

Listen... A sermon preached on Easter Sunday,
April 16, 2017 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church,
Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons; I CORINTHIANS 15:12-26, 35-40, 50-16:4
MARK 16:1-8

Over 2000 years ago,
Some very strange things took place in one of the
far off provinces of the Roman Empire.
A man of tremendous,
One could say charismatic appeal began to proclaim
that the long awaited Kingdom of God was at hand.
This was not a new message,
For this particular area had heard the message
before.
However, the man who proclaimed it was different.
It was a Kingdom that was characterized by
overflowing,
Unbounded,
Self-giving love and mercy
It was a Kingdom he said was in fact HERE – and
was available to people NOW
And this man not only spoke, and preached and
taught about the Kingdom,
His healing and his approach and compassion for
all was very different from all who had just talked
about the Kingdom of God.

This man – one Jesus of Nazareth spoke out against anything, which broke or marred the human spirit.

This Jesus stood up for and championed the poor, the rejected, and the marginalized of this world. People like prostitutes, the sick, and the dreaded tax collectors

Further,

This Jesus challenged the religious leaders of his country

For this religious elite – these holy Joes were not ministering to the people who most needed religious and spiritual help.

They were more worried about keeping the rules, the religious minutiae, keeping up appearances. They worked under the principle that if it did not fit within the rules, then it could not be done; the person could not be helped.

Little wonder that this made Jesus very popular to many people.

For Jesus never cast any aside And frankly, calling the Temple a den of thieves and its leaders white washed tombs, was not something that would endear him to the temple leaders!

So, the Temple leaders accuse Jesus of blasphemy and political subversion – undermining the authority of Imperial Rome.

That should get things going

Of course the charges were trumped up ones,

But the religious authorities knew they could make a deal with that wishy washy Roman governor, one Pontius Pilate.

Through a series of events, a Roman execution took place

After the standard policy of belittling then torturing the accused, the Roman soldiers nailed this Jesus to a cross

Where He hung in agony until he died.

That is the story recorded more or less in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John .

Throughout history, corrupt and paranoid civil authorities have liquidated good men and women

Some of the finest and most compassionate, religious people have been killed

Because they were a nuisance to the existing powers.

What is very different is that Jesus the Nazarene did NOT STAY DEAD.

The lesson Helen read this morning is just one of the gospel accounts of what happens on **the first day of the week, just after sunrise.**

First a few,

Then an increasing number of people claimed this Jesus had risen from the dead and had come to meet them.

Not as some ghost seeking revenge and retribution
 But as in the time before the Crucifixion – wanting to bind up the broken hearted,
 Release the oppressed
 And provide recovery of sight to the blind – in the fullest sense of those words.

The people who met the risen Christ were transformed by that encounter
 The Gospels only list a handful of specific meetings with the risen Christ.

And they are indeed incredibly moving stories – Mary in the garden
 The story we will look at next Sunday – Thomas Peter,
 And the Emmaus couple.

However,
 Few encounters with the Risen Christ can be matched either for drama or impact upon the church as the encounter of one Saul of Tarsus. – Who we know better as Apostle and letter writer – Paul.

The specifics of the conversion are recorded in Luke's Acts of the Apostles – chapter 9

This morning,
 I want to concentrate upon Paul's letter to the Corinthians – chapter 15 – *for this is the first recorded reflection on what the Resurrection of Jesus means for all time and for all people.*

Paul writes Corinthians within 30 years of the events surrounding the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus.

There is still a sense of immanency in that Christ is about to return

Further as Paul begins – he cites that there are some still living who both saw and met the Risen Christ.

Paul never lets up

The resurrection of Jesus he says is an indispensable part of the gospel

The resurrection of Jesus is an indispensable fact of history

The resurrection of Jesus is to make a timeless difference in the lives of believers.

This is what has prompted chapter 15 of the first letter.

Paul has heard that the people in Corinth are asking questions

Not questions about the reality of the Resurrection of Jesus – OF THAT, THEY HAVE NO DOUBTS!!

However, they are wondering what difference does it make in their lives

So what?

First Corinthians 15 is a long chapter – as befits the importance of the issue Paul is addressing.

It is filled with Paul's rabbinic form of argumentation

On the one hand... but then on the other.

If

So, not as easy a chapter to read as say a narrative story.

Yet, what an important question to consider in our lives – particularly this morning,
With the trimmings of Easter all about us.

For if we are dealing only with an event long ago and far away...then this is history only.

But we are dealing with an event that has meaning for all time and for all people

What then does the Resurrection of Jesus mean to us – in the here and now?

Consider three words or clauses from the lesson Helen read.

Lo, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will be changed (vs. 51)

*Highlight the word **Mystery***

If for this life only we have hoped in Christ we are of all people most to be pitied (vs. 19)

*Highlight that phrase **hoped in Christ.***

...Always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain (vs.58)

Highlight that clause “*always excelling in the work of the Lord.*”

What does the Resurrection of Jesus mean to us today

Mystery (vs. 51)

Many things can be, have been and will be said about the Resurrection of Jesus,
But one word that reappears over and over again is
MYSTERY

God’s actions in our lives and His working in the world is often – a mystery
Here in I Corinthians 15, Paul is describing what shall happen to believers after death.
He has not been there,
Nor have they,
Nor for that matter have we.

