

## **“An Easter People”**

*The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – March 31  
1 Corinthians 11:23-26, John 13:1-17, 31-35*

What is there to say on this on this Easter Day?

There is an ancient liturgy of the Church, a saying from our grandparents in the faith, so to speak. The worship leader, looking out on the people gathered for worship, would proclaim:

**"The Lord is Risen!"**

And the people respond: **"He is risen indeed."**

Let's try that together, shall we?

And so, what is there to say on this day? The Lord is Risen.

"He is risen indeed."

Ah, but there comes the question that every sermon ought to try and answer at least in some small way: "So what?"

I mean no offense, no disrespect, no flippancy. I don't mean to shatter anyone's faith or imply that what we celebrate together today in worship is without meaning. I will simply put the question to you. I have proclaimed: "The Lord is Risen." You have responded to this statement of faith with: "He is risen, indeed." And so, I again put the question to you, as well as to myself: "So what?"

What does it matter to us that the Lord is Risen? What does it mean that he is present, today? What does it mean ... and not in some sort of encyclopedic, dictionary-definition fashion.

What does it mean deep down in your heart, deep within your soul, calling to us across the void of time with the ancient words of worship-- **"The Lord is Risen!"**

**"He is risen indeed!"** (if they don't repeat the response, prompt)

How do you respond, all on your own, when there is no preacher to prompt you, no congregation to remind you of what to say and when to say it? When that call comes, daily, weekly, hourly...

Do you look up from your work, look away from the news, and respond?

**"The Lord is Risen." "He is Risen indeed."**

So, what does that mean to you? For you? Through you?

Since the first time since James became a pastor, he is spending Easter not with his church but with his family, at the wake and funeral for his mother. He wrote: "Until today, Easter was the most important thing in my life. Today, the most important thing is the Resurrection."

**"The Lord is Risen." "He is Risen indeed."**

Does it mean the same for us, as it does for that pastor, confronted with a devastating loss? Suddenly, the Easter parade and pageant, the new clothes and high services, the favorite hymns and ceremonies, all fade in importance. What is left is the central message of the faith.

**"The Lord is Risen" "He is risen indeed."**

It is the message delivered by the Risen Lord himself that first Easter morning. His female disciples, confronted by the ultimate grief, the loss of someone dearly beloved to death, came to the tomb not in hope but because it was comforting to be in the place where he lay. They came not because they hoped he had survived, but because they were certain that he had not. They came hopeless and were further wounded to find that his body had been moved. His body was not where they had placed it just a few days before. Stolen, the victim in death of a hideous and ghoulish prank, the body of their friend, the last physical reminder of his life, was gone.

Devastated and weeping, Mary collapses at the door of the tomb. Blinded by hopeless tears, she is unimpressed by the angels in the tomb; they do not even have to say their usual opening greeting, "BE NOT AFRAID." She is so grieved that she is not at all afraid of the presence of the angels. She is so grieved she does not recognize the one who speaks, who seeks to offer comfort to her. Only when he calls her by name-- "Mary"-- does she recognize him. Hard as it is to believe, it is true.

**"The Lord is Risen." "He is Risen, indeed."**

But, belief in the Resurrection is more than some intellectual agreement to the story of the gospels. I dare to say this morning something that may sound odd to your ears. The power of Easter is not found in whether you think Jesus walked from the tomb.

The power of Easter, the power raging through this day of celebration, throughout the history of humankind, throughout the ministry of the Church

and of every member of that great Church throughout time, is not the power of intellectual agreement.

For as important as it is that Jesus is raised from the grave, what is more important is that Jesus is not merely **RESUSCITATED**, restored to the same way of living he had before the crucifixion.

Jesus is not resuscitated, he is resurrected. He is raised by the power of God into a new way of life, a new existence. The power of Easter comes as the resurrected Lord is raised to a new way of life, and then, in a miraculous fashion, shares with us that new way of life.

The Lord is risen; and those of us who follow Christ, who truly give ourselves to him and seek to live as his friends and family left in this world, share not only in his name but in this Life to which he is raised.

**“The Lord is Risen” “He is risen, indeed!”** And because he is risen, we share in his new existence. We are an Easter people.

We are not a people of a spring-time celebration of eggs and bunnies, of bonnets and clothes and chocolates, although those things are all OK in their own place and way.

For us to be an Easter people means that more than the day of celebration, it is the resurrection that counts. More than calendar observations, it is the daily realization that the very power of God, which raised Jesus from the dead, is also the very same power which flows in and through us as followers of the Risen Lord. To be an Easter people means that even as the long dark nights come, even as the daily grind wears at us, even as the tugs and bumps of the problems of each day come our way, we know that it is not our own strength which sustains us. It is not our own wisdom and cunning on which we must depend. It is not only by our own wits and resources that we struggle to survive.

Rather, "Because he lives, I can face tomorrow." Because he lives, and lives in a new way, I also can know a new way of life. Because he lives, and lives in me; because my true life is hidden with Christ in God, and will be fully revealed in that great day a-coming, I can live today with grace and power no matter what comes.

And when the echo comes down the hallways of the workplace, through the silent nights of worry in hospital rooms, through the grief of funeral parlors and

cemeteries; when the echoes come from all those who surround us in the great cloud of witnesses, we, who are Easter people, will know how to respond.

**"The Lord is Risen. "He is Risen, indeed"**

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

--Amen