HOPE, NEW MEANING, NEW PURPOSE AGAINST THE DEFEATS OF LIFE!

Because in the news of the resurrection, we are able to give hope even when terminal illness means physical defeat and death.

In the news of the resurrection, we are able to endure agonizing suffering, because RESURRECTION OFFERS ASSURANCE, CONSOLATION, AND DIVINE PRESENCE IN SPITE OF SUFFERING.

In the news of the resurrection, we recognize that abandonment, isolation, worldly defeat -- all these are but momentary ... all followed by a renewal and reunion of that which is lasting and eternal.

In the news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, death is no longer the threatening power to end hope and life. No longer does death scare us into fear and inaction. We live confident that God has the last word. And his Word is resurrection to eternal life.

But we dare not limit our resurrection news to only a life-ending event. The New Testament sees resurrection power as available DURING LIFE as well as AT ITS END. According to the N.T., "death" is whatever threatens life, whatever destroys purpose, whatever prevents us from becoming what God intended, whatever engenders hatred and distrust between people, whatever estranges us from God. These are all "death." The resurrection not only promises a reawakening of the dead; it also promises the power of God for life OVER ALL REALITIES OF "DEATH."

That's what God wants his Easter people to SHOW AND TELL about the resurrection. Not only that life will not end, but that life is being fully lived ...NOW! Namely, that the power of God is being shared NOW -- that forgiveness, compassion, kindness, love ... that these and

and all powers of God are ALIVE AND WELL NOW!

Alex Haley will soon release his forthcoming book called "Henning." In the Reader's Digest, a condensed Easter story is told from this novel. The story is about the Rev. Black Douglas, a new, handsome, young, black preacher who has come to Henning, Tennessee's New Hope Church. On Easter, Rev. Douglas said:

We Christians are always talking about love, we're always talking about having religion. But for nineteen hundred years, God's love has been right here on this earth with us, right here amidst us - and there never has been as much hate and evil in the world as there is today. Why hasn't his love worked?

Our trouble, brothers and sisters, is that we are too often seeking and expecting love to come from somewhere else, from somebody else! We are failing to perceive the true meaning of the Bible's greatest statement: God is love! God has made us in his image ... in his image of love.

That's why we say: God so loved the world that he gave his Son, Christ Jesus, to redeem us -- his only son was crucified for us. But then he raised him to assure us THAT HIS LOVE WAS NOT LEFT ON GOLGATHA. HE RAISED HIM TO ASSURE US THAT HIS LOVE IS WITHIN US -- ALIVE AND WITHIN US. We are the resurrection of God's love on earth.

That is the love of Christ, of resurrection -- the power of love from within us. It is that resurrected love that we are to SHOW AND TELL. God wants us to be as excited about this Easter news as our children are when its their turn to SHOW AND TELL at nursery school. We all know what that's like -- there's nothing more exciting than being chosen for SHOW AND TELL. God has chosen each of us TO SHOW AND TELL the news that HE IS RISEN ... ALIVE WITHIN US.

Shouldn't we be thrilled to be the chosen ones - the ones to SHOW AND TELL of resurrected love. Thrilled to show and tell that Christ is alive. That because he lives, we too shall live. That the last enemy, death, has been destroyed. That God's love is no longer dead at Golgatha, but alive within us. That we are the ones who have been especially chosen to SHOW AND TELL THE GOOD NEWS OF RESURRECTED LOVE!

On Easter morning 1799, the Austrian citizens of Feldkirch awoke to find their peaceful village surrounded by Napoleon's army. Knowing the town could not withstand Napoleon's massive, regimental formations, the town officials called a meeting to decide whether to hoist the "white flag" of surrender. The pastor rose at the meeting

and in trembling voice said: "This is Easter Day! This is the day of our King's resurrection. We must allow our Lord and Ruler at least one moment of triumph. Let us ring the bells. If the town falls, it will at least fall with the bells ringing ANNOUNCING THE TRIUMPH OF EASTER! The pastor's counsel prevailed.

Soon the church bells were ringing all over town. It was a joyous, triumphant sound. It reverberated through the valleys and unto the hills of Austria. It filled the frosty air of Easter morning with gladness and victory.

Napoleon and his soldiers amassed outside the city walls. "Why should there be such celebration," they asked? They concluded that the bells surely announced that the Austrian army had arrived during the night. Napoleon's Army quickly broke ranks and ran in full retreat before the bells of Easter morning.

That's SHOWING AND TELLING the resurrection news. Always victorious over the powers of evil and death! Let us ring the bell of victory -- let us SHOW AND TELL that Christ is alive -- let us proclaim that He is Risen Indeed! Alive for us; alive within us; alive forever!

AMEN!

E A S T E R - 1986
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
March 30, 1986
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"D E L I V E R A N C E !"

"(And) the men said to them, 'Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here; he is risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Luke 24:6-7

Several years ago Jon Voigt and Burt Reynolds starred in a graphic portrayal of four city-slickers from Atlanta off to spend a weekend in the wilds of the Georgian-mountain rapids. They took two canoes, lifejackets, bows and arrows, and an ample supply of six-packs. From Friday to Sunday, it was going to be a three-day survival weekend in the Georgian wilderness. Well, as they entered the hinterlands of these mountains, their mood was soon altered. The mountains were lush and majestic, but deeply silent and forbidden. Somewhere hidden deep in the forest was a so-called civilization, but it certainly wasn't what you and I would call civilized. It was crude and barbaric; it was vulgar and voracious; it was lewd and lustful. By nightfall on Friday, all four men were hoping for DELIVERANCE. Deliverance from the hopelessness of their situation; deliverance from the impending negation of life by death; deliverance from their fears of no future!

Maybe some of you saw that movie. It was not an easy one for the stomach. And if you did, or if you can appreciate the picture I have painted, then maybe you can imagine the feelings of those women that first Easter morning. They, too, had just gone through three days of brutality and living hell. They, too, were wondering if they would ever see the civilized world again. Because what they had seen of the civilized world was not very impressive. They had seen humanity at his worst -- crude and barbaric, vulgar and voracious, lewd and lustful! Although they didn't put it into thoughts or words, they too were seeking DELIVERANCE!

Deliverance from the hopelessness of their situation;
Deliverance from the negation of their Lord's death;
Deliverance from the fears of no future life!

Can any of us wonder why so many are crowding into sanctuaries this Sunday morning? Things haven't changed in the twenty centuries since that first Easter morning! Nor have they changed since the filming of Deliverance. Just like those women and four men from Atlanta, we too are seeking to celebrate deliverance from hopelessness ... from

death, and from the fears of an unknown tomorrow! We are here seeking this DELIVERANCE! And at the same time, we are here celebrating this DELIVERANCE!

Yes, resurrection is deliverance from hopelessness -- from the despair of defeat ... from a life without the assurance of victory! One thing we all need at one time or another is the assurance that we will not lose ... that ultimately there is hope and victory, triumph and not defeat!

But as long as things are going along pretty well - it's amazing how most of us easily overlook this conviction to a resurrection hope. As long as we are in control -- as long as the money is rolling in ... as long as the bills are being paid ... as long as the health seems satisfactory ... as long as no one is really rocking the boat -- then we are content to be ho-hum about God's resurrection hope.

That's exactly the way Jon Voigt and Burt Reynolds approached their 3-day survival weekend. As they were climbing the Georgian hills in their cherokee Jeep, it was all laughter and levity. Because they were living with the illusion of being in control ... they figured they had life by the tail ... they had nothing to fear. But once they lost control ... once they realized that forces beyond them could claim their defeat at any instant - then they needed a hope! Then they needed reassurance from beyond themselves. Then they needed a resurrection hope - something from beyond their control!

The same is true for you and me. It's interesting - but a survey of why most of us are here this morning is very revealing. National results indicate that it runs the gamut from "conformity to habit" to "inheriting a family tradition" to "a desire for prestige" "to reflecting the good moral life" "to 'it's the thing to do on Easter.'" In terms of the Easter gospel, these are poor reasons for being here! Maybe that's why many of us are poor Christians. Because not one national survey indicates that people join churches because they desparately desire RESURRECTION HOPE!

Those earliest believers were devoted to their Lord because they were boldly honest -- they admitted they needed a Savior. They needed a hope beyond their own control of life. They needed to celebrate that God was ultimately in control of their life, death, and whatever comes after!

Is it any wonder that Easter comes in the springtime. We celebrate that God can be counted upon to intervene EVERY YEAR and give us NEW LIFE AGAIN! That's why we celebrate this day with brightly colored eggs. These are symbols of resurrection hope! That's why it was traditionally a day for wearing new brightly colored clothing! Not to show our

great affluence, but to show our resurrection hope ... our assurance of victory over the old! Early Christians were not affluent. But once a year, at Easter, was the only time when they splurged on new clothing TO SHOW NEW HOPE, NEW LIFE, NEW JOY! Easter celebrated God's RENEWED involvement in their world. It was a time to turn the old into the new - to claim God's victory rather than man's defeat!

But we are also seeking and celebrating DELIVERANCE FROM THE NEGATION OF DEATH today! A pastor recently told of a funeral home in Florida that gives its clients a "guarantee to heaven." For about \$4000 they will cremate your body, put it into a small rocket, and fire it into orbit. It is guaranteed to circle the earth 2,300 years. Think about that - your ashes in orbit for 2,300 years. Obviously, part of the pitch is that you're guaranteed to "get up there!" Of course, who ever said that "heaven was up there ... or happiness was up there?!" Just imagine, on a clear night people could come out and watch you go by -- no more trips to the cemetery. You might even want to put blinking lights on your satellite so relatives could say: "There goes Peter! There goes Bertha." Can you believe it -- people will buy this rather than the resurrection??

Yet, let's face it -- none of us likes facing the reality of death. A while back, a "Family Circus" cartoon saw the family returning from a funeral. The mom was saying to the children in the back seat: "Don't worry, we'll see Grandpa someday when we go to heaven." The smallest child quickly responded: "Look mom, I'd just as soon wait in the car." Resurrection does not make it easier to face death.

In fact, resurrection does not mean we avoid "the dead" or death. Death still comes to all; it will be painful for many, prolonged for others, and instantaneous for some. Easter does not erase the reality of dying; but it does remove the victory / the defeat of death! There is no longer an everlasting sting to death.

No longer does our hope rest upon transplants or quick freezes. We were created for life, not death. God did not bring us into being for THIS WORLD only. Through Christ, we now see that death is no longer an enemy - it is merely the gateway to a new life with God. It is not a revival of the corpse, it is not a prolongation of life, it is not the reincarnation of another organism. It is totally new life given and lived with God and each other!

Resurrection is a radical transformation beyond verbal expression. Isn't it great that there is one thing in life that cannot be analyzed or synthesized or conceptualized?!? Resurrection is beyond human rationality or imagination. It is radically -- totally of God! It cannot be illegitimized

by human research or manipulation. It is purely of God and by God. It is totally of his realm and his understanding. And all we can say is "thanks be to God -- we will always be among the living and not the dead!"

Finally, today we are seeking and celebrating DELIVERANCE FROM LIVING FEARFULLY! The angel asked, "Why are you seeking the living among the dead?" The obvious implication is that we are often prone to seek "the dead" in life. It's almost as if we want to live fearfully. Why is it that we love to instill fear rather than faith into one another's hearts? Why are we so prone to talk about our fears? Why do our youngsters seem so enamored with horror shows? Why do we seemingly desire to be scared to hell rather than confident of heaven? Let's face it - most of us would rather weep at life's tombs than embrace new life -- new opportunity -- new hope!!

Isn't it true? We lose a loved one, a cherished friend, a special lover -- and for months and years we focus ONLY upon our selfish grief. Who are we grieving for - our loved ones or ourselves? We know the answer - we certainly can't be grieving for our loved ones who are with God. Don't get me wrong - there is no easy soothing sympathy for the loss of a special love. But Easter announces that we cannot live in the tomb! God has rolled away the stone to give us a new today and tomorrow! He empowers us to let go of yesterday's fears, frustrations and fatalities!

That whole experience was graphically illustrated by the disciples -- dramatically portrayed in our Resurrection production. Peter wanted to hang onto the guilt of his denial; and the disciples had even become greater cowards after Jesus' death. They fled to save their own skins. They locked their doors "for fear of the Jews."

Then that morning came at the empty tomb. At first, it seemed like sheer nonsense, like an idle tale. But then these timid, frightened, ineffective men came alive (thanks to the courage of a few women). Strong, immeasurable life had been breathed back into a dead body that had laid on a cold slab. The dead man had risen up - had walked out into a dewy garden -- alive forevermore! Those disciples became steady and strong - so courageous that they stood at the doorway of the temple ... boldly announcing the resurrection. Christ's enemies would have given anything to refute the claims. All they needed was one thing -- the body of Jesus. But his corpse could not be found -- and has never been found since!

Because he is risen! Risen from the dead! So they tried to silence his followers - threats, imprisonment, scourgings, even crucifixion. But nothing succeeded. Let's

face it -- men do not invent such a story so that they can be crucified upside down ... or have their heads chopped off ... or be stoned to death!

And that's exactly why we are here today - celebrating this deliverance from fear! Nothing silenced those first disciples -- and nothing will silence us today. We are here seeking and celebrating our deliverance from God. Deliverance from the hopelessness of defeat! Deliverance from the negation of death! Deliverance from the fears of no meaningful life tomorrow!!

Yes, that's what brings us here at Easter and every week. We are not here today or next week to merely view or worship a carefully embalmed body enclosed in a glass case. Thank God, the tomb is empty! That's the central message of our celebration! Bruce Demarset, in his book, Who Is Jesus, writes: "Throughout the centuries people have tried to honor their heroes by erecting lavish monuments: the massive pyramids of Egypt for the Pharoahs ... the glistening Taj Mahal for the Indian emperor ... Lenin's Tomb in Red Square for the body of the Marxist leader ... Mount Vernon for the interment of President Washington.

Jesus' grave cannot compare with any of these costly crypts. But his tomb excels in the most important respect. It lies empty! He is not there! He is risen! Risen Indeed!

AMEN.

EASTER SUNDAY, April 3, 1988
(The Resurrection of our Lord)
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"TAKING THE VITAL SIGNS"

And the messenger said, "Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples" ... And they went out and fled from the tomb; ... and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Mark 16:6-8

For (Christ) must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.