Paul has just finished using the image of seed and grain to describe the difference between our bodies now and the resurrected body that shall be ours – owing to Jesus’ Resurrection – **the first fruits.**

It is a familiar image to all of us – seed in the ground,
Growing,
Final fruit.

But it is still a mystery –yes
And the resurrected body – *a mystery*

We are not going to have all the answers
 We may not ever know all the questions

There are things in this life and how God interacts in this world and in our lives that are beyond our comprehension and outside of our experience.

For example, you will not find a description, or even a hint of what went on in the darkness of that Tomb.

To speak about the mystery of the Resurrection is not deflecting one from real issues. It is to come face to face WITH real issues.

God is much greater than we are

His working in his world and in our life is much greater than what we can see, hear, touch taste, see and smells

Human power is not the heart and centre of the universe.

Worldly success is not the centre of all things

God's love is at the centre – always has been, always will be!

So with the Resurrection – do not run from this 'mystery' –embrace and celebrate it wholeheartedly
For this is proof positive of God in action – for each and for all of us.

What does the Resurrection of Jesus mean to us today?

It is a sign of hope in a world that is much in need.

In the delightful late '90's movie, As Good as it Gets, which gave both Jack Nicholson and Helen Hunt Best Actor and Actress Academy Awards for 1997

Nicholson plays one Melvin Udall, a Manhattan novelist who is an obsessive compulsive with a nasty mouth

It is a role Nicholson plays very well – for I think it is so reflective of his actual personality!

In one scene, Nicholson bursts into his psychiatrist's office DEMANDING that the psychiatrist drop everything, and help Nicholson deal with a frightening problem – He is becoming more human and it scares him!!

Nicholson wants a quick fix

The psychiatrist, who has not seen Nicholson for some time says, "Make an appointment – there are other here Melvin. You are not the only patient I have.

Nicholson storms out of the psychiatrist's office. He looks around at the people in the waiting room.

Some of their faces are etched with distress and dismay

Nicholson blurts out – *what if this is as good as it gets – you ever thought about that!!!*

And he storms out of the office.

What IF this is a good as it gets?

What if we were only to know brokenness, upset, loss, pain, and grief, sorrow, worry and despair?

What if the grim were to be every present and cyclic?

What if there was nothing but numbing repetition?

Melvin Udall's world view may reflect the view of many today – what if this is as good as it gets?

But the Christian faith, anchored in the Resurrection of Jesus says that our hope does not rest on things in this world

Our value, our worth is not dependent on what the world says it is – rather it is anchored in the love God has for each of us through Jesus Christ our Lord

Our hope is not based on some dead Nazarene entombed on a Galilean hillside

No our hope ultimately rests on the Risen Lord of Time and History.

And that hope says – *the best is yet to come.*

For Jesus' Resurrection validates all His claims and all his promises

--From those promises of abundant life here and now

To promises to make all things new

From his promises to always be with us

To promises that nothing, not even death itself shall separate us from His love

The past is not meaningless

The present is not cyclic grim,

The future is not an empty void.

Past, present and future – all are in God's hands

Great news? You bet

There are therefore new possibilities of forgiveness, love, grace, mercy and joy

With the help of Jesus – each and any of us can come to terms and deal constructively with old destructive habits and let go of memories that hurt and cripple.

That is the hope and the reality – *the best is yet to come!!!*

What does the Resurrection of Jesus mean to us today?

It means we are to get about the business of living out the Christian life.

I have long been struck by the swiftness with which Paul moves from the grand and glorious description of the meaning of Jesus' Resurrection To the practicalities of living out the Christian life.

Where, O death, is your sting?"

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved,^[a] be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the

**Lord, because you know that in the Lord your
labor is not in vain.**

**16 Now concerning the collection for the saints:
you should follow the directions I gave to the
churches of Galatia.**

You cannot be much more practical and basic than that—a collection for needy believers.

Paul has no intention that the Resurrection of Jesus is something we are to compartmentalize exclusively in a ‘spiritual’ or ‘holy things’ slot.

The Resurrection of Jesus is to have an impact in our lives.

This is what God has done for us—live then in its light!

Live as Easter people!

At the time of the Ascension, you will remember that the disciples had to be reminded by the two angels present

**Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking
into the sky?**

Certainly we gather here, as do all communities of faith to worship,

Praise and give thanks to God

But this is not something only for Sunday mornings,
*The message of Easter, the truths to which it points are to
be lived out!*

How we are to do this is not expanded upon specifically here – you have to read on and read broadly in the **New Testament**.

-Especially in the letters St. Paul wrote to early churches

For in these letters as well as the Gospels,

The instructions and the challenges of living out the Christian life are quite clear

Here at the end of I Corinthians 15, Paul highlights a given in the Christian life

...In the Lord your labour is not in vain (I Cor15: 58)

Read – no act done in the Lord's Name is ever wasted!

No display of faithfulness or obedience to God is ever forgotten by God.

We may not see in this life the full results of our actions in the Lord's Name – But know this – God does!!!!

We are not called to worldly success in the Christian life, but faithfulness and obedience to God.

So on this Easter morning with the songs, prayers, and lessons fresh in our minds.

Paul would say, "Get Busy"

Do the work of being faithful – daily!

Live in the hope of Christ – daily

Live in the light of the mystery of God – daily!

Thanks then be to God

**Truly, He gives us the victory through our Lord
Jesus Christ.**

