

I Am the Resurrection and the Life  
John 20: 1-18  
John 11:25 26

Text: *I am the resurrection and the life. (Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.)*

Three fools died and are at the pearly gates of heaven. St. Peter tells them that they can enter the gates if they can answer one simple question. St. Peter asks the first fool, "What is Easter?" He replies, "Oh, that's easy! It's the holiday in November when everyone gets together, eats turkey, and are thankful..." "Wrong!," replies St. Peter, and proceeds to ask the second fool the same question, "What is Easter?"

The second one replies, "Easter is the holiday in December when we put up a nice tree, exchange presents, and celebrate the birth of Jesus." St. Peter looks at the second fool, shakes his head in disgust, tells her she's wrong, and then peers over his glasses at the third fool and asks, "What is Easter?"

The third fool smiles confidently and looks St. Peter in the eyes, "I know what Easter is." "Oh?" says St. Peter, incredulously. "Easter is the Christian holiday that coincides with the Jewish celebration of Passover. Jesus and his disciples were eating at the last supper and Jesus was later deceived and turned over to the Romans by one of his disciples. "The Romans took him to be crucified and he was stabbed in the side, made to wear a crown of thorns, and was hung on a cross with nails through his hands. He was buried in a nearby cave which was sealed off by a large boulder." St. Peter smiles broadly with delight. Then he continues, "Every year the boulder is moved aside so that Jesus can come out...and, if he sees his shadow, there will be six more weeks of winter."

We can laugh, but here is a true story. Several years ago a clergy friend of mine went shopping for a confirmation gift. She decided to buy a nice gold cross necklace so she went into a nice jewelry store. She asked the clerk, who was in their early to late 20's, if they carried gold crosses. The clerk's eyes brightened as she said, "Oh yes. Right over here." She reached into a display case and pulled two padded display trays. "We have these plain crosses," she said as she sat the tray on the top of the glass counter. Setting the second tray down beside the first she continued, "And then we have these with this little man on them."

On this Easter morning we look at "that little man" who said, *I am the Resurrection and the Life.*

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for what was to be the last time when he took a little side trip to Bethany, the home of Mary and Martha. Word had been sent to Jesus that Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, as well as his friend, was gravely ill. By the time Jesus made it to Bethany Lazarus had died. When word of his arrival came to the sisters, Martha ran out to meet Jesus.

*Lord, she said, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*  
Jesus replied, *Your brother will rise again.*  
*I know that he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.*  
But that is not what Jesus was talking about. *I am the Resurrection and the Life*  
he told her.

If you know the rest of the story you know that a few moments later, in a voice that awoke the dead from the grave, Jesus called out to Lazarus, and he who was dead stumbled out of the tomb. That, at least in John's gospel, was the last of Jesus' miracles.

He entered that ancient and holy city of Jerusalem where he was at first triumphantly received. He washed his disciples feet, he gave his followers a "new commandment"—that they love one another as he had loved them. He told them that he was about to leave them but that they should not be afraid for Another—the Comforter, the Holy Spirit—would come to lead them just as he had led them. He told them that he was the vine and that they were his disciples, that cut off from him, they would be able to do nothing. And then he was betrayed, and denied and crucified and buried in a borrowed tomb.

That is where this morning's gospel lesson picks up. It was the first day of the week, before dawn, when the lone figure of Mary Magdalene was making its way toward the tomb. Unlike the other gospels, as John tells his account, Mary Magdalene is not carrying spices to anoint his body for it had already been anointed by another Mary, Mary the sister of Lazarus and Martha.

No, it seems as if Mary Magdalene was going to the tomb in the spirit of grief, not unlike any of us who visit the site where one of our loved ones are buried. Imagine her surprise when in the shadows of the hour before dawn she sees that the stone that had sealed the tomb had been rolled away. In her mind, and I believe, in ours as well, if we had been there, it could only mean one thing! He had been taken.

In a panic she ran to Simon Peter and to the disciple who is identified throughout the gospel of John only as "the one whom Jesus loved." When she reached them she breathlessly gave them the news!

*They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."*

The two disciples bounded out of their house and raced to the tomb. It was exactly as Mary Magdalene had said. The stone had been rolled away sometime in the night. The tomb was empty! Undoubtedly fearful and confused the two left, trying to make sense of it all for the gospel writer says they "did not yet understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead."

Mary Magdalene stayed at the tomb that once held her beloved Jesus weeping.