I Corth. 15:25-27

You can't hear it, but it's a vital sign of life. It's not the greatest heartbeat ... it's not even the heartbeat of America, but it's a good American heartbeat ... and it's a great Easter morning heartbeat!! Thanks to this handy device around my neck -- you and I have the privilege of knowing a very important vital sign of life. Add to this such things as blood pressure, skin color, pupils, and brain wave function -- and you have a pretty good analysis of the physical vitality of human life. Whenever there is a question of health or well-being - we "take the vital signs!"

I commend all of you for being here this morning. By virtue of your presence, you have passed two tests of vitality: first, you set your clock ahead last night, and second, your vital signs were evidently strong enough to allow you to get up for Easter worship. I hope you are as grateful as I am for your vital signs; it's so easy to take them for granted!

But Easter morning announces a higher level test than mere physical vitality -- namely, resurrection vitality. Have you taken the vital signs of resurrection yet today? Well, one vital sign is that you are here! That's a good beginning! The first step for physical renewal is to have a check-up from the doctor. The first step for resurrection renewal is to have a check-up at church. We've all achieved the easiest test of the resurrection -- we've presented our bodies!! But resurrection vitality goes beyond bodily warmth -- it requires renewal of the mind, the spirit, the whole self (soul). How do we know when that's happening?? How can we TAKE THE VITAL SIGNS of the resurrection??

Well, the first sign of the resurrection is not much different than the first sign needed for medical diagnosis: IF YOU RECEIVE THE SAME PROGNOSIS FROM FOUR DIFFERENT MEDICAL EXPERTS; YOU HAVE GOOD REASON TO BELIEVE IT! And that's exactly what you're doing here today: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - all give us the same prognosis for the resurrection:

Matthew says: And the angel said to the women, Do not be afraid, for I know you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen, as he said.

Mark's text is before you ... as I have already read, he says essentially the same thing.

Luke says: Behold two men stood before the women in dazzling apparel; and they said, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? Remember how he told you ... that he would be crucified, and on the third day rise.

John has Jesus himself speaking: "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek? And Mary, supposing him to be gardener, says, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him." And Jesus responded, "Mary!" And Mary exclaimed, "Rabboni!" Then Mary ran to the other disciples, shouting, "I have seen the risen Lord."

When four different medical experts report the same results, usually the prognosis is predictably certain. When four different apostolic experts report the same resurrection, their proclamation appears predictably true! We don't insult four medical professionals by asking for additional scientific proof. Likewise, on Easter Sunday, we don't ask our four evangelical experts to give us any more scientific proof: **LIKE FOUR MEDICAL EXPERTS, THEIR REPORT IS TRUSTWORTHY!!**

The first vital sign of Easter Sunday is not to ask God, "How did you do it?" but rather, "Did you do it?" And the resounding response from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John ... and millions since ... is "YES! He is risen! Risen Indeed! See the place where they laid him! He is not here! He is risen!

The Buddhist Association of China reported, in 1987, that bone fragments of Buddha had been found in a cave near a temple 45-miles southeast of Peking. Actually, the discovery had been made six years ago, but the Buddhists were waiting for an "auspicious moment" for announcement.

Amazing, isn't it -- that followers of a religion should rejoice when bone fragments of their founder are discovered. To them, bone fragments are vital signs. To us, bone fragments would be a total rejection of the resurrection! We rejoice because no fragments of Jesus Christ have ever been found! No bones, no hair, no heart, no toes, no teeth -- nothing was left behind. The grave was empty! All we have to report is that he appeared not only to Mary and Peter, to Thomas and the twelve -- but to hundreds of others as well!!

No bone fragments - but "he is risen" -- that's the good news, the vital sign for us on Easter and every day! "He is risen" - these are the three most meaningful, most memorable, most mighty, most musical, most miraculous words ever recorded in medical history!

Take the "risen Christ" out of Easter, and you no longer have any reason for any of us to be here today! Christianity no longer deserves to exist. Because without resurrection, all we have is just another great religious leader, another spiritual guru who taught great moral truths about living. There have been hundreds of these great moral teachers ... if that's all Jesus Christ offered, there's not much reason for millions of us to be celebrating Easter today!

But obviously, Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, was and still is the only spiritual leader who ever said, "I am the resurrection and the life," "I am the light of the world," "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." These were not mere arrogant self-affirmations -- they were and still are the vital signs of the Christian faith! We worship more than another moral teacher; we worship a risen Lord, who has prepared a place for each of us TO SHARE HIS RESURRECTION!

But there is a second vital sign, esp. echoed by St. Paul today: "For Christ must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death." The second vital sign: DEATH NO LONGER HAS DOMINION OVER LIFE!! Let's look at "death" for just a moment. "Death" in the New Testament does not only mean the end of physical life -- death also signifies any power which threatens to take away meaning or purpose or joy from life.

Is there anything taking away meaning or purpose or joy from your life right now?? Is "death" of some kind stalking at your doorway?? Maybe the physical death of a loved one is still robbing you of a meaningful and joyful life? Why are you letting that happen? God has already assured your loved one of the resurrection! Why are you still living as if there is no hope, no new life, no joy from God? Why won't you let God put death under his feet? Why are you denying the vital sign that God has graphically given you: DEATH NO LONGER HAS DOMINION OVER LIFE!!

Maybe you're allowing nuclear weapons, or the fear of communism, the prospect of cancer, or the reality of war to deny you any joy or purpose for living? Oh, there's no doubt about it -- these realities are very much with us! We can't deny any of these horrendous fears! We can't fantasize them away! But the resurrection clearly forecasts the score on all such expressions of death: THEY WILL BE WIPED AWAY! Maybe not today! Maybe not tomorrow! Maybe not even in a hundred years! But God will put these realities under his feet. All expressions of "death" WILL NO LONGER HAVE DOMINION OVER LIFE!

Maybe your encounter with "death" is more of a spiritual reality. One author has said, "Some people just relish cultivating the cult of Good Friday." Some people seemingly prefer the cold grave and dark night of the cross to the radiant warmth of Easter Sunday. In short, some people like to bask in a PERSECUTION COMPLEX! They seem to get their jollies by nailing all kinds of vital life to the cross!

Evidently, such people feel persecuted by life, so by golly they are going to make certain that others feel the same way! I call these people "fashionable cynics." They are the ones who are always against anything and everything that might be for the VITAL LIFE of others.

Tell me - why is "fashionable cynicism" so popular today? Why is it that we can so easily articulate our negative feelings, but find it so difficult to voice our positive beliefs? Why has it become so fashionable to be slanderous, insulting, and demeaning of other people, esp. heard among teenagers today? Why have we become "fashionable cynics?" BECAUSE CYNICISM DEMANDS NOTHING! No risk, no new life, no commitment, no struggle, no repentance, no change, no reorientation -- a cynic demands nothing of himself/herself! The fault is always out there ... with someone or something else! It's so much easier to cling to "death" ... to be negative, than to embrace new life! It's so much easier to stay a drunk or an addict than to admit that you are one and then to make a change! It's so much easier to say "no" to God and to others than to affirm God's "Yes" of resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ announces a new order of things for the body of Christ: THE FORCES OF DEATH WILL NO LONGER BE TOLERATED AMONG THE LIVING! If you relish slander, negativism, and cheap talk -- then find a community where that's celebrated. But that's not the mission of the church! Our mission is one of mercy, not condemnation. The risen Christ lives through this body ... he has no other body on earth! Through you, his body -- his mercy and forgiving love wipes away the gloom and doom of persecutors who are trying to crucify life with guilt and greed! Please don't get me wrong, mercy does not mean that we, the body of Christ, merely turns our backs on the evils around us.

A pastor recently wrote of his post-Easter vacation week in Ft Lauderdale, Fla. Regretably, that week was also spring break for eastern college students. After the first few days, the hotel where he stayed had to hire armed police to patrol the hallways. The dining room had to be closed because it had been "trashed" by the students. The beaches were swarming with youth stupified by liquor and drugs. And the cry of justification from the students was: "We need relief ... we need relief from academic pressures."

We all need relief from the pressures of life, but not at the expense of persecuting others or their property. Relief comes through mercy, not madness! Such persecuting evil is always the enemy -- whether witnessed from Germany's Hitler or America's Ft Lauderdale. The resurrection announces that God will put such enemies under his feet. Obviously, he uses your toes and mine, your brains and mine, your discipline and mine - to make certain that our lives and the lives of our children are never such an expression of "death." "He is risen" - the second vital sign is that God will not allow us to THINK THAT DEATH HAS DOMINION OVER LIFE IN ANY WAY, SHAPE, OR MANNER!

Finally, the third vital sign: Easter people exhibit a "Go and Tell Spirit." Mark says the messenger concluded his Easter announcement by saying: "Go and tell his disciples that he is going before you." Then Mark tells us that the women "fled ... and said nothing ... for they were afraid." The word "afraid" in this Greek text does not mean "fear" or "fright" -- but rather "awesome ecstasy." In short, the women were overcome, over-powered by the event! That's the 3rd vital sign of the Christian community - we reflect an "overpowering sense of mission; we cannot be held back; we cannot say "no" to God anymore!" That's how we "Go and Tell" the world! We give God a new "yes!"

You need some proof of that spirit? Just look at Jesus' closest followers before the resurrection. Here were the people who knew first-hand the historic Jesus: they heard his teachings; they observed his miracles; they followed his footsteps; they walked with him thru the wilderness; they sat with him at table; they knew his Godliness like no one else! Yet, where were they after the crucifixion? They had fled, deserted, denied, betrayed, compromised, and "chucked" the whole mission! Before the resurrection, allegiance was absent! But after the resurrection, no persecution, no peril, no pain, no pestilence could stop Christ's apostolic party! Come hell or high water, they would be in the thick of it!!

Please don't get me wrong. The awesome ecstasy of Easter morning does not mean that we have reached the mountain top. The road to the empty tomb is not without obstacles. There was suffering and sorrow for the disciples ... and the same will be true for us. There has been fatigue and frustration for every follower of the risen Christ ... and that will not change. But when the body is filled with "awesome ecstasy" -- it is alive and well ... because its heart is beating for all who need love and comfort; its lungs are breathing for all who are thirsting for greater meaning and significance; its whole life is giving the body and blood of Christ for all who are hungry, both physically and spiritually. In short, "awesome ecstasy" means that the body is not stiff or dead, but alive, vital and serving the needs of the world.

Do you experience any of these vital signs today?? I certainly hope so ... I hope that's why you're here. In fact, I hope you feel them so much that you'd like to jump up and throw confetti (even though Bill Lenz wants to crucify me for even making the suggestion). I hope you feel today like W. E. Sangster, a great old preacher who became diseased with progressive muscular atrophy. His muscles began to waste away ... his voice failed ... finally it became impossible for him to even swallow. But on his last Easter Sunday, just three weeks before his death ... he scribbled the following message to his daughter: "It's terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice to shout - "He is Risen" But it would be far more terrible to wake up Easter morning and have a voice ... but not want to shout at all!!

AMEN!

EASTER, THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
April 19, 1987
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"WHAT DO YOU EXPECT?"

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above ... set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth." Colossians 3:1,2

"Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and she saw the stone had been rolled away from the tomb. So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." John 20:1-3

It's finally here - Easter Sunday! There's nothing like it, is there? The Word of Triumph! The notes of Victory! The Alleluias of the music! The upbeat Scriptures! The empty tomb! The angel's words, "He is risen, risen indeed; he is not here!" The crowds gathered! The new vitality and warmth of spring! The people of God singing with gusto: "Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia." The brass enhancement -- even tympani!! Let's face it -- the day of the resurrection is a day to pull out all the stops!!

Yes - that's what you and I expect to find this Easter morning, don't we? But will all this Easter hype really change our lives?? Will we really be different tomorrow? Will all the Alleluias today make any real difference in the way we live tomorrow? WHAT DO YOU REALLY EXPECT?? Will you become a new person after today's celebration?? Will you be more giving ... more forgiving ... more spirited ... more loving ... more dedicated to Jesus Christ and his way, truth, and life???

Yes, WHAT DO YOU REALLY EXPECT FROM EASTER?? In reality, are we much different from Mary Magadene and the first disciples at the tomb?? We certainly should be -- we've got 2000 years of resurrection testimony!! We've been living in the light of the resurrection! But do we really live with resurrection confidence?? Do we live totally convinced that death never has the last word? Do we go to our "loved ones" graves totally confident that "there is nothing in all creation which can separate us from the love of God??" I wish it were so -- but I sometimes wonder, WHAT DO YOU REALLY EXPECT? Maybe the only way we can get at that is to look at what Mary Magadene and those first Easter disciples expected. What did Mary really expect?? Quite simply, three things:
She expected a sealed tomb of darkness and death!
She expected total silence - a confirmation of death!
She expected that the tomb was the end of the trail!

How do those three expectations compare with our Easter faith?? Oh, we would certainly deny the first, wouldn't we? We do not expect a sealed tomb of darkness and death! We

certainly can understand how Mary Magdalene would be totally expecting darkness, hopelessness, death! She had been a witness to the events of the past three days. She had seen the open wounds, the blood, the exhaustion, the despair. She had experienced the indignity, she had watched as Jesus' most trusted friends deserted him. She had no reason to believe that there would be any victory -- it was total defeat!!

But don't we many times come to the tombs of death in exactly the same way? Certainly, there's reason for darkness and grief in death. But we so often clutch onto the darkness as if we have never heard the Word of resurrection. One author has recently said, "Give people the chance to talk about light or talk about darkness, and they will always choose darkness." It's as if we delight in the tombs of life -- we seemingly delight in magnifying the malignancies, the malpractices, and the morbidity of life.

But on Easter morning, God announced that "there will no longer be any darkness with death!" God rolled the stone away, not so that Jesus could get out ... but so that we could go in -- SO THAT WE COULD SEE THAT DEATH WAS NO LONGER THERE! Death could not be found! Death had been destroyed! Death had been changed into new life! Only the grave cloths were left.

WHAT DO WE REALLY EXPECT?? We expect that there is no darkness and death in the tomb because that's only a momentary residence!! My friends, I always get a little troubled at the cemetery when funeral directors rush families away from the grave before the casket is lowered. It clearly says to me that death in our culture is perceived as our permanent residence. Well, Easter announces to us as Christians that God has rolled away the stone -- we can now look directly into the grave, with or without casket. Because we know that the tomb is only a temporary residence. Only for a moment will our loved ones be residing in that place. God rolls away the stone from the tomb so that we can look in ... and see that death has been changed to new life!!

