

Easter Makes a Difference

A pastor tells a story about a woman who greeted her after the Easter Sunday Service: "I've never seen such a crowd in church, the woman exclaimed'. The pastor didn't know her, but apparently she was impressed by the number of people that attended Easter worship. Then, as she was shaking her hand and moving toward the front door, she added, "Do you suppose it will make any difference? "What do you mean?" The Pastor said "Will what make a difference?" "Easter," she shot back. "Will Easter make any difference for all these people, or will life tomorrow be the same as it was yesterday?" That woman's question is truly a profound question. "Will Easter make any difference for all these people, or will life tomorrow be the same as it was yesterday. Will Easter make any difference in your life? Has this week been any different for you because of the Easter event last Sunday?"

Maybe the best way to explain what this means is to tell you a story about a clown.

"Once, a hospital children's ward was the most depressing ward in the entire hospital because the children had little hope. Many of the children had a terminal illness. There was little hope in the place. That little hope was reflected in the faces of the nurses, in fact many hospital staff disliked working in this ward and staff turnover was high. Even the parents and friends of the children who visited found it difficult to enter and stay with these failing lives.

One day a man changed that by dressing like a clown. The nurses were apprehensive, some of the parents were offended, but the children laughed. The children sensed the clown loved them from his heart and hoped for them. The clown told everyone that today was not the end of the world. He had a powerful influence on the children because he gave them hope. The nurses began to work with the clown, and they began to laugh and smile. The children began to love the nurses' and they in turn began to love the clown. Then one day the clown didn't come to

the hospital. His life had come to an end. However, he lives on in that hospital ward, lives on in his smile, which is still there because he gave those children hope. Today someone else is wearing his costume and smile, but most important--someone else is bringing hope through love."

Living in the power of the resurrection, living in Christ means we are people who live in hope and victory. Hope that because He lives, we, too, will live. Hope lives in a world of brokenness. Hope tells us that we don't have to live in the brokenness of this world; there is that possibility of change, of renewal, of a new life because Jesus Christ has risen. Easter makes a difference because of what God did through Jesus Christ. Pope Benedict who will be visiting Washington in about sixteen days has said, "The one who has hope lives differently, the one who hopes has been granted the gift of new life."

Secondly, Easter makes a difference because we can have a profound sense of peace in our lives. Peace that God is in control of life. Peace that I can surrender life into his hands and he will more than adequately take care of me. It was a peace that Thomas was looking for which drove him away from the community of believers, a peace he thought he could find through his own conditions and his own demands, but he only found frustration, loneliness, despair and sorrow.

When he returned to the community of believers, Christ appeared to him and in that appearance; he found peace as exclaimed, "My Lord and my God ". Thomas gave up trying to do things his way and began to live in and through Jesus. Now life had a sense of peace, a sense of confidence, a sense of quiet strength, God was indeed in control. Easter makes a difference when we realize that we don't have to control life, we don't have to have our way, we don't have to have our demands or conditions met, but God is the one who is in control. This is when Peace comes.

A little boy had a terminal illness. He knew he was dying even though his parents hadn't

told him, so one day he asked his mother, "Mom what's it like to die? Will it hurt? The mother thought for a moment as she searched for an answer to the question then said, "Charlie", do you remember when you used to play with your friends all day? You'd be so tired that when we'd sit around and watch TV afterwards, you'd fall asleep in the chair with your clothes on. Well, that wasn't where you belonged, but in the morning, you always woke up where you did belong--in your own bed. Your Dad or I carried you up the stairs, into your room, and tucked you into your own bed where you belonged." "Charlie," she continued, "I think that's what death is like. It's like waking up some morning and finding ourselves in another room, in the place where we belong. safe in the strong loving arms of Jesus."

That is the peace, which Christ gives to us . The knowledge that we belong to him that no matter what happens in this life on this earth, we belong to God. It is a sense of well being in the middle of disease, brokenness and despair. It is the sense of confidence knowing, believing, and trusting that somehow God is in control. Even when we have a difficult time seeing God work even when we cannot understand all the chaos around us, God is still in control, that is peace~ that is shalom.

Easter makes a difference because of this sense of peace, this sense of well being, this sense of shalom, the sense of God's blessing in our lives. It is this peace, this well being, which enables a widow or widower to go on living, which enables a person racked with pain and illness to still see joy in life, which enables a young person searching for meaning and purpose to finally find, his/her place in life. The Easter resurrection brings to life even in the worse circumstances, a sense that God is in control. The Easter resurrection does make a difference because it brings that peace which passes all human understanding.

Despite difficult circumstances men and woman have found meaning and purpose to life. Many of our great saints all found direction in their lives. To name of few, Albert Schweitzer, Martin Luther King, St. Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, John Wesley, Sister Thesea, Bishop

Titu of South Africa, we could go on and on. When the gospel message is viewed as a gift to enrich life, then life has freedom, power, courage, strength, there is no limit to what can be done. When life is seen through the power of Easter one can see for miles and miles and see all that needs doing, all the hurt, all the pain, all the suffering, all the hunger, all the inhuman conditions all the burdens of life. But because of Easter we can see through the burdens and can find solutions to these needs.

Easter makes a difference if, and only if you and I are willing to carry this gift of the gospel with us in our walk down the road of life. But, I think, in this day, many people have absolutely no clue as to a direction for life. They wander, they flow with the tide of life, never staying one place long enough to make their mark in the sands of time. I see this in people when I ask what do you want to with your life? They don't know. If we open ourselves to God's spirit working in our lives, if we take the Easter message more seriously we would find direction, purpose and meaning to our lives. Let God do the guiding and we will be filled with hope, peace, and have a renewed sense of purpose and direction.

Amen