After a few moments she looked into the tomb for what appears to be the first time and when she does so she sees something that Peter and the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved never saw. There were two angels clothed in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had once laid. One at the head, and the other sat at the feet. And speaking to Mary Magdalene they asked, *Woman, why are you weeping?*

*They have taken away my Lord, she replied, and I do not know where they have laid him.*

No sooner had those words left her mouth than she saw someone standing behind her. This Stranger asked what the angels asked. *Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?* Mistaking him for the gardener she begs, *Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.*

“This Gardener” simply said, *Mary*, and she recognized him as *the Lord*.

A second time she runs to the disciples, but this time she runs with *Good News, gospel news. I have seen the Lord!*”

Something changed that day. The words spoken to Martha took on a new meaning.

#### *I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.*

The world has wrestled with that mystery of the Resurrection for over two thousand years. It has been described as a “stumbling block” to some, “foolish” to others and “hope” to those who call themselves Christian.

In writing about the Resurrection the Apostle Paul once called it a “mystery.”

*Listen, he wrote to the Corinthian church, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye...for this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 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.”*

*“Where, O death, is thy victory?*

*Where, O death, is thy sting?”*

*... Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (I Corinthians 15: 51 ff)*

And, at another time in another place, *We would not have you ignorant, brothers and sisters, lest you should grieve as those who have no hope. For we believe that Christ Jesus died and rose again and so it shall be for those who have died in Him. Therefore, comfort one another with these words. (I Thessalonians 4:13 ff)*

*When we were baptized in Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. For if we have been united with Christ in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6: 3-5)*

*I am the Resurrection and the Life.*

*Because I live, you shall live also. (John 14: 19)*

One of the hymns in our hymnbook I had never heard before it was selected for my parents' funeral a little over a year ago. Their pastor said that it was a favorite of his and that it took on new meaning when it was sung at the death of his brother. It speaks of an Easter faith.

*Because He lives, I can face tomorrow,  
Because He lives, all fear is gone;  
Because I know He holds the future,  
And life is worth the living,  
Just because He lives!*

While I was the pastor in Burlington, Iowa a discarded church treasure was discovered during a "Spring house cleaning day." It was a picture of a Chinese family taken around the turn of the century. In the picture there was an adult man, his wife and his four children ranging in age of about 3 through 12 or 13. The man's name was Teng Yeng. Sue had it cleaned up and reframed but when the picture couldn't seem to find a permanent home, I hung it in the pastor's study. I hung it there because it reminded me of the quality of life that grows out of a faith born of the Resurrection.

As a boy Teng Yeng had been a child sponsored by the Sunday School class of that church. For many years the Sunday School offering helped pay for his education at a school ran by missionaries. Eventually this boy grew into a man, went to seminary, got married and began a family.

When news reached him that the church that had supported him as a child was getting ready to build a new building he sent a Chinese dollar bill along with a note. In his letter he wrote that in the spirit of gratitude for the ministry that that church a half of a world away had provided a poor Chinese boy, he wanted to buy at least one brick in their new structure. His dollar bill represented about a month's worth of his salary.

A short time later the church learned that Teng Yeng and his family had been killed in what Westerners call "The Boxer Rebellion." Teng Yeng was a pastor in Beijing at the time, and in a fit of anti-colonialism and nationalism all things Western were destroyed. Teng Yeng had continued to go about his ministry in the city when he and his

family were arrested. They were taken to the outskirts of the city, and a servant, who followed from a distance, told other missionaries what had happened next.

Teng Yeng was told to renounce his faith and when he refused, the servants reported that his family was beheaded one by one. First to die was his wife. She was spared seeing the death of her children. Teng Yeng knelt by each of his children and had a prayer before they were killed, youngest to the oldest. Finally, Teng Yeng knelt on the ground in the field, and joined his family on “the Other Side.”

When word of the circumstances of his death reached Burlington two stained glass windows were commissioned in his honor. The north window showed the front side of the Chinese dollar bill; the south window, the back.

I’ve never had times as hard as Teng Yeng but I often thought of his story when times were hard. And I wonder if before he died he recalled the words of his Savior whispering through the centuries to him saying, *Fear not those who can kill the body but not the soul* for after they had done that, what can they do? (Matthew 10:28)

*I am the Resurrection and the Life.*

Life, real Life is lived in the knowledge of the Resurrection. In his old age the apostle Paul wrote to a younger Timothy,

*God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline (II Timothy 1:7)*

On this Easter let us live into the One who said,

*I am the Resurrection and Life*

Let us take hope from the angel who asked,

*Why do you seek the living among the dead.*

Let us live courageously in the assurance of

*the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins;  
**the resurrection of the body;**  
and **the life** everlasting.*

To God be the glory. Amen.