I'm reminded of the story of the little girl who used to pass through the cemetery each day on her way home from school. Each day she would ride her bike through the cemetery. One day, an elderly woman asked her: "Aren't you afraid to ride through this dingy place?" The little girl replied: "Oh, no, I just cross over it to reach home."

That's what we expect from Easter -- the tomb, the grave, the cemetery is but a MOMENTARY CROSSING OVER to our home with God and each other!! There is no darkness, no fear of the graveyard!! It is but a momentary crossing!!

But some of us may yet live with Mary's second expectation: THAT THE TOMB IS A PLACE OF TOTAL SILENCE!! A place of total deafness to our grief and pain!

Mary came to the tomb to confirm death! She did not expect any voices of life! She expected no words of compassion ... no words of life ... no words of victory. But she didn't get what she expected!! And neither do we!!

Death and the tomb is never a place of total silence for the Christian. There is always a word of compassion ... always a word of life ... always a word of victory at the tomb. God always provides angels with words of comfort in the face of death. Mary arrived, and almost immediately she heard, "Woman, why are you weeping?" Obviously, we all know why? She hurt! But the point of the question is that WE ARE NEVER ALONE AT THE TOMB. God is always there, through his holy angels. And who are his holy angels?? Well, obviously, the church. We are to be the holy angels of comfort for those who have lost loved ones. We are to be there to listen to their tears and assure them that they are not alone. We are the voices of the resurrection -- we are to know that person by name ... and be a source of compassion and comfort. "Mary, God is here with you!!"

That's why it is so important to be a part of the body of Christ. Because God wants us to get to really know each other by name. That's the way it is with true lovers -- they always call each other by name. It's very comforting to be known by name -- it says that I really count ... that I am not alone ... that God knows me. And especially in the face of death, it is critically important to be known by name. It is so much easier to comfort when we know one another by name.

But comfort is not the only Word at the tomb. In Matthew's and Mark's accounts, the angel announces: "Why do you seek the living among the dead. He is not here. He is risen!" ~~That is what we expect from Easter -- to hear and to share the good news!~~ ^{the Victories} What do we expect today?? To hear the promise of God: Mary ... Jack ... Charlotte ... Barbara ... Penny ... "HE IS RISEN; HE IS NOT HERE!" As Christians, we never come to the tomb expecting only silence! We come knowing that God has already overcome the silence and deafness of death!!

Today, I urge each of you who will be visiting the graves of loved ones to take one of these little signs with you. If you really want to offer an Easter statement to yourselves and to the world -- then put this sign on the tomb of your loved ones: "HE IS RISEN; HE IS NOT HERE!!" "SHE IS RISEN; SHE IS NOT HERE!!" That's what we have come here today expecting to share with one another!! God has changed the silence and deafness of death INTO THE WORD OF ETERNAL LIFE!! AND IT IS OURS TO SHARE AND PROCLAIM FOREVER!!

But maybe there are still some of you who have come here today expecting the third thing that Mary expected: THAT DEATH IS THE END OF THE TRAIL OF LIFE!! That there's nothing after life but death!! Well, I want you to pay particular close

attention to the words used in John's account. "They came," "they saw," "she ran," "they both ran," "but he outran Peter," "they stooped, they saw, and he believed." They expected the tomb to be the end of the trail, but instead they found themselves hurrying and scurrying to tell what they never expected -- THAT JESUS CHRIST HAD RISEN FROM THE DEAD!! Just notice what a change took place in these demoralized disciples. Why were they running? Why were they scurrying to tell others? Why was there such a dramatic shift in their evangelistic activity from that day onward?? BECAUSE THEY NOW REALIZED THAT JESUS CHRIST WAS NO LONGER DEAD! AND LIFE OR DEATH WOULD NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN FOR THESE DISCIPLES!!

That's what you and I should expect from Easter! That life or death will never be the same again! That we will proclaim with great hurry and scurry the resurrection from the dead. And how do we best proclaim that reality?? Here our Colossians text helps us: BY SEEKING THE THINGS ABOVE, RATHER THAN MERELY THE THINGS OF THE EARTH!!

This obviously means heaven, but much more than heaven. Christians do not live merely waiting for heaven, they live seeking to make a difference NOW on earth. We sometimes wonder why God allows horrible things to happen. Well, Easter answers the question: HE NEVER PROMISED THAT HE WOULD OVERCOME WAR OR SICKNESS OR STUPIDITY ... HE ONLY PROMISED THAT HE WOULD OVERCOME DEATH! He expects us to overcome war and disease and alienation and slander and destruction ... and all the other evils of the earth!! God delivers on his promise: HE WILL OVERCOME DEATH!! He call us into faithfulness SO THAT WE WILL OVERCOME THE DESTRUCTIVE THINGS OF THE EARTH!!

Needless to say, God has done a very good job with death. But we have NOT done a very good job with the evil things of this earth! And that's because we have too often been looking only at ourselves, our appetites, our pleasures rather than the things that are above.

Peter McKenzie has made an interesting observation about pigs. Pigs cannot look up. Their anatomy and the very location of their eyes will not allow it. Apparently, they are designed to root around the ground with their ugly noses in the mud -- to grub around for bits of flesh on the earth. They are able to eat the acorns, but cannot lift their heads to see whence they have come. Their interest in life extends no further than their own bellies.

God has made us very different -- he expects much more from us!! That's what Easter is all about! He promises us that he will overcome death for us!! But in the meantime, we are to help overcome those things of the earth that are destructive, dehumanizing, and only reflective of the appetites of "pigs on earth!!" Because we have been promised the resurrection from the dead, WE ARE TO LIVE FOR THE THINGS THAT ARE ABOVE - AND NOT MERELY FOR OUR OWN SELFISH APPETITES. AFTER ALL, THAT'S WHAT IS EXPECTED OF EASTER PEOPLE!

AMEN.

EASTER - 1989
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
March 26, 1989
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"TURNING TRAGEDY INTO TRIUMPH!"

And the women found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they found no body. While they stood perplexed about this, behold, two men tood by them in dazzling apparel; and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said: "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" Luke 24:2-5

If you missed Good Friday at Hope, you missed a great one by my friend and colleague, Bob. Pastor Meckley preached an eloquent message on the GOOD NEWS OF THE CRUCIFIXION -- that's right, the good news of the crucifixion. Now for those of us who know Bob well - we know his favorite day is not Easter ... he loves Good Friday with a passion! And Good Friday should not only be GOOD for Bob ... it is GOOD for all of us!!

Because Jesus' death on the cross is the assurance of our salvation. Jesus' blood seals the covenant made by God -- now God sees us as beloved saints forever. Jesus did not pay the price on Easter morning -- he paid the full price on Friday afternoon. And when someone asks you, "When were you saved?" -- you know exactly what to point to ... not to an empty tomb; but to Calvary's old rugged cross.

But as Bob said, there was one individual for whom Good Friday was NOT GOOD - in fact, VERY BAD! It was bad enough for the disciples, esp. Peter, James, and John. It was even worse for the sensitive women - the many Marys. But as Bob suggested - it was the worst for Satan himself. Not only the worst because Jesus died, but because LOVE triumphed over the tragedy of the cross. FORGIVING LOVE was the triumph, not the tragedy of Good Friday. That's why we cherish John 3:16: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life."

We don't need Easter to be convinced of God's love. The tragedy of Good Friday is once and for all God's GOOD NEWS that we are loved and forgiven! However, the facts are -- Good Friday wasn't convincing enough ... even as Christ said, "and on the third day I will rise again!" We certainly know that the disciples were not convinced of any GOOD NEWS on Friday: they ran and hid. Friday was not a triumphant day for the twelve. The same was true for the women -- they came on Sunday to anoint a dead body. And it wasn't even totally convincing for Satan himself -- BECAUSE ON GOOD FRIDAY ... DEATH STILL PREVAILED! As we all learned in catechism - death is the last expression of sin! On Good Friday, God won the victory of love ... but that victory had not yet TURNED TRAGEDY INTO TRIUMPH!

It's only as we look backward from the empty tomb to the old rugged cross THAT WE ARE FOREVER CERTAIN THAT TRAGEDY WAS TURNED INTO TRIUMPH! In fact, Easter was such incredible news that the disciples told the women it was just an "idle tale." They certainly weren't overwhelmed like that on Good Friday! Yes, God gave Satan reason for despair on Good Friday ... but on Easter Sunday, God put all the powers of Satan into the pit forever! Not only was love victorious over death -- now life was victorious over death!! THE FINAL VICTORY HAD BEEN ACHIEVED ... THE FINAL STING OF DEATH HAD BEEN DEFEATED!

From this day and forever - God is no longer hanging on a cross or rotting away in some cold tomb. God is alive -- risen from the dead! Not only has God freed us from sin and guilt -- he has also freed us from death and the fear of death! And let's face it -- no matter how much we are loved by God, by spouse, or by others ... our greatest fear is still death!! Our greatest anxiety is that God's love and our love will still not get us beyond the cross ... beyond the tragedy of death. Easter Sunday wipes away all doubt ... all speculation ... all uncertainty! CHRIST LIVES ... FOREVER TO BE WITH US IN OUR JOURNEYS TO NEW LIFE. And Easter confirms that this new life will never be taken away ... not by death, not by destruction, not by despair, not by disease, not by sin, not by Satan, not by any principality or power on this earth!

So that's the theology of Good Friday and Easter as I see it! So now that we know it, why don't we live it!?! Why do we allow life's tragedies to trap us; why are we so ready to insult and slander with bad news ... and so afraid to uplift and love with good news? Why do we resist the triumph of love and new life?? As Luther said, why has Satan still got us from the backside ... still preventing us from TURNING TRAGEDY INTO TRIUMPH?!?

You see, even Easter Sunday doesn't totally win the victory! Because the triumph is not something on the outside -- it's more than a holy day on the calendar, or more than a new Easter outfit, or more than the celebration of spring. Easter is so easy to proclaim, but such a challenge to live! It's easy to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus. You and I can believe almost anything that happened 2000 years ago. As long as it doesn't have any PERSONAL, CONVICTIONAL impact upon me - what the hell, I'll go along with it!

You see, the problem is not the resurrection of Jesus. The problem is not that we don't have a desire for the resurrection within us. After all - that's why we're all here -- we're yearning for new life! But the problem is that we don't want to let go of the old life ... we're afraid to let go of what we already know is rotten and contaminated. We're afraid to take on the new life ... because then we'd have to let God be in charge. And let's face it -- that's pretty risky! If God takes control, we might not look so normal any more to our friends and culture ... we might look too much like Jesus Christ. So like Satan, we stick with the Old Adam rather than living with the New Christ.

It reminds me of the story of the little girl who got very upset with this "new life" stuff after Easter worship. So that afternoon she wrote God a letter:

Dear God, Instead of letting people die and making them all over again; why don't you just keep the old ones you got right now?!?

That little girl wrote the thoughts that you and I have probably had many times. We too often want to hang onto our old sins, our old tragedies, our old selfish ways, even sometimes we'd rather hang onto our old deteriorated life rather than resurrected life! We so often don't want God "to make us all over again." We are so often content to be trapped in grief, in guilt, in grudges, in gross living, in other tragic ways of life.

We can see that even in our public arenas. Some might logically say that TOLEDO, OHIO has experienced its fair share of tragedies in the past few months. There has been much grief over "corporate death and trading." There have certainly been many realities of deficit and dooms-day "profits." Toledo has been suffering from respiratory failure ... maybe even a slight heart-attack. But why should anyone allow these temporary tragedies to terminate any new triumphs for tomorrow. That's what I call SATANISM -- being defeated by life's obstacles and setbacks. That's the real love of Satan in this world -- he loves it when we lose heart, when we allow defeats, negativism, despair, and doom to be our only vision for the future.

Someone has recently said to me, "Why doesn't Toledo see her present problems as possibilities for transformation ... as opportunities rather than obstacles ... as challenges for committing itself to new life and new mission for the future." Now that's TURNING TRAGEDY INTO TRIUMPH! That's not being trapped by today's turmoil. That's the resurrection spirit: not relying upon the "way it's always been" ... not conforming to the legacies of yesterday -- but looking for new life, new leadership, new leaven which will give rise to God's possibilities for tomorrow!

The facts are -- life is never given without any defeats, without any tombs, without any death. Each and every one of us either has or will one day be covered by sticks and stones, crushed by the weight of some public calamity or private misery. But Easter announces that God never leaves us that way! He always comes and rolls away the stone. The question is: what will we do when the stone is removed? When God did that for Jesus, he jumped up for joy, he leaped up to new life.

Why is it so often that when God rolls away the stone -- so many people stay in the tomb. They blink once or twice at the light, and then they cringe back into the darkness like the women at the tomb. They don't even look up -- they just walk around in circles in the tomb, head hung down staring icy at the floor. Why are so many afraid of this gift of new

life?? How can anybody possibly reject the reality of the resurrection?? How can anyone possibly resist God's new life?? How can any faithful person not desire to TURN TRAGEDY INTO TRIUMPH??

Well, I can't answer that for you ... or you for me. But we can ask ourselves: What is our witness this Easter?? How do we stand this Easter -- looking upward to new life, or looking downward at the ashes and dust of death?? As for me, I hope the tragedy of a heart-attack is not what you see. I hope you see some new life and some new reason for giving and living. I hope you hear my gratitude for the ambassadors of Christ who patched up this body. I hope you perceive me leaping from the tomb and jumping for joy! Above all, I sincerely hope that you experience me "lifting high the cross" rather than being trapped in the tomb of its tragedy!

For you see, resurrection is not merely some future life -- it is everlasting life now ... life given today, to share forever tomorrow! Heaven does not merely await us somewhere in the blue ... heaven means doing God's will on earth here and now -- with our hands, our hearts, our bodies, our talents, our tongues, our treasures ... with whatever God has given us ... to give it back to others to GLORIFY GOD'S LIFE!

Resurrection does not merely happen when Christ shall come again. Resurrection happens the minute we begin to climb out of whatever hole or tomb we're in ... the minute we begin to get over the tragedies that are keeping us down ... the minute we allow God's love and new life to triumph over the disappointments and despair of the old life.

Maybe the importance of Easter's triumph is best conveyed by the life and death of a lady in Green Street. Like many of us, this lady had spent her youthful years caring for her father. But she was in love with sea captain. Again and again, he had proposed to her; but she always refused "for the sake of her ailing father."

