

“I am making all things new”

April 8, 2007

Text: Isaiah 65:17-25, Luke 24:1-12

I.

Well, the stone is rolled away; the tomb is empty ... and all about amazement is everywhere. Right from the beginning, friends, Easter is all about LIFE. It's about hope and promise ... and a tremendous infusion of new energy. But it's more than that, too.

It's about overcoming obstacles, and light overcoming darkness. It's about seeing with fresh eyes ... eyes that, no matter what, see the good, the positive, and the transcendent.

It's like the vision promoted in **Revelation 21** ...

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and earth had passed away ... See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying will be no more, for the first things have passed away.

*And the one who was seated on the throne said,
See, I am making all things new.*

Friends, overwhelmingly, this is the HOPE of Easter. That God can take whatever our lives are today and take them to a better place. Easter is, unabashedly, HOPE realized ... and possibility realized ... in any relationship or situation. It is the radiant reminder that—always—the energy of the universe is tilted toward life.

II.

The owner of the only hair salon in a small town was very successful ... enough to live comfortably and send all six of his kids to college.

However, one day *big business* came to town and one of those *full-service* salon franchises opened up right across the street from his business. Immediately, the media campaign began ... ads in the newspaper and on the billboards announced: **Everything for \$6! Haircuts, perms, manicures; everything for \$6.**

Soon, all of the man's customers began going across the street and his business seemed in a shambles. Hiring a consultant, he lamented, *I'm finished. I can't compete with them.*

Hold on a minute, the consultant said, as he picked up the telephone and dialed the local sign-making company.

Then, speaking into the phone to the sign people, he said, *Yes, we'd like a sign on the top of our hair salon ... in big letters ... reading, WE FIX \$6 HAIRCUTS.*

The Good News of our Christian faith, friends—always—is that God can fix our \$6 haircuts.

1. God can lift us out of any darkness ... straighten us out from any crookedness ... give us hope in the midst of any apparent hopelessness.
2. Don't we all have times in our lives when we wonder: how am I ever going to work my way through this? When will this ever end, whatever it is? When will it be over?
3. The ache and deep pain ... the anxiety and fear ... the doubt and the discouragement ...

The Good News of Easter morning is that, with God—always—there's more. Even if you're a Florida Gator, celebrating back-to-back national championships in college basketball. Even if your life couldn't be any better. Still, there's more.

Why? Because our lives are not lived in the past, no matter how glowing or how filled with sorrow and disappointment.

III.

Part of *the more* of Easter is that death cannot hold back the life force. On that first Easter, in Luke's story, the women at the tomb have a mystical experience ... the message is:

Why do you look for the living among the dead?

Of course, we can't blame them in any way; they've yet to experience the resurrection. But once they do, and once we do, everything changes ... because we see things differently.

We see things in terms of possibility and hope. We have a renewed confidence that our lives have meaning and purpose. In resurrection faith, change and newness are all about us.

I'm reminded of the scene in **Alice in Wonderland**, where the caterpillar, running into Alice, asks ... *Who are you?*

Somewhat startled, she replies, *well, I ... I hardly know, sir, just at the present. I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have changed several times since then.*

Alice, too, sees things differently as all about her, newness is breaking through.

IV.

With all the gloomy news in the world today ... amidst all the seemingly endless violence and death, still ... there's a hunger in the world for God and for spirituality and for peace. You can feel it. People everywhere want peace. Ask them! Ask the average Israeli and Palestinian. Ask your everyday Iraqi and Muslim.

There's a hunger in the world today for God ...

I had an eye-opening moment this past week. I was walking from the parking lot to the church office as I do several times a day. It was mid-afternoon. And suddenly, off to my right, a six year-old little girl (her parents are church members here) came bounding through the gate from The Growing Place playground on her way to Fellowship Hall.

Seeing me, she said, *Hi Jeffrey!*

And I go, *Hi, how are you?*

And suddenly, she goes, *How come you're not asking me why I haven't been in church?*

Whoa! In my thirty-some years in the ministry, no human being has ever asked me that question (*How come you're not asking me why I haven't been in church*).

So I go, *okay, how come you haven't been in church?*

And she says, *I have no idea*. And she went on saying, *I like coming to church and wish my parents would bring me*, or something to that effect.

But the point is, there's a hunger for God with folks. People want to know and experience the power of God's presence ... the love ... the affirmation ... and the hope that springs forth.

Why do you look for the living among the dead? The women are asked? ***Jesus is not here, but has risen.***

V.

Again, Easter is HOPE. It's about rising up from whatever darkness or disappointment has come our way. Easter challenges us, every day, to move beyond yesterday. To let go of stuff ... whatever it is that's holding us back. Easter invites us to see things with fresh eyes ... and to prioritize with a fresh spirit.

Futurist **Alvin Toffler** once said, *The illiterate of the future are not those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn ...*

Which prompts the question in all of us: What is keeping us—any of us—from being the person we want to be? What is keeping us from living the life God calls us to live?

Whatever it is, most likely it's connected to our past in some compelling way.

- There's value in the past.
- We can learn from the past. We can listen to its many voices.
- We can respect the past and learn from it.
- But we can't live there ... because there's no LIFE there. It's past.

Easter calls us always to the power of the moment—today—to be alive ... and to be life-giving.

- On the other side of yesterday ...
- on the other side of all our sorrows ...
- on the other side of all our disappointments, regrets, anger and all the rest ...

The next time you're troubled by any of these feelings, remind yourself: *You don't live there anymore.* Or at least, you don't have to. You're free in Christ to move on ... and to grab hold of today ... and to look to the future with optimism and hope.

VI.

Author **Richard Wile** remembers painfully the death of his only daughter when she was but 18 years old. He remembers how paralyzed he was with grief and how it lasted for months on end. It was like this poison had been injected into his spirit. And he didn't know how he would ever find relief from its awful ache ...

Then one **Easter** morning he went to church. The preacher spoke about *the fear that keeps people from knowing the joy of life. The resurrection*, the preacher went on, *when we embrace it in faith, moves us beyond our fears to a faith awareness that we are alive in God.*

Suddenly, in a service of Easter worship, Richard Wile had a new sense of the power of Christian faith. If his daughter were *alive in God*, then he should be sending out his love to her ... for she could receive it in her resurrected life.

As he began to do this ... in the weeks ahead ... one day, to his utter surprise, he had the clear sense that his daughter was standing beside him with her arm on his shoulder. Wow! What a powerful moment!

I wept, he relates. **Both from the sadness that I could not hold her and for the joy of knowing that she was alive in God.**

I am making all things new, said the Lord. O what a day!

VII.

I am about to create a new heavens and a new earth, cried Third Isaiah, the prophet of the Restoration ...

The former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. O what day! When the word of the Lord will reign over God's people.

- And a new day will be born in the hearts of all people ...
- and the goodness of people will drown out the evil ...
- and the light shining in human hearts will fill any darkness ...

I am making all things new, says the Lord.

And the wolf and the lamb shall feed together (here Isaiah 65 recalls Isaiah 11) ...
... and the leopard will lie down with the kid ...
... and the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
... and a little child shall lead them.

And they shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain. O what a day! For God has spoken and is making all things new ... through LOVE; and we are the bearers of that LOVE. Friends, *get this*: God makes all things new through us. Which suggests that what we do matters. The little things that, over time, build into a life.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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