

## **“INSIDE INFORMATION”**

***By Rev. Victor Kim***

***Matthew 28:1-15a***

(04-21-19) Easter

Can you believe it's Easter Sunday already?

Maybe it hasn't really felt like Easter because the weather has been so poor this spring or because Easter, unlike Christmas, doesn't come with the huge commercial buildup. I don't remember ever seeing anyone with a sign saying, only so many days until Easter! There hasn't been a Maundy Thursday blow out sale at Best Buy to my knowledge.

Easter always seems to sneak up on us, catching people by surprise. But maybe that's the way Easter should always be, not preceded by weeks of bunnies or chocolate eggs. It certainly was that way on the first Easter those many years ago. It doesn't matter how many times we read the account or which gospel account we read, the sense of shock, surprise and fear runs throughout all the Easter accounts. The Easter story is not a story that should be received with all the cuddliness of furry bunnies or the sweetness of chocolate. It's a proclamation that defies human logic, understanding and every ounce of reason.

Every year at Easter there's always some report or another which calls into question the believability of the Easter story. In fact in yesterday's NYT, there's an interview by Nicholas Kristof with Serene Jones, the president of Union Theological Seminary in New York City. In the interview, President Jones, who is, remember, the leader of a prominent seminary in the United States, says that she doesn't believe in a physical resurrection, the virgin birth, the efficacy of prayer or life after death.

So you wonder, what's left to believe in?

Some years ago, I read an article about a congregation which decided to make some changes to their Easter worship service. As we began worship this morning, we sang the resurrection hymn, Jesus Christ is risen today. The worshippers at this church replaced the words Jesus Christ with Glorious Hope. So, it's not that Jesus Christ is risen today, but rather glorious hope. Doesn't sound quite the same to me.

The minister of the congregation believes that unless the church sheds its no longer credible myths, doctrines and dogmas, it will be toast. And so, there'll be no more talk of Jesus rising from the dead, but rather we'll speak about the rising of hope.

### **One dares to ask, hope in what?**

The answer comes, hope in the human spirit. But hope in the human spirit apart from God, apart from a God who is the Creator, a God who in Jesus Christ is the Redeemer, a God who in the Holy Spirit is the Sustainer, apart from such a God, hope in the human spirit is a hope which is bound to end poorly. Why?

Because apart from the God who in Jesus, has resurrected life from death and opens the doors of eternal life to all who would accept the invitation, the human spirit, no matter how courageous, how joyful, how special, is temporary, it is momentary, it is brief, it is passing and it is fleeting, **and it always, always, ends the same way, in death.**

A human spirit, as well intentioned as it may be, but which ends with the eventually of death, with its final determinative state being decay and decomposition, often leads to a life defined by narrow parameters and a myopic vision.

***A what you see is what you get human life, leads far too often to a life which is lived to get as much as you can, while you can, because it will all come to an end before you know it.***

That's the story of life for so many people, isn't it? And don't we see it all around us everywhere? Without a grounding in something **outside** our own selves and interests, without being anchored in a conviction that what we see **isn't** all there is, life can be incredibly selfish and self-centered. One preacher says, that he has learned that the one thing we all believe in is death. No one is an agnostic on the subject of dying. Our lives are organized around it.

**The way you believe the story ends affects the way you live the rest of it.**

(M. Craig Barns, Earth Shattering Hope)

So much of our culture believes that the story ends in death. It's reflected all around us. Our society is built on it. Our lives are geared to maximize whatever we can get out of life while it lasts. That's why youth is valued and aging is feared, that's why birth brings such joy and death, such sadness.

**But what if you knew that the ending was different?**

Let me give you some inside information. Despite what some will try to tell you, **for the Christian, our hope rests, not on the human spirit, but on God's love.**

Our hope rests on God's love shown in the gift of his Son Jesus Christ, who was born into a human life, who lived on this earth, who died on the cross and on the third day, he **was** raised to life again by God. Some might call that a myth, but I would venture this. It all depends on what you believe about God. And if the god you believe in is only a god of your own making, if the god you believe in is just an extension of your human spirit, if the god you believe in is a god who will die with you when you die, then sure, go ahead, call it a myth.

But I've got a question,

*if Easter isn't about Jesus being raised from the dead, why celebrate it at all?*

Easter is only Easter because **it's not about us or our spirit**, it's not about what's reasonable, what's logical, what's acceptable.

***It's about God, it's about the God who creates a way when there was no way, who shakes the foundations of the world to announce the new way things would be.***

***The inside information is that life doesn't end in death, but rather that death is temporary, death is momentary, death is brief, it is passing, it is fleeting, because in Jesus Christ, in his resurrection, in his life from death, in his life over death, death is done for, life does not end in death, no friends, life leads to God, this life is part of our eternal life with God. And that has huge implications about how we should live this life.***

Our text from Matthew speaks of the women going to the tomb. When they got to the tomb there was a violent earthquake and angel of the Lord came down, rolled the stone away and sat on it. His appearance so frightened the guards that were posted at the tomb that they shook and became like dead men. These guards were posted by the Jewish leaders who thought that Jesus' followers might come and steal the body and tell people that he had been resurrected.