One day, the captain announced that he was changing ports. He would soon be leaving ... and this was his final proposal for marriage. His ship would be sailing within a day -- he begged her answer before he left. All afternoon and early the next morning - she pondered his final proposal. Her father was wealthy ... and could be well cared for. He had lived a full life, and now she was finally getting an opportunity for a new life. She sat down and wrote a note accepting the captain's proposal. She knew that her brother would pass by the captain's house on his way to work; so, she asked him to deliver her letter of acceptance.

The morning came. She dressed and packed and waited. The hours passed slowly. Still, she waited. She rushed up to the second story window. And to her horror, she saw the captain's ship sailing out to harbor ... never to return again.

For the rest of her life she lived a lonely and bitter existence. She had been trapped by her tragedy. Her father and brother died. And one day, as she was gathering her brother's clothes to be stored in the attic - she came across the coat he had worn that fateful day ... that morning that her life had been ruined. There, in the pocket of the coat, was her note -- never delivered.

That's what happens when we fail to witness to the resurrection ... when we keep God's love in our pockets ... when we hold onto our grief and grudges and ingratitude. Then TRAGEDY WINS ... and TRIUMPH LOSES. Then DEATH IS THE VICTOR ... and LIFE IS THE LOSER. Then SATAN lives ... and OUR SAVIOR dies!

God not only loved us so much that he sent his son to die for us -- he also raised that son from the grave SO THAT WE MIGHT BE RAISED FROM OUR TOMBS OF LONELINESS AND LETHARGY, FROM OUR PITS OF SELF-PITY AND PARALYSIS, FROM OUR GRAVES OF DOOM AND FEARS OF DEATH. On Easter, and Easter alone - GOD TURNED TRAGEDY INTO TRIUMPH! My friends of the risen Christ -- don't keep God's love note of new life in your pockets forever. Deliver it to somebody every day of your life! Turn tragedy into triumph! Because that's the resurrection of Jesus Christ!!

Happy resurrection!!

EASTER SUNDAY
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
April 15, 1990
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

R A I S E D T O N E W L I F E !

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. Colossians 3:1-2 And Jesus said to Mary, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" Mary turned and said to Jesus in Hebrew, "Rabboni."

Nearly ten years ago, thanks to a member of Hope, I was standing next to the Wailing Wall in ancient Jerusalem. Not too far from me was an old woman in a black dress and black babushka with tears streaming down the gulleys of her wrinkled face. I wanted to ask her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" But there was no need. I overheard her prayer: "Shalom, Elohim, Shalom. Shalom, Elohim, Shalom!" "O Lord, give me peace, give me comfort, give me new life -- deliver me from the tears of my grief!" As I stood there, I could only speculate about her real grief. So many wars in Israel; so much bitterness between Arabs and Israelis; so much death and destruction. I didn't know the actual circumstances. But I was pretty sure of one thing: SHE DIDN'T WANT DEATH TO BE THE LAST WORD ON LIFE!

You don't have to go to the Wailing Wall to see and hear people weeping and wailing for new life. Just this past week in the life of Hope, three families have again been confronted with death and grief. There has been much weeping and wailing in the life of Hope this week. In fact, that has been the case for many families here in the last eight months, obviously including my own family. And whether it's the death of Jesus, or a mother, or a spouse, or a dear friend, there are tears of grief. But there's also a weeping for new life ... there's a cry for deliverance ... there's a wailing for restoration and renewal ... there's a yearning that death not be the last word for life. "Shalom, Elohim, Shalom!!"

That cry is not unique to Hope Church, to the Christian community, or to the western world. Almost every civilization has cried out against death and despair as the final word of life. The hope, the dream, the fabrication of "life after death" is woven into almost every culture. The American Indians placed arrowheads and earthen vessels by the side of their dead that they might have weapons with which to hunt and utensils with which to cook in "the happy hunting ground." The Greeks put a silver coin in the mouth of their corpses that they might pay Charon, the ferryman, for safe passage over the River Styx. The Egyptians placed in their coffins a text called the book of the dead. This book contained the prayers that the dead were to recite and a map to guide them through the unseen new world. The Laplanders

buried flint and tinder with their dead that they might have light for their dark journey into the new life. The Norsemen buried a fallen warrior's horse and armor with him for the dead hero's triumphant ride to Valhalla. The Greco-Romans developed the well-known theory of the immortality of the soul -- that there was something within us that escaped at death to go on and live forever with the gods.

Humanity in almost every civilization has had this hope for life after death. So some would say that the Christian faith in the resurrection of the body to new life is just another human fantasy ... just another dream of life after death ... just another desperate cry ... another cultural concoction for denying the reality of death.

Nothing could be more contrary to the truth! The Christian faith fully confirms the reality and finality of death. Time after time Jesus warned his disciples that he would die -- and that his death would be very real, very complete. And yet, the disciples were shocked, dismayed, and dejected on that Good Friday. For death, real death, final physical death, had visited the One whom they thought was invincible! These men had left everything to follow this Messiah -- their homes, families, jobs, familiar surroundings. They had risked everything! And now he was gone - crucified like a common criminal ... buried dead in a borrowed tomb. Christianity has never fantasized the reality of death; death is the epitome of separation and pain.

But neither has Christianity concocted some superstitious scheme for life after death. The Christian church has not devised philosophies of reincarnation or buried books or placed other human/holy relics in caskets "hoping against hope for life after death." That kind of superstition and wishful thinking has no place in the Christian community. Our faith makes crystal clear that there is NOTHING, absolutely nothing that we can do to gain life after death. This is one solution that human technology and ingenuity cannot touch. Only God, and God alone, can transform death into new life.

And that's why you and I are here today. Because God, and God alone, has done just exactly that! He has raised Jesus Christ to new life! And the historical record makes clear that God's action in Christ is not some kind of mere wishful thinking. It is not some ancient's impossible dream or some evangelist's spiritual concoction. The dead body of Jesus Christ could not be found ... and his corpse has never been found since. It could not be found because he had been raised to new life. And that wasn't the delusion of some woman at the Wailing Wall. That was the historical seeing and touching of a woman named Mary Magdalene, of an apostle named Peter, of a doubter named Thomas, of a persecutor named Paul, and of some 500 other witnesses whose testimony said the same thing: **GOD RAISED JESUS CHRIST TO NEW LIFE!**

And not only do we know this to be a historical, documented event. We also know it to be a transformational, experienced event. When Jesus was laid in the tomb, no trace of the twelve could be found except one. With death, his most dedicated had given up on life. Their vision of a better world died when Jesus uttered the loud cry and breathed his last breath.

But on Easter morning - God not only raised Jesus to new life. He also raised to new life those same apostles who had denied, despaired and deserted him. Easter was not only a historical reality of new life, it was a transformational reality of new life. It radically changed the way those eleven saw God, viewed life, and looked at their future. From that morning on - the eleven were never the same. From that day forward - those men had their feet on the ground but they had been raised to new life. From that moment on - they were committed to the cause of Christ even unto their own deaths. Death no longer had dominion over the life of that Christian community.

And the same is true for this Christian community. Easter is the same transformational reality for you and me. Through those early witnesses, we have become the historical recipients of life over death. No longer is this some kind of wishful thinking. God has raised Jesus Christ to new life; and in Christ, we have the same hope, the same promise, and the same reality. What does that mean? It means that we no longer fret and worry about what's going to happen after death! God has already given us absolute assurance about that -- he will give us new life as a gift (just as he gave us the gift of life in the first place). Easter announces no more fretting over death. God has taken the worry and the sting out of death for the living. Now we are called to concentrate on life, not death. Now we are raised to new life NOT ONLY AFTER DEATH, BUT WHILE WE ARE YET ALIVE!

So, Easter is not merely a future hope ... not only a future promise, it is a present summons. Since we are freed from fretting over the future and death - now we can concentrate on the mission God has set before us: RAISING UP NEW LIFE ON EARTH!!

That's what our Baptism is all about. In baptism, we profess that we have already died with Christ. We have already put the fretting over death and guilt and grief behind us - BECAUSE IN CHRIST THERE IS VICTORY OVER DEATH, GUILT, AND GRIEF. But equally important - in baptism we are raised to new life now ... at this moment ... for this world! That's why St. Paul says "no longer set your minds on what's below - namely on the earthly obsessions and acquisitions and where you stand in the pecking order. Those fortunes and that fame of this world will not be everlasting. RATHER, set your minds on things above -- not meaning other-worldly

things - but on matters of justice and peace and compassion and mercy ... the powers that desperately need to be everlasting in this world. Show yourself as more than one who merely exists on earth -- show yourself as an Easter child ... as a life-raiser, a life-lifter, a life-giver ... as one committed to Christ's cause of RAISING UP LIFE ON EARTH!!

It's like the story of Greta who lived in a dingy cellar apartment in Cleveland. She started attending services in a nearby church where the great Scottish preacher, George Matheson, served. Before long, to her friends surprise, she moved to a bright apartment with a great view of the city. Her friends asked her -- "Why the sudden change?" She replied: "You can't listen to Rev. Matheson week after week and go on living in the cellar."

You can't listen to the Easter message Sunday after Sunday and go on weeping at the tomb, crying over the past, hanging onto the despair of yesterday. Easter not only promises us a personal resurrection, but it summons us to be RAISED TO NEW LIFE NOW! It summons us to give hope to the Shirleys of this world. Today, Shirley is spending her 25th Easter in a nursing home. She has been paralyzed for a quarter century by a crippling disease. Her husband left her long ago and got remarried. Her children have moved to the coasts and rarely visit her. A little over a week ago someone stole the diamond out of her wedding band as she lay helpless in her nursing home bed.

Easter will not change Shirley's crippling disease. The resurrection of Jesus Christ will not help Shirley to rise up and walk again. But when an Easter Christian takes a few precious moments to visit ... when an Easter Christian delivers some chancel flowers ... when an Easter Christian just takes five or ten minutes to hold Shirley's hand - THEN SHIRLEY IS RAISED TO NEW LIFE. Then she is given reason to go on. Then the nursing home becomes -- even if for only ten minutes -- it becomes more than a cold tomb of death for her. That's resurrection living - that's raising up life on earth!

Ryan White, the 18-yr old All-American AIDS patient, died this past week. But he was RAISED TO NEW LIFE long before his death. He spent his last five years transforming America -- changing fearful attitudes, transforming rigid school rules, giving hope to other AIDS victims, helping all of America become more compassionate and more committed to the fight against AIDS. Amazing, isn't it, that one little-known 13-yr old boy could RAISE UP A WHOLE NATION TO NEW LIFE -- so much so that Barbara Bush, Elton John, Phil Donahue, Michael Jackson, and many more just had to be witnesses to his RESURRECTION service last Wednesday.

Ryan White had all the right reasons to give up on life. Ryan could have been totally justified in weeping unto his

death. If Ryan was merely "of this earth" ... one who merely saw life going no further than himself, then his life would have ended with him looking no further than the grave -- feeling sorry for himself and seeing life as nothing more than a hopeless accident. Instead, Ryan lived out his last days as he had lived out his first thirteen years -- HE SOUGHT THE THINGS ABOVE. Certainly he did not want to die, but he would not allow his impending death to cause him to stop living, to stop loving, to stop fighting for Christ's causes of compassion and justice, of mercy and HEALING on earth. Ryan White was an Easter child - he lived to love life even in the midst of death. He lived to transform deadly attitudes and understandings of others. He lived to RAISE OTHERS UP TO NEW LIFE.

That's what this Easter and every Easter is all about. Living absolutely confident ... even in the midst of death, that God will raise us up to new life. But not only after we die. For while we yet live, God has raised us to seek the things that are above ... the things of life, the things of Christ, the things that give NEW LIFE and NEW HOPE to this world. Shalom, Elohim, Shalom!!

AMEN.

EASTER - 1991
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
March 31, 1991
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"FINISHED - BUT NOT YET DONE!"

The words of Good Friday still echo in our ears: "IT IS FINISHED!" Good Friday confirms that salvation is complete. No longer need the faithful fret and fume about being saved. "IT IS FINISHED!" God has fulfilled the plan and promise on Golgatha. No longer can anyone claim uncertainty about God's love and concern for humanity. "IT IS FINISHED!" So the next time your born-again friend asks, "Have you been saved?" - there will be no hesitation in your response. "IT IS FINISHED!" You will humbly but confidently respond: "Yes, I was saved at Golgatha some 2000 years ago ... I was assured of God's personal forgiveness in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross." "IT IS FINISHED!" That's why we Lutherans say so emphatically -- "not by my own merit ... not by anything I have said or done, but through the merit and atoning act of Jesus Christ, I have been saved!" IT IS FINISHED! BUT IT IS NOT YET DONE!

Good Friday finishes salvation; but the story doesn't end at the cross. We have come here today to finish what was NOT YET DONE on Good Friday. God offers more than salvation to his faithful - he offers victory over defeat; transformation over resignation, and resurrection over decay, decomposition and death. We have moved from the hillside of Calvary to the garden of the empty tomb. We have come to finish God's story of deliverance. Good Friday forgiveness is absolutely essential for the heart and soul of all humanity; but Easter assurance of victory over death must also be "finished" if God is to be glorified as God above all other gods. Sacrifice can be achieved by almost any great prophet; but resurrection can only be accomplished by the one who is God Almighty!

And so it is that we hear these words from Mark today: "Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen; he is not here, see the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him as he told you." And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Mark 16:4-8

This is not quite the finish that we were expecting today, is it?. We know that the Easter story is finished; Mark says that "Jesus is not there; he is risen." But that just seems too unfinished! We're told that the "women said nothing - and that they were afraid." That's not exactly the note of victory or the conclusion to the story that we have come to expect on Easter Sunday.

We have come with tympani and trumpets today. We have come ready for a parade and Easter party. For many people,

this may be the only time the Good News will be heard for yet another year. We certainly don't want to finish this day with "and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." We want Mark to tell us what Matthew, Luke and John have told us. Tell us that Mary recognized him in the garden and called him by name. Tell us how he walked to Emmaus that day and broke bread with new friends that evening. Tell us about his appearances to the disciples in that upper room; tell us about breakfast over the fireplace by the Sea of Tiberias; tell us about his confrontation with Thomas. But for God's sake, Mark, finish the story! Wrap it up! Complete the conclusion! Don't just leave us with an empty tomb and some frightened females.

But that's exactly where Mark finishes the Easter story: "efobunto gar," and they were afraid. Some earlier editions of this gospel have longer conclusions which include appearances and additional teachings. But scholars universally agree that this was the handiwork of faithful Christians who felt that Mark had forgotten too many important details. Not so for the real Mark: "Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He is risen; he is not here; he is going before you to Galilee."

