

## The News that Matters

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! This is the message of Easter, the reason we are here tonight. This is the truth that has brought us together, whether we know it or not. Without it there would be no church and no Easter to celebrate. Without it there would be no eggs to dye, no Easter lilies, no fashion shows, no reason for you to get up tomorrow and go to church again!

Jesus Christ is risen. Nothing else matters tonight. The shock of paying your income taxes, the hassle of deciding where to spend your summer vacation, the frustration of getting the lawn mower to crank, the college acceptance letter that may or may not be in Monday's mail, the goings on at the legislature down the street – these things and a thousand others might be on our minds tonight, but they are not what Easter's about.

Tonight – or by Jewish reckoning – today -- Christ is risen, and that's all that matters. For just a few moments out of our busy lives, let that single message occupy our thoughts, our feelings, our imaginations.

Tonight we are the people of the Exodus, huddled on the shore of the Red Sea, our children and belongings around us. At our backs is the uncrossable sea; in our nostrils the salt air. Etched in our memory and in the flesh of our backs in the sting of Pharaoh's lash.

Tonight we are Israel delivered, standing dry and safe on the other side of the sea while the waters roll over the last of Pharaoh's army. Tonight we are a people delivered, a people set free.

Tonight Christ is risen, and the powers of Satan are defeated. The past no longer holds us in bondage. The old ways of living our lives, the ways that enslaved us, have been beaten, drowned, overcome.

Easter is a public reality, a cosmic act of God which divides all of history in two. It does not depend us to make it true. It will not be reduced to wishful thinking or some precious rite of spring. It defies rational analysis and explanation. Words can neither express nor contain it. Our songs and prayers do not cause Easter to happen. Easter *is*. Christ is risen.

But this cosmic event is also personal, as intimate as your own name whispered in your ear. Easter is Mary Magdalene's tears spilling down on her jar of ointment. Easter is Mary weeping, not only because the established governments of the two most "civilized" nations of the world conspired to hang her master on a cross, but also because she had been denied the opportunity to anoint his broken body with her oils of burial.

Easter is Mary's tears. Easter is the tears of friends who never got to say good-bye before the auto crash or the cancer did its work. For me, Easter is my mother dying on the far side of the Atlantic before I could tell her again how much I loved her. Easter is my sister dying a month before the 25<sup>th</sup> birthday we should have shared. Easter is God's answer to death, and to the power of death that threatens to keep our hearts broken and our tears unchecked. Easter is Mary's tears and Jesus' voice, saying "**Woman, why are you weeping? . . . Mary.**"

Jesus Christ is risen, and he calls us by our names. Like a mother who holds her child to her bosom, like a father who wakes his child from a nightmare, Jesus is risen to dry our tears and to throw open the sash to show us that the day has dawned, and the long night of despair ended.

Christ has died, and we have died with him. Christ is risen, and with him we have passed from death to life. Inside that tomb with the grave clothes we have left our tears, our failures, our regrets, our long-cherished resentments, our broken promises, our shabby respectability. Easter is our personal deliverance from sin and death. It is the risen Christ speaking your name and mine.

But Easter is more than that. It is the sign that God's rule is breaking into this world -- that the powers of oppression, of injustice, of enslavement, have been broken. The kingdom of this world is becoming the kingdom of our God and of his Christ.

The Easter dawn dissolves the shadows; the powers of darkness are put to flight. I remember a scene outside the South African Embassy in Washington, D.C. in the darkest days of apartheid. Bishop Desmond Tutu, fully aware that back home black people were being killed and imprisoned, stood with a band of protestors who were singing Easter hymns outside the embassy.

Bishop Tutu cried through a bullhorn to the officials within the embassy: “You think you are in control. You are not! You have already lost the battle, for Christ is risen.”

The forces of oppression and violence -- the old regimes which pitted black and against white, male against female, slave against free, rich against poor, straight against gay have been defeated. God is writing the future in a new language. Jesus Christ is risen.

There is no message more radical, more cosmic, more personal, more joyous, or more dangerous than the message of Easter. Jesus, the Christ, not only has defeated death, not only speaks our names, not only puts to rout the powers that threaten our future – he shall also reign forever and ever. And at his feet every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God.

Jesus Christ is risen. That reality, above all others, gives this faith community our identity and mission. The Church is the Easter people. Everything we do, whether in worship or in work, must show forth the risen Christ. Every lesson we teach, every meal we serve, every issue we engage, is for the sake of our risen Lord.

Without Easter we, the church, would not be in business, and we have no business doing anything at all, if we proclaim not Christ crucified and risen.

And so, we say our prayers, we sing our hymns, we break bread and pour wine to share. We go from here to seek the risen Lord in our neighbors, and to serve him through acts of justice and compassion. Next week we will gather to do the same, and the next, and the next, and the next – until our whole life, together with the life of the whole world, becomes a thank-offering to God.

That’s what the church does. It bears witness to the truth: Jesus Christ is risen.

May the God who raised Christ Jesus from the dead raise you, and may you live in joy to serve the risen Lord.