

"JOY TO THE WORLD"

ISAIAH 25; COLOSSIANS 3:1-4; MATTHEW 28:1-10

APRIL 16, 2017 -- EASTER SUNDAY

Colossians 3:1-4

1 Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits at God's right hand in the place of honor and power. **2** Let heaven fill your thoughts. Do not think only about things down here on earth. **3** For you died when Christ died, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. **4** And when Christ, who is your real life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.

Matthew 28:1-10

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. {2} there was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. {3} his appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. {4} the guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. {5} The angel said to the women, "do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. {6} he is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. {7} Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'he has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' now I have told you." {8} so the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. {9} Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. {10} Then Jesus said to them, "do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Well we made it! Congratulations! Lent and Holy week are behind us, they have left their mark, but we made it to that great gettin' up morning. We have made it to Easter and now instead of just alluding to resurrection we can talk about it, we can embrace it, we can see what we need to do about living it in our lives. It is now time to concentrate as people, as a church on what the resurrection of Jesus means to us, means for us, what it calls us to be and to do.

We live in a world of things that are improbable – but not impossible. It's improbable that someone can take a little slip of paper, circle 6 numbers and a day later be a multi millionaire. In sports one of things that makes being a fan is the law of improbability. It's baseball season and last year the improbable became true and after 108 years the Chicago Cubs finally won the world series. Or how about catching a foul ball at a major league baseball game – I've been to a lot of games – never snagged one. Some people have season tickets and go for years and never get one. 20 K fans in a stadium on average and 60 to 80 foul balls – somebody's going to get one. ^Take Greg Van Niel, Cleveland Indians Fan – he caught 4 – not bad – but in one game? Improbable but not impossible. His seat, Row FF, Section 160, Seat 3, is the most requested at progressive field.

It's improbable that the US elected a red headed business man non-politician – but there you go. Beatrice, Nebraska is probably not widely

known, but something amazingly improbable took place there in the evening of 1 March 1950. The church choir was due to meet at 7:20 AM. And practice for Easter music. All fifteen members were late due to ten separate reasons. Just as well. The church exploded at 7:25. The members obviously wondered about God's hand in this. Improbable, but not impossible.

Which brings us of course to the improbability of Easter. First of all, it's incredibly improbable that over 2000 years after an event that rooms full of people, big rooms, small rooms, with people of hundreds of languages and multiple races in every corner of the world will gather and within a small window of time in those place and in those languages say, Alleluia, He Is Risen, He is Risen Indeed. Which occurs because of the most improbable event of all. The reversal of death – to life – the improbably but not impossible event we know as the resurrection.

Reflecting on the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus on Easter, author Phillip Yancey writes that Easter actually holds out the awesome promise of reversibility. Nothing -- no, not even death -- is final. Even that could be reversed. The improbability of Easter is complete reversal. And if that is true then Easter holds for us unlimited possibilities for life changing events.

As C.S. Lewis puts it: *"If we let Him, He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into dazzling, radiant immortal creatures, pulsating all through*

with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine. He will make us into bright stainless mirrors, which reflect back to God perfectly, though of course on a smaller scale, His own boundless power and delight and goodness. That is what we are in for, nothing less."

Jesus did not come to merely make a few improvements to our lives, but to give us a whole new one! Resurrection is about reversibility, about taking what was and turning it around, it is about moving from sin to redemption, from death to life. From improbability to possibility.

Easter gives a stable basis for hope -- hope that things will get better; hope that there is a good purpose to life; hope that there will be an end to pain, suffering and sorrow; hope of an afterlife. "If I take Easter as the starting point," writes Yancey, "the one incontrovertible fact about how God treats those whom he loves, then human history becomes the contradiction and Easter a preview of ultimate reality. Hope then flows like lava beneath the crust of daily life." Jesus rising from the dead is THE reality which, if you believe, will swallow up all other realities.

"Does that mean that everything that is sad in our living going to come untrue?" If you believe in Easter, the answer of Jesus is yes! Some day will be the great morning, *the* morning of which Easter is just the foreshadowing. In the midst of lives that have the same issues on Easter morning as they did when we went to sleep on Good Friday, this is hard to see, harder to

understand, harder even still to adapt into our living. Not even Easter always feel free and clear.

You've seen God's power of resurrection in your life. We all have. Whether we feel it right this minute or not, we have all experienced moments when we have come to realize what resurrection is. Sometimes we name it; sometimes we don't. Sometimes we, like the disciples on early Easter morning have to grapple with what it means, and if it is real, but, it is here and now and all around us.

We have a member of this church who was given the improbable gift of some bone marrow from his sister in an improbable procedure and in a resurrection like improbably possibility he is literally being born again from the inside. Improbable but amazingly, thankfully possible.

Do we understand what the empty tomb means to us? Do we know that in spite of the things that would change us forever, that because the tomb is empty, because he is risen we can have new life? In spite of ourselves. In spite of what we do and how we do it.

Do we understand what it means to us? Do we understand if we only come to worship once or twice a year or all 52 + times what Easter means? What that empty tomb means and how it should significantly change us?

If we understood, if we could even begin to understand, how would our lives change? If we have only a tenth or a hundredth of Mary's understanding and enthusiasm that her lord was risen how would our lives change.

Could we possibly be the same this afternoon as we were yesterday? If we knew what the empty tomb meant could we be the same tomorrow as we were when we uttered the curse that diminished the other; or when we, with such instant hostility or calculated cruelty did our best to inflict pain, even on those we love the most; if we knew could we so flippantly take the chances we take not just with our own lives but the lives of others as we drive in unsafe states of mind or body; if we knew could we take the love our parents and children freely offer and mutilate that love with our hardness of heart; if we discovered on Easter what the cross and the empty tomb have done for us would we be able to look into the pained faces of the poor, of the lonely, of the sorrowful and not respond as Christ would respond; if we realized what that empty tomb really means to us could we, would we discover in our hearts, in our redeemed hearts, any hatred for anyone because of who or what they are, because of what color they are or what language they speak or what their political inclination or even their religion; if we lived as if Christ were truly alive how could we not worship with our whole selves not when it accommodates us and fits into the busy schedule of our lives but whenever opportunity arises; if we had any true idea of what that empty tomb, that declaration "he is not here" means to us would we, could we do anything but seek to glorify god with our lives?///

It is improbable, right? Improbable that the God of universe is God and that God has given us this gift of life. However, today is Easter and we are supposed to feel elated and excited and full of life, new life . . . And isn't that the good news? Isn't that exactly what the empty tomb means? That because of Easter we have the opportunity to become new, to allow our old selves to die and to discover that death cannot hold us but that there is new life for us.

As individuals and as the church the challenge is for us to seize that

new life and to begin to live it. To allow our old selves to constantly die so that we can be the people Christ wants us to be, the people Christ dies and rose for to redeem, the people Christ needs in the world to live and work and serve him.

In Colossians, Paul asks us to set our minds on things above. How difficult would it be in our lives to at least consider how our faith might inform our behavior? What would happen if we lived as people who have been saved from our own sinfulness? If we look at our lives with all of the unsavory things that go on inside us and around us and because of us and to us . . . wouldn't we like to know what living a new way might mean to us? Wouldn't we like to know what it would be like to live in light of, in respect for, because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ our lord?

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ say that, yes, we can be new people. People who live out our 'alleluias' as we serve him through the church in the world today . . . And best of all, it does not matter what we have done in the past, because Easter allows us to know that all things are new in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is improbable but true that because he lives there can be "Joy to the World."