The facts are: Mark has finished the story! He has proclaimed that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. But he stops there and shifts the focus from the risen Christ to bewildered followers. The question for Mark is NOT: What did Jesus do after he was raised from the dead? But rather, What will the faithful do once they are confronted with his resurrection? It's almost as if Mark's gospel concludes: FINISHED - BUT NOT YET DONE!

As we have always known from our Christian faith - God takes the initiative - God always shows us His way. But his actions have little significance if we come and sing "Christ is Risen, Alleluia" today ... and then forget about it for the next 364 days. Mark is saying that Jesus' resurrection from the dead is FINISHED; but Jesus' spirit of new life is NOT YET DONE! God finishes salvation and resurrection for you and me. But while we yet live, we are to be his spirit of salvation and resurrection in this world. Or as Mark says: "he is going on ahead of you!" Mark is saying that resurrection faith means that Jesus is always out there ahead of us ... beckoning, calling, leading us on, waiting for us to show up and offer some of his grace & gratitude for the assurance of new life already given.

As one scholar has said: The Easter story has no final ending - no complete conclusion! Easter always calls us into the future rather than merely asking us to remember an event of the past. Easter announces events NOT YET DONE ... forgiveness NOT YET FINISHED ... brokenness NOT YET HEALED ... hopes and dreams NOT YET REALIZED ... new life over death NOT YET EXPERIENCED ... God's future NOT YET FULFILLED.

Christianity has proclaimed this "new life" for some 2000 years. But during that same period, it has been a major power perpetrating death, denigration and depression in this world. In light of Christianity's maltreatment of other races and religions, a Jewish rabbi on Easter Eve recently challenged Christendom with the following words:

"I challenge the Christian world to measure itself by the standards of its Christ. As long as ANY people is judged by its creed or color or country rather than by its character, Christianity is a sacrilege rather than a sanctity. I summon Christians everywhere to make this Easter signify that Christ was not only risen then -- but that Christ is realized "alive" now!"

The gospel of Mark says, "It Is Finished!" Jesus is risen from the dead! He has gone on ahead of you and me. And what that means is that his new life in the world IS NOT YET DONE!

Easter doesn't get finished in a garden or upper room in Jerusalem. Easter gets finished in your heart and mine - where we show that Easter has made a difference in our ordinary lives ... where we eat and sleep and work and play. The Easter story is certainly finished by God when he offers us resurrection from the dead! But as Mark says so clearly in this gospel: God is always faithful at finishing his part of the story! What's NOT YET DONE is your part and mine!! The Easter story is not only finished with God's gracious gift of life over death; the story continues to be either affirmed or negated by the way we respond to the everyday events of our lives -- in the way we talk to our kids, in the way we listen to our friends, in the way we care for those needing our compassion, in the way we support the causes and ministries for which we write our checks.

That was classically illustrated in a community-wide Easter pagaent planned each year in the foothills of southeastern Ohio. People from all over the community tried out for the parts of this passion play. The part of Mary Magdalene was given to a nun; Peter was played by a local doctor; a high school principal became Judas; and Caiaphas the high priest was enacted by the local banker. It was relatively easy selecting people for all the parts - except Jesus. No one seem to fit the director's idea for this part -- no one, except the most unlikely character ... a big, burly, brute of an oil field worker. Everyone thought he was totally ill-suited -- he cursed like a sailor and had a horrible reputation for barroom brawls. But he was the director's choice.

Finally the day of the pagaent arrived. People came from all over the state to see this production. It was estimated that 10,000 folks were gathered on the hillside to see the re-enactment of the last week of the life of Christ.

When they came to the part where Jesus was led away to be crucified, one little man -- who was filling in as an extra in the crowd scene -- became totally caught up in the emotion of the moment. Along with the mob, he yelled: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" And as Jesus was being led away toward Calvary lugging the crude cross, this little man watched the big, burly, brute of an oil worker walk past him. Totally caught up in the excitement of shouting insults at this burly Jesus walking by, the little man spit a full slug into Jesus' face. The big, burly, brutish oil worker stopped dead in his tracks. He reached up and wiped his face - and then looking deeply into the little man's eyes he said: "You just wait 'til after the resurrection, little feller; I'll be back to take care of you!"

That's a great story for a resurrection laugh on Easter Sunday. But tragically - that's the way far too many people finish the Easter story. They play it like the oil worker! They come to church to sing their old favorite Easter hymns, but after the alleluias have ended and the flowers and other props have been put away ... after the drama of Easter Sunday has been finished - it's back to the same old tactics and battle cries: "You just wait - I'll be back to take care of you!"

The gospel of Mark challenges us to finish the story in a different way. Not in a garden or upper room of ancient history. Not along the road to Emmaus or next to the Sea of Tiberius. Mark offers in many ways an even better idea than Matthew, Luke or John. He suggests that the risen Christ has already gone ahead of us to empower us with his new life. He meets us in literally hundreds of places and gives us the opportunity right now to FINISH this unfinished story: WHEREVER WE SHOW THE LOVE OF THE RISEN CHRIST BECOMES THE WITNESS OF RESURRECTION - OF HIS NEW LIFE!

IT IS FINISHED but not yet done! Where the hungry are fed and the naked are clothed - life triumphs over death, and the risen Christ is there.

Where the fearful are comforted and the lonely befriended, life triumphs over death, and the Risen One is there ... ahead of us and yet beside us.

Where the shamed are forgiven and the guilt-burdened find grace, life triumphs over death, and you and I come face to face with the risen Christ.

Where people take and eat ... and take and drink ... and then go out and love and live in peace, sharing the body and blood of the risen Christ ... there it is Easter, and the greatest story ever told goes on and on - and never ends.

Followers of the risen Christ - the Easter story never ends. It never has and it never will. It has been finished for the saints of heaven; but it is NOT YET DONE for God's servants of the earth. This Easter sermon is finished ... but it's resurrection message IS NOT YET DONE.

AMEN.

EASTER SUNDAY
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
April 19, 1992
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"COMING ATTRACTIONS"

While the women were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, he has risen!" Luke 24:4-5

Well, the Academy Awards for 1992 are now history; late in March, "Silence of the Lambs" captured the hearts, minds, and votes of Hollywood. Fourteen months after its release, "Silence of the Lambs" dominated the Academy evening - it is the first horror film in history to ever win best picture, best actor, best actress, best director and best screenplay. I have not yet seen it. I am told that it reflects some of the best acting even done by Anthony Hopkins and Jodie Foster. But "Silence" is more than a horror film. It is the story of a perverted serial killer and a cannibalistic psychiatrist who violently and grotesquely stalk their murder victims. Such films have been the essence of top-rated, oscar-winning entertainment that is supposed to provide rest, relaxation and renewal for us movie goers. And we wonder why our families and our children are experiencing so much distress and dysfunction in today's society. With top-rated movies like Terminator 2, Judgment Day, Silence of the Lambs, and the like, it's very obvious what has become our daily entertainment diet: stories of violence, perversity, profanity, depravity and death.

But it's not only the movies. Seemingly, everywhere we turn, esp on the tube, whether its Jenny Jones, Geraldo, Phil Donahue, Sally Jesse, Oprah Winfrey, Joan Rivers, Arsenio, Late Night with Letterman ... and even some of the major news commentaries, like 60 Minutes - their main features seem to be oriented to the wierd, the profane, the perverse, and the repulsive. Yet, we the people keep on tuning into this tripe - and seemingly wanting more. And then we wonder why the homicide rate in Toledo hit an all-time high of twenty over the weekend; and why a 71-yr old woman would dose her wheel-chair bound husband with alcohol and ignite his body JUST BECAUSE HE ATE HER CHOCOLATE EASTER BUNNY. Our daily diet has become one of more drug trafficking, more gang violence, more fear of Aids & blood transfusions, more political corruption and cynicism, more unemployment and more domestic economic chaos, more bigotry and racism on the rise ... in short, the forces of death are all around us. Hardly sounds like an Easter sermon, so far, does it?!? Well, quite to the contrary -- this is one of the most graphic reasons we celebrate Easter ... BECAUSE EASTER PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FOR COMING ATTRACTIONS THAT ARE A LOT MORE LIFE GIVING THAN THE MAIN FEATURES THAT ARE PRESENTLY PLAYING IN THIS WORLD. That's why we're here today ... we're like the lead character in the film "Network" - we're yelling out our Easter windows: "We're mad as heck ... and we're not going to take it anymore!" It's time for some NEW COMING ATTRACTIONS OF LOVE AND LIFE AND PROMISE AND HOPE!

And God has responded miraculously to this human cry for new life! First and foremost, on Easter morning God created, produced, engineered and directed the most classic expression of living drama ever known to humanity: HE RAISED JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD! No feature film or story has ever surpassed the life-giving worth of this COMING ATTRACTION promised to every living person on this earth. But lest we forget amidst the lillies, tulips, alleluias, trumpet fanfares, jelly beans, chocolate bunnies and Easter finery: EASTER VICTORY NEVER COMES WITHOUT GOOD FRIDAY STRUGGLE. Before Jesus Christ left the empty tomb, he first had to wrestle with the forces of evil and death. Without the blood-stained cross of Calvary, the empty tomb of Easter morning becomes little more than DIVINE SPECIAL EFFECTS - an escape from real life and real death. Jesus Christ had to fight the good fight on many occasions - but the ultimate battle came on the fields of Golgatha. It was there that he met the enemy head on - the powers of despair, defeat, and death. We will never know how furious the battle raged on Golgatha ... we will never know how close the powers of hell and darkness came to snatching the scepter from the hand of God. All we do know about this drama is that Jesus pleaded: Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me - yet not my will, but yours be done!"

Maybe one day, when we all see God face to face, we can ask for a copy of the full script of the dialog between Father and Son. But until then, we know for a fact that the mighty battle against hell's forces has been documented in film, history & scripture: it shows an unfaithful religious system; a venal, cruel, unprincipled government; betraying friends; denying, deserting disciples; weeping women; brutal lashes, sputum in the face; a mocking crown of thorns; & jeering, hostile crowd. And it was this and other dread powers of hell that finally forced Jesus to say: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!"

Charles Spurgeon, the great English preacher, has tried to put this first preview of Easter's COMING ATTRACTIONS into perspective through the story of a London street boy. The lad was carrying an old, beat-up bird cage. Inside was a tiny sparrow. Spurgeon stopped the boy and asked what he was going to do with the bird. Wickedly, the boy said "First I'm going to shake it around and play with it; and when I'm tired of playing with it, I'm gonna kill it.

Having compassion for the bird, Spurgeon asked: "How much would you sell it for? The kid chuckled: "You don't want this bird, mister; it's just a bloody old field sparrow!" But Spurgeon's face was very serious. Finally the boy said: "You can have it ... for two pounds. Two pounds then would be worth a hundred dollars today. Spurgeon paid the price; and then he let the bird go in the presence of the boy.

The next morning, Easter Sunday, the old-beat-up bird cage was sitting on the pulpit. He began his sermon: "Let me tell you about this bird cage ... and he recounted the whole story. Then he concluded: "I tell you this story, because that's what

we celebrate between Good Friday and Easter. You see, an evil specter called Sin had us caged up and unable to escape. But then Jesus came up to Sin and said: "What are you going to do with those people in that cage?" And Sin answered: "First, I'm gonna to teach them to hate and despise each other; then I'll play around with them until I get tired of them - then I'll see to it that they kill each other." Jesus asked: "How much to buy them back?" With a sly grin, Sin answered: "You don't want these people, Jesus. They'll only hate you and spit on you. They'll mock you and jeer you and finally nail you to a cross. But, if you're still stupid enough to want to buy them -- it'll cost you all your blood, sweat & tears ... your whole life!"

Spurgeon concluded: "Ladies and gentlemen - that's what Jesus did for you and me. He set us free from Sin's cage ... he paid the ultimate price ... so that you and I might be free from the inescapable penalty of everlasting death!"

Easter friends - this day gives all of us a preview of a COMING ATTRACTION that none of us can ever avoid - that before you and I ever get to God's eternal home, we too will shed blood, sweat and tears in trials and betrayals and slanders as we fight the good fight. There can be no real Church of the Living Christ if it is a church without any blood stains on it. The first preview of Easter Sunday shows Jesus Christ asking each of us who claim to be his followers: "WHERE ARE YOUR WOUNDS?!" "IN MY HOLY NAME, WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND WORTH DYING FOR?" On Easter Sunday, Jesus asks us to be followers who are willing to be WOUNDED FOR HIS SAKE. Needless to say, Easter goes way beyond jelly beans, Easter eggs or chocolate bunnies.

And that leads to the second DRAMATIC COMING ATTRACTION that is previewed every Easter: DEATH NO LONGER HAS DOMINION OVER LIFE. The cemetery messengers said to the women: "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here; he is risen!" What does that really mean for us today. Well, obviously it means that physical death has been defeated by God! God has changed the final scene for our lives from Toledo's earthly graveyards to his heavenly set, where moths, worms and corruption no longer exist. But Easter Sunday also previews the ultimate COMING ATTRACTION for our daily life: namely, because the resurrection is now a fact of life, God's love seeks to transform our lives right now ... to transform any thing or any power that is taking away meaning, purpose or joy from our daily living.

Is there anything taking away meaning or purpose or joy from your living right now? Are you suffering with cancer? God's Easter power overcomes cancer with resurrected new life! Are you still stuck in grief or guilt? God's Easter power says that nothing in all creation shall separate us from his spirit of forgiving love and everlasting compassion. Easter Sunday previews God's COMING ATTRACTIONS against the principalities and powers of this world: THEY WILL BE DEFEATED ... HE WILL GIVE NEW HOPE, NEW LIFE, NEW JOY FOR ALL OF US WHO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO HIS WORD! DEATH WILL NOT HAVE DOMINION OVER LIFE!

On Easter Sunday, God puts the powers of death under his feet so that you and I can get on by letting our feet & body & hands & minds be LIVING EXPRESSIONS OF HIS LOVE. Easter Sunday reminds us to get beyond our journeys to cemeteries and other cold tombs "seeking the living among the dead!" I'm reminded of the little girl who used to pass through the cemetery every day on her bike to get home from school. One day, an elderly widow in the cemetery stopped her and asked: "Don't you hate this place!?! Why don't you find a different way to get home; you should be afraid to ride through this dingy den of death!" The little girl replied: "Heck no, lady, this is a great place to ride ... it's the best CROSSING OVER PLACE I've ever found to get back home."