Frederick Buechner writes of this image,

***"Elderly men with station and status and real gravitas, invested in the status quo, frightened, trying for all they are worth to make sure that nothing interrupts or changes the way things are, securing the tomb.***

***Old men trying to keep the sun from rising."***

(The Magnificent Defeat)

Buechner says they have two fears actually. The one they **express** is that someone will steal the body and claim resurrection, a religious hoax. But, Buechner observes, religious hoaxes are relatively short-lived. Would-be messiahs were a dime a dozen in those days. The real fear, the fear they probably didn't want to even acknowledge, was that it might happen, that he might actually get up and walk out of the tomb. ***That, they rightly understood, was not only unthinkable; it would change everything.*** If Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, God's anointed, God incarnate, and if somehow in him the power of death was defeated, then, we are living in a brand-new world.

Thousands of preachers, Buechner says, on Easter Sunday **act like those old men when they try to explain the resurrection, make it safe, secure.**

We won't speak of a bodily resurrection, but rather of a rising of hope.

We find ourselves more comfortable suggesting that that it was Jesus' teachings that live on, not Jesus himself, or that resurrection really just points to the power of life we see every springtime. None of that is very compelling. We could celebrate that at Starbucks, why come to church for that? None of that is what faith claims this day.

**Jesus Christ is risen.**

**Death could not hold him.**

**He and what he stood for were not defeated as everybody thought.**

**Death is defeated, and we are living in a new world.**

(John M. Buchanan, *The Laughter of the Universe*)

The story doesn't end the way we might think. What difference does that make for you? I'll tell you something, **it doesn't always make the difference we think it should make.** The guards had seen the impossible. And yet when they told the chief priests everything that had happened, they were offered a large sum of money to say something different. They were bought off. And the chief priests themselves lied to keep the status quo. Their unspoken fears had come true; Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, just as he said he would do. But their wealth, power and status were what they lived for. And so, they clung to the old world, shutting their eyes, their minds and their hearts to the newness offered in Jesus.

***The way you believe the story ends affects the way you live the rest of it.***

### **What do we believe?**

What have we been living for?

Have we been living as if the story ends in death, as if our story ends in death?

Have we constructed the rest of our lives around the belief that it all ends in death?

### **Easter says no, it doesn't end like we think it ends.**

We have inside information.

What would you do with your life if you knew that you only had a year left to live?

Would you live it any differently than you are now?

Would you make different priorities, would you not care so much about **how much money you make** and more about how you **spent** that money, on making a difference in the world?

Would you change the things on which you spent your time, making a priority of spending as much time as possible with the people that matter the most?

Would you toss aside the frivolous things of life, trying to keep up with the Joneses or the Wongs, or even the Kims, and embrace the deeper values of compassion, sacrifice, servanthood? If you only had a year to live, would you make these changes?

### **Why?**

I think many of us would, because that knowledge would give us the motivation to tear ourselves away from the unthinking, uncritical, unexamined life that so much of the world engages in. It would make us more honest about what we value in life.

***Now if the knowledge of having only a year left to live could make such a difference, imagine what difference it would make to know the inside information that no matter how long we have left to live, that our lives don't end in death, but that God has eternity in mind for us.*** Imagine a life, which isn't preoccupied with issues of security or scarcity, security from want and need, from pain and hurt, from fear and death, ***but imagine a life defined by freedom.***

***The way you believe the story ends affects the way you live the rest of it.*** If we know that this isn't all that there is, and that it doesn't all end in death, imagine how free we could be to give, to share, to reach out, to be generous, to live with compassion, to live with hope, to live with joy. Imagine not having to hoard our stuff because our stories are more important than our stuff. Imagine not having to fear a prognosis or diagnosis because we know that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

As the Apostle Paul puts it,

**“When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:**

**Death has been swallowed up in victory.”**

It doesn't mean that we have to give up our day jobs or our retirements,  
***but it does mean that they don't, that they can't, rule us, that we are not defined by what we do or how much we have.*** We are defined by ***whose we are and the love that God has for us.***

Our security comes from the inside out. If it doesn't all end in death, if not all the power in the world can put an end to what God has in mind for us, imagine the freedom to speak about and share the good news of Jesus, free from what the neighbours might think of us, free from our self-enforced ideas of respectability and embarrassment, free from our fear of what the established powers of the world can do to us. Imagine how we could respond to the needs of our world, to the needs of our neighbour and of the stranger.

**Do not fear, do not be afraid!**

**Easter proclaims a truth that shakes the foundations of the world, but it is because God is creating a new heaven and a new earth. Do not be afraid.**

We can be like the guards or the chief priests, who, though they knew the truth, clung to the old story that says money and power are the goals of life, to get what you can while you can get it. **We can be like those who are embarrassed by the claims of our faith and try to find ways to make it more reasonable, more acceptable, to shape God in our image rather than knowing that we are created in God's.** But a story that is rooted in us, in our spirit, no matter how noble, **is a story that always, always, ends with the finality of death.**



Or we can embrace the truth, the new story made possible in Jesus Christ. We can be like the women, afraid, yet filled with joy, to whom the resurrected Jesus suddenly appeared. They came to him, they took hold of his feet and they worshiped him. **The word is out, Christ is risen.** The old way has always been to try to rob the news of its life changing power. Pretend it didn't happen. Throw enough money at it to make it go away. Or in our more modern sensibility, claim that we as progressive, enlightened people, can no longer accept these ancient myths. We all know that everyone dies, people just don't get resurrected, so, don't sing about it, never mind have it change your life.

***But its Easter and we're living in a new world. Jesus is alive, it doesn't matter what we do, we can't keep the Son from rising!***

**Jesus Christ is risen today – Hallelujah!**

*Written by Rev. Victor Kim  
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