

"Easter: A Time For Renewal of Hope"
1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

April 8,2012

The Resurrection of Our Lord - Easter Day

Easter is truly a happy day. It is a happy day for regular church members attending church because we hear the wonderful news about Jesus Christ rising from the grave and becoming alive again. It is a happy day for church visitors because of the traditional story and music. It is a happy day for people who do not attend church because of the Easter bunny and candy, new clothes, and the beginning of spring. Easter is a time for joy, excitement and enthusiasm.

However, will that feeling of joy and excitement fade tomorrow? Tomorrow we have to go back to work to face the "real world". That "real world" has a lot of problems in it. Read the newspaper and see all the bad news about crime, drugs, murder, poverty, suffering, and so on. We go to our homes for peace and quiet with our families. But families are having many problems today. Children experience abuse from parents or other adults living in the house. Even if there is no abuse, there is tension between parents and children; wife and husband. There are more and more divorces and broken families.

Life just seems to get worse. We work hard. We try to pay our bills, but it seems there's never enough money. Prices increase while pay decreases. We want our lives to be better later. However, later we become old. Perhaps we will become sick and suffer, stuck in a nursing home or hospice program. Finally, we will die. All of us will die. It doesn't matter how young or healthy you are now. We can't escape death. Doctors can't prevent death. Then what happens?

In the past, Americans were always optimistic and always had hope for the future - an expectation of good things. People would say, "Don't worry. Things will get better." But that is changing. We are becoming more and more pessimistic. One survey of Americans about the problems in our world showed that a majority thought there was nothing we can do to stop those problems. The survey concluded said, "American optimism is changing to more and more pessimism. People are losing hope."

People are searching for hope for the future. Paul wrote our text to a group of people in THESSALONICA (T town) who were searching for hope. Some of their friends had died and they were losing hope. Where are people going to find that hope? That's the reason we are here today: to receive hope. Easter is a time for a renewal of hope.

First, we have to understand the problem. Why are there so many problems in the world? People try to explain that and they blame many things: government, people living in poverty, tension between black and white people, and so on. But we know the reason for all the ills of the world: sin. God created a world that was beautiful and perfect. God intended people and animals to live together in harmony and peace with perfect hope. But, when Adam and Eve sinned, that changed everything. Sin ruined God's perfect world. Our relationship with God -- sin destroyed that. Our relationship with each other -- sin ruined that. Sin was like a disease that spread, ruining everything.

Sin is also the reason that we die. The Bible says, "the wages of sin is death." We will all die because we have all sinned. None of us is perfect. Every time you go to a funeral, you see proof of sin in our world.

That seems pretty pessimistic and we can feel pretty sad. Paul says that it is all right to grieve, but don't grieve like other people - they have no hope. Paul is writing to give them hope. What does Paul say? "Think positive and things will get better."? No. Paul says, "We believe that Jesus died and rose again." How does that give hope?

Soon, it will be summer and I remember that summer meant DANDELIONS when we lived back east. How do you get rid of them? If you just mow and cut off the yellow flower, they will pop up again and again. You have to remove the ROOT. In the same way, people think our world will improve if we educate people, stop poverty, stop disease, and so on. Those things are like the yellow flower on the dandelion. We can eliminate all those things, but problems will pop up again and again. Jesus did not come to stop those things. Jesus came to remove the ROOT of all our problems: sin.

Jesus (succeed) did that! Jesus suffered and died on the cross to destroy sin: your sins, my sins, the sins of all people in the past, the sins of all people in the future. Every sin, every mistake is

forgiven when we trust in Jesus Christ and His death for us. Our relationship with God is restored. Our relationship with each other is restored.

But Jesus did more than die. If Jesus died and remained in the tomb, what would happen? The Bible says that if Christ is not risen, then our faith is worthless and we are still in our sins. And what would happen to us when we died? If Jesus couldn't rise, could we? No We would die and be stuck in our graves forever.

All of that changed on Easter many years ago. We read that wondrous story just a little bit ago. A group of women walked to Jesus' tomb, fully expecting (thinking) to find Jesus' dead body. But they didn't find that. They met an angel who said, "Jesus is not here. He has risen as He promised."

Paul writes about Jesus rising from the dead to comfort the people in (T town) THESSALONICA: if you belong to Christ through faith, you will leave this world of troubles and problems and live in heaven forever. It doesn't matter if you die or if you are still alive when Jesus returns. If you die, Jesus will make you alive again. If you are alive, you will rise up to meet our Lord when He returns. And, together, we will be with the Lord forever.

That gives us hope. But you must understand what HOPE means. People use hope to mean, "I want something to happen, but I'm not sure if it will or not." For example, "Will the weather improve?" "I hope so." That is rather weak and doubting. The Bible uses the word in a different way: HOPE means having full confidence something will happen. There is no doubt. We know it will happen and we wait patiently and eagerly for it to happen.

Easter morning renews our hope. God's promises will happen true because Jesus rose again. Will God forgive your sins, accept you, and love you? The Easter message gives you hope. Jesus' resurrection proves that sins are indeed forgiven. God does forgive you, does accept you, does love you! Will all the problems, frustrations, and troubles in this world change this wonderful life with God? The Easter message gives you hope. Nothing in all the world can change your life with God because Jesus rose from the dead. Satan can't change that because Jesus defeated Satan when He rose

from the dead. Sin can't change that because Jesus took away your sin when He rose from the dead. Death can't change that because Jesus overcame death by rising again. Will your life end in the grave or will you live forever? The Easter message gives you hope. Jesus says, "Because I live, you will live also." When you put your faith in Jesus, your life does not stop when you die. You will live forever in glory in heaven.

Continue to celebrate hope every day of your lives, not just on Easter. Don't let Satan tempt you to doubt. Jesus has defeated Satan. He has no power over you. Don't let the troubles and worries of this world overcome you. Sin causes those problems and Jesus has defeated sin. Continue boldly hoping in the Lord and He will do as He promised.

Also, share that hope with other people. Don't just keep it for yourself. Our text says, "You should comfort each other with this message." Speak that joyous Easter message to each other here in church on this special day and tell others as well. But also come back to worship God and support each other next Sunday and every Sunday. The Christian church has reserved Sunday for worship ever since Jesus rose from the dead. Why? In order to help us remember our hope through Jesus' resurrection. Sunday is a good time to strengthen each other, comfort each other, and encourage one another to continue hoping, despite the troubles and woes of this world.

It truly is a wonderful day today. We have enjoyed a festival worship service, a beautiful choir song, lovely flowers, and so on. Now, we leave to continue celebrating. Perhaps you are going to eat dinner with family or eat your Easter candy. But, remember, our joy doesn't end today like it will for many people. We have hope for the future because Jesus Christ rose from the dead as He promised. We have hope for our lives here on this earth. No problem can defeat us. No trouble can stop us. We have hope for an eternity of joy and peace with our Lord in heaven. Leave with that hope. Continue in that hope. Share that hope with one another. Amen.