That's the COMING ATTRACTION which is the MAIN FEATURE of every Easter Sunday - the tomb, the grave, the cemetery is but a MOMENTARY CROSSING OVER to our real home with the risen Christ and each other. Easter announces that the FORCES OF DEATH WILL NO LONGER DOMINATE THOSE OF US WHO ARE YET LIVING! If there are people who relish slander and negativism and perversity and other profane forces of death -- then God urges them to find a community where those powers of death are celebrated. But the mission of this body 52 Sundays a year is to be an Easter body -- people committed to RESURRECTION POWER ... to mercy, compassion, and forgiving love ... people looking for expressions that give life, not condemnations that cause death!

So at last, Easter announces the third preview of God's COMING ATTRACTIONS: what was first viewed as an "idle tale" when the show closed at Jerusalem became a cosmic coming together of twelve - then Paul says five hundred - then that became thousands - and those became millions - and today the cast is trillions who have been on the roads to the ends of the earth for this risen Christ. The original production, once staged on a hill and tomb in the Old City has now switched to become street theatre everywhere. The audience, once only a few who stood fearful at a distance, have now become millions of acting participants. The disciples were at one time featured as faltering confused, sometimes blubbering, often denying, and many times reluctant followers of this rabbi, Jesus. But once God directed that the stone be rolled away and revealed the risen Christ to Cephas, then to the twelve, then to Thomas, then to many more - since then, the body of Christ has been transformed from a faltering few to a multi-national, mission conglomerate, directed by God himself to radically renew the world.

That is the COMING ATTRACTION which we again preview here today. No longer do we view life over death as mere wishful thinking. God has produced, engineered and directed a never-ending feature for every day life: just as he raised up Jesus, NOW HE RAISES US UP TO BRING NEW LIFE EVERY DAY ON EARTH! We are to be the earthly community of God that struggles to overcome the featured PERVERSE entertainment and narcissism of our present age. We are to be God's cast of commissioned actors who are not merely "play acting on stage," but who are aggressively REFORMING THE EARTHLY STORIES OF VIOLENCE,

PERVERSTY, PROFANITY, DEPRAVITY AND DEATH THAT KEEP ON MAKING THE NIGHTLY NEWS AND BECOME THE FILM FEATURES OF OUR DAY.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter is God's preview of the COMING ATTRACTIONS for those who are looking for a hope and promise that is greater than a bad economy, or a cancer stricken mother-in-law, or a never-ending grudge between family or friends. Resurrection power is not yet fully given to each of us, but it is fully promised to all of us. As Martin Luther said, "We are not yet what we will be, but we are no longer what we once were." DEATH NO LONGER HAS DOMINION OVER US. The battle has been won! The mission is ours to confidently celebrate and courageously offer -- knowing full well that we will never accomplish it without SHOWING OUR WOUNDS. But such is the struggle, the joy and the glory of the COMING ATTRACTION of everlasting life with Jesus Christ our Lord.

AMEN.

EASTER SUNDAY - 1993
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
April 11, 1993 7:00 & 8:45 a.m.
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"KEEPS ON GOING!"

"Keeps on going, and going, and going. Still going!"

Happy Easter! Now that you're all shocked, it's time to tell the truth! Some of you have wanted to do this to me for many years. During several of my sermons, you've wanted the EMERGIZER BUNNY to appear and say: "Keeps on Going - and going - and going! Still going!" So there, I've done it all by myself!"

Secondly, this strange "Easter outfit" announces that God likes to break the routine once and a while: HE GIVES US UNEXPECTED HAPPENINGS! And the greatest surprise that he has ever given is NEW LIFE AFTER DEATH ... AND THAT KEEPS ON GOING, AND GOING, AND GOING. STILL GOING!!

Thirdly, we are hopefuully all here today to give thanks to God for the fact that our bodies DO NOT KEEP ON GOING, AND GOING, AND GOING! Who would possibly want this body to KEEP ON GOING after 100?? The only 100 yr old member of Hope asks me every time I visit her: "PASTOR, WHY DO I HAVE TO KEEP ON GOING??" So on the very surface - Easter announces that there is a time for all of us TO LET GO ... AND LET GOD remake our bodies into his everlasting entities. That's what it means to be RISEN WITH CHRIST.

Dear friends in Christ, that's why God very wisely planned Good Friday before Easter Sunday: THERE CAN BE NO NEW LIFE IF WE HAVE NOT FIRST DIED TO THE OLD LIFE! On Good Friday, Jesus Christ bodily surrendered to death! Our faith tells us that his death assures us of the forgiveness of sin (no longer separated from God). But his death also shows that faithful people need not cling onto their bodies as if THAT'S THE ONLY THING THEY GOT GOING! Christ's death shows us there is more to life than mere prolongation of physical existence! For the faithful Christian, Easter announces that there is a right time to "pull the plug!" Which one of us would ever choose to have "life on a respirator for all eternity!?" Good Friday announces that there is a time to surrender back to God what he has first given us -- earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust! What a glorious moment that can be; as I victoriously celebrated with Helen Nouse last Monday! That moment of surrender was not DEFEAT! It was the VICTORY leading to the resurrection of the life to come!

And that's why Good Friday always leads us to Easter Sunday. So, if our bodies don't KEEP ON GOING, then what does? Last Monday night during the Michigan/N. Carolina

game, a video tape of former N.C. State coach, "Jimmy V," was shown. Suffering from terminal cancer, he shared this vision of his life at a recent basketball banquet: "Cancer will prevent this physical body from KEEPING ON GOING, but I know for an absolute fact that my heart, mind, and soul WILL DEFINITELY KEEP ON GOING!"

Today, Easter Sunday, we call that: "first dimension of resurrection!" That even though the body dies, that we who continue to live will be the embodiment of that heart, mind & soul of those who has loved, served and uplifted us throughout life! That's why the church puts so much emphasis upon weekly worship and study: BECAUSE WE ARE TO BE THE EMBODIMENT OF THE HEART, MIND & SOUL OF GOD ... AND YOU CAN'T EMBODY HIS HEART & SOUL IF YOU'RE NOT AROUND IT REGULARLY!! Today I stand before you as the embodiment of the heart, mind & soul of Jim and Blanche Martyn (although they would have never been seen in a bunny suit; and my mom is probably turning over in her grave right now!) But this embodiment is so much more than just the memory of James & Blanche! Because of their deep commitment to the faith and life of Jesus Christ -- HIS HEART, MIND & SOUL HAVE BEEN MEDIATED TO ME THROUGH MY PARENTS! Is it any wonder that we ask parents & sponsors to take their baptismal promises so seriously?

But this first dimension of resurrection is not all THAT KEEPS ON GOING! All the gospels tell us that the stone was rolled away and Jesus' physical body was never found. But following that empty tomb reality - an even greater reality is witnessed: ALL THE DISCIPLES HAVE A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH THIS RISEN CHRIST! They saw him or touched him or experienced his presence & power in a very personal way! Resurrection therefore (2ndly) means that the power and presence of Jesus Christ KEEPS ON GOING! Does that sound too mysterious for you?? Well, let's bring it home!

Each and every time you and I share Holy Communion, we proclaim that Christ is present and that his power of forgiveness has been shared. Communion is one of our personal encounters with the risen Christ today! But let's look at another one! At the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter denied Jesus even after he said that he wouldn't. But after Jesus' resurrection, Peter was not only a "rock" of a believer ... his first sermon in Acts today even urged the elimination of the walls between Jews and Gentiles -- something that Peter openly opposed before encountering this risen Christ! What made the change of outlook ... the change of circumstance! One thing: Christ was risen from the dead!

That reminds me of a Newsweek story about a letter from the Greenville County, South Carolina, Dept of Social Services. It was written to a deceased person.

The letter read: "Dear sir: Your food stamps will be stopped immediately because we received notice that you passed away. May God bless you. You may re-apply if there is a change in your circumstances or outlook." How about that for anticipating the resurrection?? But seriously, those who regularly allow the presence of Christ into the living areas of their lives DO HAVE A CHANGE OF OUTLOOK & CIRCUMSTANCE. As St. Paul says today, "they begin to seek the things that are above ... a vision of life not tied to yesterday's disappointments ... a vision of Christ's love & justice & mercy as the ruling powers of their lives. And this power of Christ **KEEPS ON GOING** in everything they say or do.

It's like we have often heard said about people who are really "into something." If somebody is really into sports, we say "Sports is his life!" If into music, we say, "Music is her life!" If into nature, we say "Gardening is their life!" And if into Christ's power, then we say, "Christ is her/his life." "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives through me!" So you see, the power of Christ just **KEEPS ON GOING!**

But the third and greatest dimension of resurrection is that **LIFE ITSELF - KEEPS ON GOING!** Not this physical life as it exists now, but a totally new creation that God fashions for each of us. What really amazes me is that this is where agnostics and atheists JUMP SHIP from the Christian faith. They simply cannot accept the fact that God could possibly have the **DESIRE & POWER** to fashion a resurrection life for us. Seemingly, these brilliant ones would rather choose the alternative: that the final word on life is the DETERIORATION of this body by cancer; that the intention for life is to end in brokenness, pain, decay & fragmentation; that life is little more than a progression from vitality to incoherence and nothingness; that all there is to experience in life is RIGHT HERE & NOW -- and it all ends pathetically with death & disorientation. I'm sorry, dear friends, but I cannot buy into that kind of mindless & meaningless fatalism!

Like E. Standly Jones, the Christian faith proclaims that "Death is just the temporary anesthetic that God gives while He changes this mortal body into his newly designed resurrection body." As St. Paul says (Colosians) we don't have a complete picture of the resurrection body because "that life is still hidden with Christ in God." But whatever form it takes, that life **KEEPS ON GOING ... AND GOING ... AND GOING WITH GOD!**

I've been told that at the time that Danny Thomas' father was dying, the whole family gathered around him. And Danny saw his father turn his head to the wall and whisper this prayer: "GOD DAMN DEATH!" Christian friends, on Easter morning that's exactly what came to pass: **GOD DANMED DEATH FOREVER ... AND HE GAVE THE RESURRECTION TO NEW LIFE.** Death is the only thing that God has ever damned, and as for his new life ... it just **KEEPS ON GOING ... AND GOING ... AND GOING. AMEN.**

EASTER - 1994
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
April 3, 1994
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"UNSHACKLED!"

And the young man said, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." Mark 16:6-7

When Dr. Robert Kysar, now professor at Luth Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, was serving as pastor in Pa., he was confronted one Sunday morning by a strange sight in the lounge. Little six-yr old Mickey was sitting on a lounge davenport shackled with chains around his wrists and ankles. (Just so that you can see the wierdness of this picture - shackle the person's wrists who is sitting next to you right now. Go ahead - do it!) Imagine if a visitor entered this sanctuary now - seeing half the congregation shackled: it was equally strange for Pastor Kysar to walk through the lounge seeing little Mickey shackled, with his father sitting right next to him NOT TROUBLED BY IT AT ALL. Pastor Kysar took several double takes as he walked through the room. When he finally got to the edge of the lounge, little Mickey stood up and yelled, "Hey Pastor Kysar -- look how tough I am!" Mickey popped the plastic shackles with one heave of his wrists and ankles and stood there proudly knowing he had put BIG ONE over on Pastor Kysar. (POP YOUR SHACKLES) As Pastor Kysar laughed and walked on, he thought to himself: If only Mickey knew how difficult it really is to get "Unshackled!"

Most of us in this room know what Pastor Kysar was saying: some of us are shackled by grief; some of us by physical/emotional distress; some of us by loneliness; others here have shackles of anger/hatred/bitterness; and some of us here are just plain shackled by boredom, listlessness and wondering if there's really anything worth living for. But all of us in this room know the reality of being shackled: OF BEING CAGED BY SOMETHING THAT DOESN'T ALLOW US TO BE THE EFFERVESCENT FORCE OF LIFE THAT GOD INTENDED US TO BE.

Whatever that "strangulating power" is -- it always reminds me on Easter of Charles Spurgeon's story of the English boy with the bird cage. The lad was carrying an old, beat-up bird cage. Inside was a tiny sparrow. Spurgeon stopped the boy and asked what he was planning to do with the bird. The boy wickedly stated: "First I'm gonna shake it around and make the bird feel crazy; then when I'm tired of playing like that -- I'm gonna kill the bloody beast!"

Having compassion for the bird, Spurgeon asked: "How much must I pay for both bird and cage?" The kid laughed: "You don't really want this bird; he's just a bloody old sparrow!" But Spurgeon insisted. Finally the boy said: "You can have it

... for two pounds (about a hundred dollars today). Spurgeon paid the price then opened the cage and let the bird go.

The next morning, Easter Sunday, the old-beat-up bird cage was hanging from the pulpit. He began his sermon: "Let me tell you about this bird cage ... and recounted the story. He concluded: "I tell you this story, because that's what we celebrte between Good Friday and Easter. You see, an evil power called Sin had us caged up and unable to escape. But Jesus came up to sin and said: "What are you going to do with those people in that cage?" Sin answered: "First I'm gonna make them crazy by teaching them to hate and despise each other; then when I'm tired of fooling around with them, I'm gonna watch them kill each other." Jesus asked: "How much to buy them back?" With a hellish grin, Sin answered: "You don't want these people, Jesus! They'll hate you & spit on you & turn against you! They'll mock you and jeer at you and finally nail you on a cross! But if you're stupid enough to really want them, it'll cost you everything: YOUR WHOLE LIFE!

Spurgeon concluded: "Easter friends, that's what Jesus did for you and me: he set us free from Sin's cage ... he UNSHACKLED US ... He paid the ultimate price: he freed us from the inescapable penalty of everlasting death.

But what do you/I do with this Good News? Like the women in today's gospel, sometimes we do nothing or say nothing. There are sometimes we almost seem to CRAVE THE CAGE ... we seemingly gloat over being SHACKLED. In fact, some days the discord, the disappointments, the disillusiones, the disagreements, and the disenchantments are all so great that we just stay shackled - WE CHOOSE DEFEAT INSTEAD OF VICTORY - WE CHOOSE TO BE afraid of new life/new hope. In the face of life's DEFEATS/UNCERTAINTIES - RESURRECTION IS too illogical, too impractical, too demanding, too alien. We would often rather choose death than be challenged by NEW LIFE! IT'S ALWAYS EASIER TO QUIT THAN FACE A NEW CHALLENGE OF LIFE!!

