

## What Will You Do With Easter?

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“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain.” – 1 Corinthians 15:10

By this time tomorrow, Barb and Dave Holtz will need to be on a plane for Spain, so I need to be brief. Let me dispense with my usual Easter wind-up and get right to the pitch.

The question that constitutes the title of my sermon is not rhetorical. What will you do with Easter? is a serious question if you're a serious Christian, and I will take it as given that you are all serious Christians here this morning because you're here and not somewhere else.

You're not nestling back in the Church of the Holy Comforter, where many of us began this day. You're not out on the golf course allegedly worshiping God while you're thrashing your way out of the weeds. You're not at the breakfast table with the *Times* crossword because you knew that you'd get a better breakfast here this morning, and I hope you all did.

You're here, and of all places on earth to be on Easter morning, there is none better than church – this church or another. My brother in southern Indiana, who's not a regular church-goer, told me a few days ago that he was planning to go to church on Easter. He doesn't know which church he'll go to, and I said it didn't much matter because we'll all be open, and we'll all be saying more or less the same thing: “Hallelujah! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Hallelujah!”

That pretty much sums up the Easter message. You heard it here, you'll hear it across the street at the Armenian church, you'll hear it at the Gospel Hall over on Monticello Boulevard, and you'll hear it among the Nazarenes on Trebisky Road. No matter where you go among Christian communities of faith this morning, that's the message you'll hear: “Hallelujah! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Hallelujah!”

And that is serious and seriously good news. That Easter proclamation that Paul called “of first importance” in our epistle reading from 1 Corinthians, that simple announcement is what we preachers mean when say the word “gospel.” The resurrection of Jesus Christ IS the gospel – it is the good news that that Old English word “godspel” means.

All of the stuff that the Christian church speaks of when it speaks of the gospel – God taking human form, living, teaching, healing among us, suffering at our hands, and rising from death for our salvation – all of that comes down, in the end, to that one simple declaration: Christ is risen.

All the stuff from Genesis to Revelation that provides the context for the story of Jesus, all of those other stories of redemption, of God's reaching out to us in wondrous love, again and again, without fail – all of that gospel, too, is summed up in the words of the Easter proclamation: Christ is risen.

The Christian faith begins with the Easter proclamation and it ends with the Easter proclamation, because the Christian faith from beginning to end is good news – gospel, good news truth – and today is the day above all days when we get to pull out all the

stops, step up to the microphone without apology, and let it rip, so say it with me, "Hallelujah! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Hallelujah!"

Now, there, don't you feel better? I know you do and I knew you would. I know you wanted to say those words just as I wanted to say those words because you and I both know they're true. And however much the world encourages us to obfuscate, dissimulate, prevaricate, or otherwise not tell the truth, deep down most of us and all of you want to do exactly that. You who have assembled here this morning want to discern and say what really matters most, and what really matters most is the truth.

It matters that water flows downhill, and if you build your McMansion disregarding that truth, you will learn, after sufficient rainfall, just how much that truth matters.

It matters that all people have certain basic needs, such as the need for decent food, decent shelter, decent care, and decent education, and if you deprive enough people for enough time of enough of those basic needs, you will find out, probably amidst strife and bloodshed, just how much that truth matters.

It matters that we are souls – we don't have souls, we ARE souls, living, breathing souls – and that our soul's needs for love, for purpose, for meaning, for truth, for beauty, for righteousness, and for God are as basic as any of our other needs, and we ignore that truth at our spiritual and physical peril.

These truths matter, and Easter is the day when Christians face these truths squarely and boldly, and proclaim even more boldly the truth that matters more than any other, and that is that God has shown us in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead that nothing in all creation, including death itself, can separate us from the love of God embodied in Jesus the Christ.

That's the truth of Easter. It's about love, God's love, for us and for all creation, in this world of time, space, flesh, and blood.

The truth of Easter is not about history – Did it happen? -- because we do not, finally, believe in history because we have not pledged our allegiance to history. We have pledged ourselves to the God who created history and is history's Lord – that's the One in whom we believe – and to insist, as so many thoughtful people do today, that the resurrection had to happen in exactly the same way that the assassination of Julius Caesar happened is to make history our master rather than God. And I, for one, will not be a slave to history, and I implore you not to be one, either.

The resurrection is not about history, it's about love, that reality that transcends and transforms history. To make history love's master is to consign ourselves to the misery of the same-old same-old, snatching from the daily grind what scraps of happiness and satisfaction we can like hyenas stripping a zebra's carcass.

You pick up the paper or turn on the news or cruise the Internet and, unless you've anesthetized your mind with drugs or entertainment, the full force of Edna St. Vincent Millay's observation about life can't help but hit you: it's not that it's one damn thing after another, its the same damn thing over and over.

If the genocide wasn't in Armenia, it was in Germany or Chechnya or Rwanda.

If the massacre wasn't Herod killing the Innocents in Judea, it was Serbs killing Bosnian men and boys in Srebrenica or al-Shabab militants gunning down Christian students in a Kenyan university.

If the racism wasn't in the plantations of America's antebellum south, it was in the apartheid laws of South Africa or the new Jim Crow of America's racist war on drugs.

This is history, friends, that purposeless, mindless, heartless clash of forces in which the Golden Rule is that those with the gold make the rules, that you do unto others before they do unto you, and that the one who dies with the most toys wins.

That's history – sad, sorry, bloody history – and it's into that sad, sorry, bloody

mess that God broke on Easter morning with the completely unhistorical, joyful, exuberant, and radiant good news: "He is not here, he is risen!"

It wasn't biology that was shattered on Easter morning it was history – that sad, sorry, bloody, repetitious tale of woe that we saw played out on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. We understand Good Friday – we don't like it, but we understand it. We understand cowardice, we understand weakness, we understand the abuse of power. We get all of that. Today we call it news, tomorrow we'll call it history, and we're sickeningly familiar with both.

What we don't understand is Easter, and the reason we don't understand it is because it's NOT the same-old same-old. Easter is God's way of saying to us clever, cynical, world-weary, common-sensical Midwesterners, "Hey, you! You who think you know it all, you who think you've seen it all, you who think you've done it all – listen up! I am doing a new thing, and I want you to participate in it. In fact, you are essential to it, because it has no meaning or purpose apart from you! I want you to receive it, to rejoice in it, and to proclaim it, but above all, I want you to live it – live the new life to which I have raised Jesus – for his sake, for the world's sake, and above all, for your sake. Easter is for you!"

And so I ask you again, friends, on this Easter morning, what will you do with Easter? What will you do, when you leave this service and this place, with the gift of new life? What brokenness will you allow the risen Jesus Christ to help you mend? What estrangement will you allow the Prince of Peace to help you bridge? What besetting sin or burden of care will you allow love itself to help you overcome or bear? Will you, like Paul, allow God's grace to make you who you were always meant to be, or will you continue to go it alone, pretending that you're a self-made man or woman?

The gifts of Easter, friends, and so many others, are the gifts of God for the people of God. They're yours. They have your name on them, and it's my great privilege to remind you of that great fact. I've done my part, now its time for you to do yours. And so I ask you one last time, What will you do with Easter?