

# "Real Savior – Real Life"

1 John 1:1-4

April 12, 2015

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter

What a difference a week makes! The crowds of visiting family members, curiosity seekers, and occasional church attenders are gone. The choir is gone. The big processional, recessional, and all the trappings of a special service are both gone. Even the pastor is gone! The special Easter clothes are back in the closet. Most people, many Christians included, have gone back to “life as usual” after our yearly celebration of Easter.

I’ve become convinced that, for many people (even so-called Christians), the celebration of Jesus’ resurrection on Easter is much like other annual celebrations. It’s something that is fun and inspiring, but not very real. If people actually believed that there was Someone alive and truly present here who had control over life and death, wouldn’t they flock here every Sunday and not just on Easter Sunday?

Jesus becomes someone almost on par with Santa Claus, the Easter bunny, and other personalities of our holiday celebrations. They are all people or characters with interesting stories which we like to hear and celebrate every year, but are not very real. After we’ve heard the story and celebrated the holiday, it’s time to get back to “real life.”

What is this so-called “real life”? It’s the life out there in the “real world.” It is a life that has to do with work and paying bills; struggling with problems and coping with sadnesses of various sorts; aging and illness; and, if we are willing to admit it, death. Religion is okay if you need help in coping with real life, but it is often considered to be a crutch for the weak. It’s not real. Christians are often told that they need to deal with “real life” and not the sheltered life in a church sanctuary. Sometimes Christians will think that themselves. They will think, “Okay, we’ve had our fun with Easter. We’ve heard the story. We’ve sung the familiar hymns. We’ve had the big celebration. Now, it’s time to return to ‘real life’.”

But what is “real”? That was on the minds of the disciples on that first Easter evening. They had heard the story about Jesus’ resurrection from the women who had gone to the tomb and from the disciples who had traveled to Emmaus, but they weren’t convinced that it was real. Even when Jesus appeared before them, they didn’t believe it was real. They thought they were seeing a ghost. Thomas, who was not with them that evening, refused to believe that Jesus was alive even after his fellow apostles told him of seeing the resurrected Lord. We call him “doubting Thomas”, but he was really “disbelieving Thomas.”

So, the disciples lived in fear. They locked the doors for fear of the Jews, that is, to keep the enemies of Jesus out so that they would not be persecuted. But they probably could not keep out the feelings of guilt and failure for having deserted and betrayed their Lord. For them, “real life” would be a struggle to cope with their fear, their failures, and their guilt, while just trying to survive. Sounds a lot like us, doesn’t it?

But that’s not “real life”! It is a perversion of life brought on by sin. Often, we see sin as only a violation of God’s moral code (which it is), but it is so much more. Sin corrupts and destroys, not only those who practice it, but everything with which it has contact. Sin has corrupted life on this earth and made it difficult, even miserable, with, at best, temporary interludes of happiness. Sin will destroy everyone and everything near and dear to us, including ourselves.

What *is* real then? That’s the question St. John is addressing in our epistle reading for today. He was dealing with a false understanding of Jesus Christ which is still around today: namely, that Jesus only appeared to be a real human being; that the Son of God only appeared to die on the cross; and, therefore, there could be no resurrection from the dead.

St. John declares what is truly real: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked up and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life – the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testified to it and

proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us - that which we have seen and hear we proclaim to you.”

In other words, Jesus Christ is a true human being who really lived. St. John and the other apostles had heard Him with their ears, seen Him with their eyes, and touched Him with their hands. Therefore, His death on the cross was real. His flesh was really nailed to that cross. His blood was really shed there. His heart stopped beating and He was really dead.

At the same time, He is the Son of God who was with the Father from the beginning, as St. John says. That makes His death the very real sacrifice for your sin, my sin, and the sin of all mankind. He is “the Word of Life...the Eternal Life”, St. John says. That means He is the source and the substance of true life – a life not affected or corrupted by sin – through His very real bodily resurrection from the dead to life again.

We have received and now experience real life. It began in the baptismal font when we were born again by having our sins washed away through the real death of Jesus on the cross. It is a life that is formed and lived out by the Word of God as it is preached to us, read by us, and meditated upon by us. It is a life that is nourished at the altar where Jesus gives us His crucified and risen body and blood to eat and drink for the forgiveness of the sins which we commit daily. It is a life which sin cannot corrupt and death cannot destroy. It is a life that is eternal – lasting forever.

Do not let anyone tell you that you live in a fantasy here at church while they live “real life” out there in the “real world”. That is a lie of Satan to deceive you and draw you away from God. Real life is lived right here. The fantasy is out there. That is the existence of illusion, deception, and death. Here is life - real life – eternal life - found in fellowship with (or connection to) the Word of Life, Jesus Christ, as He gives, strengthens, and nourishes life through His preached Word, written Word, and Sacramental Word in Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

What’s the problem then? Why do we feel so stressed out and so unfulfilled? It’s because many Christians arrange their priorities around the false life out there and have contact with real life in

here only occasionally or when it fits into their busy schedule. They wonder why they feel so stressed out and why their so-called “life” is no different than an unbeliever’s life. They are devoting their energy to feeding the “false life” which will kill them and neglecting the “real life” which alone can sustain them. Stop trying to fit the Word of God into your busy life. Instead, fit life into the Word of God. Then, and only then, will you experience “real life.”

Like St. John, proclaim that “real life” by your words and testify to that “real life” by your actions to those around you who are equally stressed out and finding so-called “real life” to be quite meaningless. We do that so that they might have fellowship with us and with the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ. When that happens, St. John says, our joy is complete. It is complete, not because we get new church members or have more people in worship, but because they will have received and experienced life – real life – as we have received and experienced real life through the Word of Life, Jesus Christ and will be able to share that with us as we deal with the “unreal life” that is out there.

People, especially younger people, are looking for something that is real today. People are rejecting that which is fake or hypocritical. They are trying all sorts of philosophies, technologies, and material things to find something that is true, something that is real, something that will last. We have it right here. The message of Easter is not to be found in an annual one day celebration, but in an ongoing reality. We have a real Savior who lived, who died, who rose from the grave, and who now really lives among us. We have a real life in Him through the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of everlasting life which sustain us in this world of sin, deception, and death. People need to know this: a real Savior, a real life – real answers for real people. Give that to them! Amen.