That most certainly must have been the case for someone like Howard Hughes. The details after his death revealed that he lived in virtual seclusion, desparately trying to avoid anything that might threaten his life. For all his wealth, power & fame - his life was one of misery. He had all the world has to offer, yet the fear of death HAD SHACKLED him to a dismal and defeatist's attitude toward life. He was so afraid to die, that he was afraid to live.

And that is the story of every person who has made God into the "almighty dollar" rather than the risen Christ. Our temptation is to become CAGED IN OR SHACKLED by what we know - even though we know that ultimately this life will BECOME ROTTEN & CONTAMINATED. So on the one hand - we are yearning for new life and new hope; and on the other, we're afraid to "let go" of what we've got FOR SOMETHING BETTER.

This human dilemma of resurrection (of old life vs new life) reminds me of the funeral home in Florida that gives its clients a "guarantee to heaven." For about \$5,000 this

funeral home will cremate your body, put your ashes into a small rocket, and fire you into orbit. The funeral home guarantees that you will continue to circle the earth for 2300 years. Obviously, part of the SALES PITCH is that you are "guaranteed to get up there." Of course, you have to believe that "heaven" is up there; and that HAPPINESS is circling the earth for 2300 years. Just imagine ... you could put RED blinking lights on your little satellite; and instead of going to the cemetery, your family could just come outside on clear nights and say: "There goes Peter!"

Even though Easter assures us of "new life in heaven," most of us would not want that kind of eternity. And all the Easter accounts and appearances never painted that picture of heaven and new life. The "new life" of the Bible does not reveal an "airy heaven, with mists & vapors & clouds & gowns and lightweight harps & lighted halos. Jesus did not rise from the dead to weightless oblivion." We are told that he was "at home in a risen body." We cannot imagine how our bodies and spirits will do breakfasts in heaven, but the Easter message gives us a hint. Jesus commanded his disciples to look and touch; he ate with them and spoke with them and it was in breaking bread that they finally recognized him as the risen Lord. After the resurrection, he was not "up there" circling the earth: HE WAS AT HOME WITH HIS BELOVED DISCIPLES, AND THEY WERE AT HOME WITH HIM.

That's the first reality that is UNSHACKLED BY THE RESURRECTION: that death is no longer an enemy, but merely a gateway to a new life given by God. It is not a revival of the corpse; it is not a prolongation of life; it is not some kind of reincarnation into another organism. It is totally new life given and lived with God & ultimately each other.

But secondly - Mark's Easter account does not specify any final exhortations or conclusions given by this "risen Christ." We're simply told "that he was not there; and that he had gone ahead to Galilee, and that's where his disciples would see him." That's where Mark's story ends: women leaving the empty tomb "seized by amazement and fear." Mark leaves the story "unended." We are UNSHACKLED from the tomb, but not caged into any other conclusions. In other words, Mark is saying: SINCE YOU HAVE THE ASSURANCE OF NEW LIFE AFTER DEATH, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT THE "UNFINISHED LIFE" THAT YOU STILL HAVE?!? How will you live differently from now on knowing that you no longer have to fear death??

Thomas Hine, the author of Facing Tomorrow, illustrates this resurrection dimension. He concludes his book by telling that as a child he often sat on his grandmothers lap as she told the "transition tales" of life from Ireland to America. And he always remembered that her stories never had an ending, because she would look into his eyes knowing that he WAS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THAT CONTINUING STORY. As Hines said, "It was up to me to know the story and make it part of my life: add to it and pass it on. A resurrection of a truly

righteous life has no ending ... it is part of a larger story that must go on and on and on." For those disciples in the upper room ... and for US disciples in this sanctuary -- it is up to us to know the story and to make it a part of our lives ... adding to it and passing it on. The resurrection announces not only an event of the past, but things NOT YET DONE for the future. When Jesus said, "I am going on ahead of you" he was clearly saying that the things of the past are forgiven: the denials, the betrayals, the slandering, the sleeping in the garden, the defeats and doubts of yesterday have been put behind us. EASTER ANNOUNCES THAT WE ARE UNSHACKLED FROM THE TOMBS AND TERRORS OF YESTERDAY'S DEFEAT, IN ORDER THAT WE MIGHT GET ON WITH GOD'S UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF HEALING AND HOPE YET TO BE FULFILLED.

And that obviously leads to the third and final dimension of resurrection: EASTER TRANSFORMS US FROM WAILERS OF DEATH INTO WITNESSES OF NEW LIFE. Thanks to a generous Hope member 14 years ago, I once stood at the Wailing Wall in ancient Jerusalem. Not far from me was an old woman in black dress and black babushka with tears streaming down her wrinkled face crying and beating the wall: "Shalom, Elohim, Shalom! Shalom, Elohim, Shalom!" "O Lord, give me peace; O Lord, give me new life!" I could only speculate about her real grief; she was certainly a mother or grandmother who had only known death & destruction - wars and bitterness between Arabs and Israelis. That was her final word on life: DEATH AND DESTRUCTION. Because of the never-ending turmoil in the middle east, she has become SHACKLED TO WARS & BITTERNESS AND A NEVER-ENDING LITANY OF WAILING AT THE WALL.

Easter announces that God's vision is totally contrary to what we see happening in the Holy Land today. God does not want the pilgrimage of life to end in a tomb from a mortar shell or through the violence of guns or incest or rapes or robberies or all the other destruction that leads to beating a Wailing Wall. God's last word on earth was not "wailing death" but "witnessing to new life." Jesus said, "I am going ahead of you! Your mission is not to be SHACKLED by death or tombs or tears but to be liberated to offer hope and new life to everyone around you!" That's what Easter offers to every Christian - hope, renewal, and new life. As I said in my Easter commentary - God's greeting is never "Goodbye," but "Til we meet again, for Lo I am with you always!" Like Mickey - each of us today and every day can stand up and shout: "Hey everyone - look at what God has done for me ... freed me from the shackles of death in order that I might be a GIVER OF LAUGHTER & NEW LIFE in the name of Jesus Christ!"
HAPPY EASTER! AMEN!

EASTER SUNDAY - 1995

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

April 16, 1995

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"HOME SAFE!"

After sixteen years of pastoral leadership at Hope, members of this congregation have learned that Martyn will go to extremes to demonstrate the relevance of the gospel - whether as **an Easter Bunny** with bass drum saying that God's new life **KEEPS ON GOING & GOING & GOING ...** or **a bird cage** demonstrating that Jesus Christ has freed us from Sin's Cage ... or **a pin-ball machine** demonstrating that much of our culture has conformed to a "pin-ball-machine" lifestyle. And now this Easter, he comes with the PBS nine-part series on "Baseball" as his Easter's parable. And all of you are asking - what does the 2-1/2 minute segment just shown have to do with this glorious day of Easter?!?

Well, first we can hopefully all agree that everyone in America understands baseball. As the narrator said - it is one sport played in parks, prison yards, alleys, and backyards by young & old, boys & girls, amateurs & millionaire pros. **So, just like Jesus' parables, everybody here today should understand this metaphor of the day.** Unlike me, Sue was entranced with this series, and she never was a baseball player. But she fully understands that the object of the offensive team is to get as many players "Home Safe" as possible.

During the televised series, our staff spent some time discussing its vision. We all saw not only its deeply poetic value, but its great parallel to our Christian faith. And then some of us watched the 2-1/2 minute segment you just saw. **And there it was--a theme for Easter: being "HOME SAFE" WITH GOD and with all whom we have loved!** What a powerful modern parable!

But then we switch to our Gospel for this day ... and we see that it does not affirm this glorious reality. **It says that the earliest messengers did not find it easy to believe that God brings us "Home Safe!"** The women went to the tomb to prepare Jesus' body for proper burial. When they found the stone rolled away and the body missing, they were very perplexed. Even after confirmation from a messenger at the empty tomb, **many of Jesus' followers concluded that it seemed like an "idle tale."**

And the women and those in the upper room were not the only ones who reacted with confusion to this empty tomb. Throughout all ages, whether the well-conditioned faithful or the rookie skeptics, **many people have reacted to the news of "resurrection" as little more than an "idle tale."** In this world, we simply don't expect those kinds of gifts of grace. And certainly in baseball, there are no such free gifts of getting "Home Safe" without earning it.

I played softball in Jr High and for a few years on a Community League in Oshkosh. In all my years at the plate (incl. a few times here as pastor), **I never once hit a home run.** In all my years in softball, I only remember getting "Home Safe" probably 20 or 25 times. And those times it usually had nothing to do with my hitting ... it was ususally somebody else who "hit me home!"

As John Chancellor said in the tape, baseball is a "leisurely game, but it demands blinding speed and tremendous coordination and accuracy." Most of us who have played ball have had **times of great fantasy -- we've had those moments of wanting to be the great grand-slam hitter on the team ...** the one who rounds third base to the roaring cheers and jubilation of the crowd and our teammates with open arms as we come "Home Safe."

That's the same fantasy that every pastor has for his/her Easter sermon. **We want it to be a home-run today for the faithful.** But we know that "such fantasies" will never be the facts for most Easter sermons. Most pastors are lucky if the sermon is just a good base hit ... **or a good bunt.** Very rarely do we hit doubles, and almost never home runs (**we need only look at next week's attendance to be reminded that today was not a home run!**). Most times our Easter messages are not much different than the rest of our lives: maybe a walk, often a strike-out!

That's why this resurrection promise of Easter -- this assurance of being "Home Safe" often **seems like an "idle tale."** **Because we are not accustomed to giving thanks for God's gifts ... we always want the credit ourselves.** Most of our lives are lived on the playing field where we expect to earn all the glory for ourselves. As John Chancellor further said, it is really rough terrain because **"every player is measured against the ghosts of those who have gone before."** And Charlie McDowell alluded to all the **"hazards out there between 1st and 3rd."** Isn't that the way most of us experience everyday life: **we see the hazards and failures and defeats and missed catches and dropped balls and errors.** And it's pretty tough to be told that in spite of all these disappointments we will still get "Home Safe." It all seems like an "idle tale," because our world so often dwells upon the daily defeats and failures and errors and crucifixions.

The biblical scholar, Moffat, when serving as a missionary in Central Africa, tried to explain the Easter gift of "risen & new life" to a tribal African chief. When the chief heard that the dead shall rise, he asked:

"Will the dead really rise?"

And Moffat said: "Yes, the dead will rise one day!"

And the chief asked, "Will my father arise?"

"Yes, your father will arise," said Moffat.

"And will all those who have been devoured by lions, tigers & crocodiles also rise?"

Again Moffat said, "All will rise before God's throne."

"And will those that my people have slain in battle also rise?"

"Yes," said Moffat, "they will rise in the resurrection!"

The old chief stared at the missionary in disbelief; then turned to his people and said: "Did your ears ever hear such strange talk? Those dead cannot arise! Those dead must never rise again!!"

Moffat was shocked and said: "Why do you say the dead must never rise again!?"

The old warrior-chief raised his muscular arm which was now shaking in old age and replied in anguish: "Because I have raised my spear against hundreds of those enemies ... and I say, they shall never rise again!"

Do we see why the Easter message is often an "idle tale?" **Because that's the way skeptics like the African chief want it!** They do not want to hear about God's power over all creation; they want to continue to believe that all power and authority is still in the hands of the creatures rather than the Creator!

Well, Easter Sunday once and for all took all the errors out of that kind of hazardous living. **God said on Easter that you don't have to be a Babe Ruth or Hank Aaron to get "Home Safe" with Him.** God said on Easter that he has already hit the **grand slam** that each of needs thru the life of Jesus Christ. And because Jesus Christ **endured all the hazards and mockery and jeers and poor sportsmanship of the crowds on Good Friday** -- because Jesus Christ suffered defeat for our sake on Golgatha's field ... He (and all his teammates) would now be offered the total victory of coming "Home Safe" a few days later!

I hope we all see this image of "Home Safe" not only as our ultimate assurance of "paradise with God and those who have gone before us." The resurrection **not only promises** being "Home Safe" with God in heaven. It says that **RIGHT NOW you and I can experience a fortaste of that resurrected life -- wherever we experience being "Home Safe."** And where is that? **Wherever we are assured of love and forgiveness in spite of our strike-outs and errors!** Like at this **Communion Table!** Like at that **baptismal font!** Like in those homes where family and friends are **always there holding out their arms** to hug us and cheer us "Home" to "Safety!" Like maybe even playing on an actual sport's team ... if the attitude there is **always one of acceptance and understanding** ... one in which the coach is trying to make us better players of life, *where we don't always have to win, but we simply are called to do the best with the ability that God has given us.* Now tell me that there is not great jubilation and joy in the gift of being "Home Safe" with that kind of God today!?!

In all the other religions of the world, whether Buddhism, Hinduism, Siva, Mohammedanism, Zorastrianism, or even the "New Age" spiritualism of our own day -- in all these religions **there is only hope and redemption through your own skill, wisdom or perfect ability.** In these religions, it's everybody for himself/herself... everybody must be a "home-run" hitter to get "Home Safe." Only Jesus Christ of Christianity *rose from the dead* after he "struck-out" at Calvary! **But by the power of his Father, he was back on the playing field three days later to the amazement and confusion of his best friends.** And that's the power that is promised to you and me every Easter Sunday -- **God's power to raise us up from every defeat ... even the defeat of death ... and give us new life to get going again!** Not only on Easter Sunday, but 52 Sundays-a-yr ... God guarantees that we will rise again and come "Home Safe!" Is it any wonder there's so much noise and jubilation around home plate here today! **Hooray ... You're "Home Safe!"**

AMEN

EASTER SUNDAY

Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo

March 30, 1997

Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor

"FROM EMPTY TOMBS TO LIVING ENCOUNTERS!"

*Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"
Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away,
tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!"
She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" John 20:15-16*

There are empty tombs all around us. Whether we want to face them or not, they are here! Widows and widowers face empty beds once shared by beloved spouses. Middle-aged parents face empty homes without the noises & purpose once given by their children. And imagine the 39 families of the cult members! How could their kids wander so far astray? Likewise, how many minorities at this moment wonder when the empty promises of equality will be fulfilled. And divorced adults and their children face the end of a vision once joyfully shared. Let's be honest -- there's nothing worse than empty tombs!

Empty tombs also abound in religion Pews filled on Easter will become amazingly empty until next Christmas. Commitments made earlier for 1997 have already become secondary as "fun and sun" come with spring & summer. And "Performance Evangelism" has become the new ritual for pop religion -- where people come to church only to be entertained ... not to be empowered by God's Spirit or inspired to be His faithful disciples.

And as we approach the 21st century -- society is looking at many empty tombs -- cultic suicides & random assassinations ... terrorist attacks & technological unemployment ... a growing gulf between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' ... simmering strife in our cities & never-ending war in the middle east! Just a few of the empty tombs of the future! Yes, there are empty tombs all around us! Like Mary, none of us wants to face them! We want to run!! We want to avoid losses of any kind!! We want to make believe they don't exist!!

That was exactly the situation Mary Magdalene faced that 1st Easter morning. She had come to complete the burial of Jesus. Instead, she faced An Empty Tomb! It was more than she could take!! She ran for refuge to the familiar; to the place where she knew there was life; back to reality with her closest friends.

We would have done the same!! When the empty cavity of a tomb strikes us ... we run away! We seek the living & avoid the fear of emptiness! We turn on the light at 3 o'clock in the morning when we awake from a terrifying dream! We vigorously shake our heads to clear out any thoughts of nothingness ... ~~any~~ potential fear of emptiness. We click on TV ... we pick up a novel or magazine ... we turn on the stereo: anything to give us the assurance that we are not alone ... not in an empty tomb!! And if you're like me, maybe you've even played the "Great Escape" game -- losing yourself in busyness!! If we just plan enough meetings, create enough places to go, enough things to do ... enough, enough,

enough -- just enough so that we don't have to think about the feeling of being alone!! No one wants to be mocked by an empty tomb!!

Yes, we've all been there and done that!! We know what Mary Magdalene felt like as she encountered an empty tomb that morning. None of us delight in empty tomb experiences! But Easter morning beckons us to GET BEYOND empty tombs and look for hope, for new life, for resurrection!! Empty tombs just won't do it today!!

So we return to our text and note that as Mary is weeping in the garden, she hears something behind her. She sees what appears to be a gardener. He asks why she's weeping. She merely asks, "Where is the body of my Lord?" And then comes the LIVING ENCOUNTER!! He speaks but one word: "Mary!" Immediately she recognizes his voice & cries: "Rabbouni!" "My Master!"

"From Empty Tombs to Living Encounters!!" He is there! God has again shown his real body of love - totally and completely through raising Rabbouni from the dead!! The empty tomb recedes into the background. Her focus is no longer on emptiness but now upon a LIVING LORD!! A living encounter with Jesus Christ has replaced an empty tomb!!

I sincerely hope you have come here today to experience that same LIVING ENCOUNTER!! For if you're looking for empty tombs, you're looking in the wrong place!! *** Martin Luther said it this way: "We do not believe in the resurrection because of an empty tomb ... but because of a Christ-filled world!" People believe WHEN THEY encounter a Christ-filled world!!

Mary believed after ENCOUNTERING a living Christ in the garden! The disciples believed after ENCOUNTERING a living Christ in the upper room! Those on the road to Emmaus believed after ENCOUNTERING a living Christ in the breaking of bread! It is not through the details or descriptions of an empty tomb ... *but through encountering the living Christ* that we come to affirm a resurrection faith!!

My friends, get this today ... and get it straight!! There is no proving of the resurrection!! *No one can prove by sacred stories or by empty tombs or by detailed descriptions of discarded grave clothes that Jesus rose from the dead!!* Not even the amazing Shroud of Turin or other scientific details will prove the resurrection as a fact of history. Only ENCOUNTERING THE LIVING PRESENCE & POWER OF CHRIST in our daily lives can assure us that the resurrection is a reality!

And how do we have those living encounters ~~daily~~?? How do we know that we believe in a living & loving Lord?? Richard Hoefler says it simply & graphically: we have a living encounter with Jesus Christ through forgiveness, through freedom and through fellowship!!

a crucified

First, we encounter the living (resurrected) Christ through forgiveness! Which one of us can honestly say that he/she has never experienced the unmerited forgiveness of God for the wrongs which we have perpetrated?? There is no one in this room who has not known that forgiveness! That is the guaranteed absolution of a-resurrected Christ! Jesus Christ is the living declaration of grace for all, and condemnation for none!! And because we are forgiven, we know that Jesus Christ is Risen ... Risen Indeed!!

Second, we encounter the living (resurrected) Christ through freedom! Which one of us hasn't been burdened by the endless laws & rules & demands which weigh us down with worry. Both the law and the demands for perfection are essential in every religion & society--but they also weigh us down ... making us feel hopeless, helpless and imprisoned!! Morality is a mandate for every person & society -- but without grace (the unmerited gift of love), the pressure of perfection suffocates every victim! Christ rose from the dead to announce freedom from the letter of the law & faithfulness to the spirit of the law: freedom from perfectionistic religion! And because we have been delivered from a perfectionistic religion, we know that Jesus Christ is Risen ... Risen Indeed!!

Third, we encounter the living (resurrected) Christ through fellowship! The church is the fellowship of saints -- namely, reborn sinners for whom Christ died and was raised! The church is the "flesh & blood" fellowship of Jesus -- the body God calls to reach out & touch the world with His mercy & His manna! The church is God's electric shock for an ^{Carthage} arrested world! According to God's own directions, Christ is the head and we are the body. Christ is the bridegroom and we are the bride. Christ is the vine and we are the branches. And when we are grafted together in the power of God's grace, mercy & peace -- then we know that Jesus Christ is Risen ... Risen Indeed!

Forgiveness, freedom and fellowship -- these are the foundations of faith in the resurrection! These are not the experiences of an annual visit to the tomb! These are day-by-day, week-by-week realities of being touched by a living Lord! These are the regular experiences of Word, of Sacrament, of warm sharing, of the healing power of a God who always cures thru the resurrection from the dead!! These are the powers of LIVING VICTORIES - not the attributes of defeats in an EMPTY TOMB! Today ... and every day in this place ... we celebrate a victorious encounter with a living Christ!

That experience was graphically felt in 1799 on Easter morning by the people of Feldkirch, Austria. They awoke surrounded by Napoleon's army. Little Feldkirch could never withstand Napoleon's massive forces! A town meeting was quickly called to determine if a "white flag" of surrender would be hoisted. The pastor rose at the meeting saying: "This is Easter Day - the day of our King's resurrection! We must allow our Lord and Ruler this one moment of triumph! Let us ring the bells! If the town falls, at least it will fall with the bells ringing -- THE TRIUMPH OF EASTER over the principalities and powers of this world!!"

Soon the bells all over town were ringing! There was a triumphant sound in the valleys & over the hills of Austria! Napoleon's army was amassing outside the city walls. They asked: "Why would they be ringing the bells of celebration?" They concluded that the Austrian army had arrived during the night and was waiting for them. Within moments, Napoleon's army broke ranks and ran in full retreat *as the bells of Easter morning kept ringing!*

That's how one little town moved from the spirit of Empty Tombs to a Living Encounter with the resurrected Christ! So, let's ring the bells of victory! (Bells begin ringing!!) Let's tell the world today & always that Jesus Christ is Risen! Risen Indeed! *For life in his body is never an empty tomb, but a living Encounter with forgiveness, freedom & fellowship with His Saints yet Sinners!* Yes, today & always -- Christ is Alive for us! Christ is Alive within us! Christ is Alive to bless our Living Encounters!

AMEN.

Please Rise!
THE PEACE OF BE
THE LORD BE
WITH YOU!

EASTER SUNDAY
First English Lutheran Church, Toledo
March 31, 2002
Peter R. Martyn, Part-time Interim Pastor

“TURNING TRAGEDY INTO TRIUMPH!”

But Mary Magdalene stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she looked into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying ... They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.’ And then Mary went and announced, ‘I have seen the Lord’ and then told them the things he had said to her.

John 20:11-13;18

Happy Easter!! “He is risen!! *He is risen indeed!*” If you are an “Easter person” like me -- there is no other day of the year that is more triumphant. I love Easter -- the hymns, the bigger crowds, the spirit, the decorations. I hope you love Easter too! This is God’s day of victory that makes all other days triumphant! But is this just religious hype – do we really live victoriously because of Easter?! Is Easter really triumphant -- or are we just “whistling a happy tune because that’s the way we want life to be?” The gospel text today certainly doesn’t begin with a victory or triumph – we’re told that Mary and the disciples were uncertain, confused, discouraged ... she couldn’t control herself from weeping. In short, we’re told that Easter didn’t immediately change the tragedy of Good Friday.

I’m glad the gospel begins this way, because it’s a much more realistic picture of Easter. Easter Sunday can’t change the tragedy of Sept. 11th that lives vividly with many of us. Easter Sunday doesn’t change the tragedy of Andrea Yates action toward her own children. Easter Sunday won’t change the tragedy that continues to break out in the Middle East. In short, Easter Sunday does not eliminate tragedy. In fact, hate it as I do, I am certain there will still be other terrorist tragedies and family tragedies and global tragedies. So that raises the question: How can there be triumph for families who have or will experience tragedies like these?? Certainly just singing “*Jesus Christ is Risen, Today*” isn’t going to do it for these families.

So what can we say? We must say that Easter Sunday alone will not help us *Turn Tragedy into Triumph* -- because God doesn’t work that way!! God never intended to give us an Easter Sunday without a Good Friday!! Because Easter Sunday without Good Friday is like coating all of life with sugar-frosting. We believe that God is a God of love, compassion & mercy ... and he has no intent of overlooking our tragedy and sorrow!!

So God’s first step in TURNING TRAGEDY INTO TRIUMPH is to make us a “Good Friday people” before we become “Easter Sunday people.” And why the reality of Good Friday?? Because on Good Friday -- God showed like no other time HOW CLOSE HE CAN REALLY GET TO US! God chose on Good Friday to get as INTIMATE to human tragedy & sorrow as God could ever get -- HE CHOSE TO DIE ON CALVARY! On Good Friday -- God chose to feel the fullness of our hurt & pain & sorrow so that we would always know --

WE ARE NEVER ALONE IN OUR TRAGEDY! God is always with us in tragedy: because he was fully there on Good Friday! It is not Easter Sunday that tells us that God understands our worst tragedies -- it is Good Friday! Good Friday tells us that God loves us so much that He will never take the "easy way out!" Good Friday tells us that God shares the most outrageous tragedies of New York, Houston, the Middle East, anywhere. God knows what it's like to be **INNOCENTLY KILLED** by a terrorist mob!

Yes - Good Friday reminds us that God never said that he had created a world without tragedy, heartache & death. On Good Friday—"God took the whole human trip!" And that's God's first method for turning human tragedy into triumph – he shows true "understanding & compassion." But then God turns to Easter Sunday because he doesn't want WEEPING to be the final act of life on earth. God's Easter morning task was to turn weeping into HOPE: that there is HOPE beyond every tragedy. And God's HOPE is twofold!

First, God has the power to turn death into resurrected life!! That's what God did with Jesus Christ. He brought Jesus back to life in a new way. I cannot tell you exactly what Jesus looked like – but I can tell you that all the biblical experts gave the same prognosis on Easter morning: *Jesus Christ was risen from the dead!* And that's a HOPE he promises to each of us! But that's the easy part for God.

Secondly, if Easter is really going to be triumphant -- then God must do more than change our bodies from dust to new life. Let's face it ... God does not want to wait 'til we die to change us to be like him. God wants Easter to happen **RIGHT NOW!** God's understanding of Easter HOPE is not a date on the calendar ... Easter HOPE is not wearing a new spring outfit ... Easter HOPE is not a bunny parade! **EASTER HOPE IS RECEIVING GOD'S SPIRIT TO LIVE WITH LOVING-KINDNESS FOR WHATEVER DAYS ARE LEFT ... regardless of how much tragedy we may yet face! That's TURNING TRAGEDY INTO TRIUMPH!** To live with Easter HOPE is NOT only wanting a resurrected body -- but wanting a victorious life of God's spirit and image in this world RIGHT NOW!!

That spirit was captured by the famous Michelangelo as he was remarking to his fellow painters centuries ago: *"Why do you keep filling gallery after gallery with endless pictures of Christ in his weakness, of Christ upon the cross, of Christ dying, of Christ hanging dead? Don't stop there as if the curtain was closed at Golgatha – open the curtain with the cross in the foreground but show the Easter dawn streaming upon the risen Christ, the ruling Christ, the triumphant Christ!"*

Easter people understand that weeping and tragedy will come in life – but they live each day with the **SPIRIT OF RESURRECTION TRIUMPH** – they do not

let their tragedies overcome God's triumphant spirit of mercy and loving-kindness!! Like Mary Magdalene, like Peter, like all the others after that Easter morning – Easter people live to share one thing with others: THERE IS ALWAYS A NEW DAY of LOVING KINDNESS AFTER ANY TRAGEDY. That's God's promise on Easter morning. I wish I could say that I was one who always lives that spirit. I still have some room to grow ... so may some of you. But let me share a favorite story that illustrates the opposite of that Easter Spirit. And in looking at the opposite, we will all see what it means to live in the image of God every Easter after every tragedy.

This is a story that took place somewhere in southeastern Ohio. It was an annual community Passion Play. People from all over the county tried out for the parts. The part of Mary Magdalene was given to a nun; Peter was played by a local doctor; a high school principal played Pilate; and Judas was played by the local banker. The director had an easy time selecting everyone except Jesus. Finally she selected the most unlikely character--a big, burly oil field worker. Everyone thought he was wrong for the part -- because he cursed like a sailor and was known for barroom brawls. But he was the director's choice.

Pageant day arrived. People came from all over for the production. When the time came for Jesus to be led away to be crucified -- one little man (who served as an extra) became totally caught up in the moment. As the mob was crying "Crucify him!" and the brute worker was lugging the cross past this little man - the little guy spit a full slug into Jesus' face. The big, burly oil worker stopped dead in his tracks. As he wiped his face - he looked down at the little guy and said: "You just wait 'til after the resurrection, little fella -- I'll be back to take care of you!"

It's funny, isn't it? But it's the greatest tragedy of Easter Sunday for many people. They finish the Easter story in the spirit of slander rather than the spirit of compassionate love. When Jesus said, "*It is finished,*" he didn't mean that we were to "finish one another off!" He meant that he had completed his life in the image of the Father's love. That's the spirit of a triumphant Easter: finishing life in the image of the Father's love! That's why people shouted then ... and still shout today: "*He is risen! He is Risen Indeed!*" Because real Easter people aren't worried about a bodily resurrection: God will easily handle that! Real Easter people want to be certain they finish their lives in the image of God's love. That's TURNING Good Friday TRAGEDY into Easter TRIUMPH – living every day in the image of God's love.

AMEN.