

After Easter ... What Now?

The good news is that Easter is not over! We celebrate it on Easter Sunday but it is really a life-long experience. Jesus was raised not resuscitated. The truth in this metaphor is that death is not an end but a transition to greater possibilities, life abundant now and for ever. The resurrection stories in the Christian Scripture are not historical accounts as we know and write history today. We know this because they differ widely from one Gospel to another. These stories grew until they were written down in the Gospels from about 70 CE to more than 100 CE, about 40 to more than 70 years after the death of Jesus. A literal interpretation only brings arguments and conflict about the accounts in Scripture that proves nothing. The reality of resurrection is like trying to prove the existence of God. One comes to know God by experiencing God's resourceful and creative life-changing power in one's life. It is the same with resurrection. You have surely heard someone say when facing insurmountable difficulties, "I thought I was going to die"; but he or she was raised to a new life in that experience. Their recovery makes their words understandable but no details will prove how or what really happened. Most people, in one way or another, experiences resurrection metaphorically in their continuing lives.

While Jesus made few claims for himself, others find him to be "the way, the truth, and the life." [John 14:6] This is why Jesus has often be said to be the living word of God because his words and way of life demonstrated this powerful yet inexplicable presence. His words and deeds demonstrated to us how we also could be a part of the Realm of God. This understanding was made clearly by the Apostle Paul in the earliest Christian writings soon after the death of Jesus, "*For anyone united to Christ, there is a new creation: the old order has gone; a new order has already begun.*" [2 Corinthians 5:17] Here we sense that when a person is united to or in harmony with Christ there is a new or fresh formation of lifestyle. The old way of life is gone or finished and the new arrangement for living is in process and will continue.

When anyone has an Easter experience as indicated above it is important to make sure you get out of your Tomb! It is amazing to me how many people tend to stay entombed in their old ways because of a natural resistance to change. "Change is one of the constants in life; yet many people fear it. If one can embrace and accept change then they will be able to easily flow through the changes in life." [<http://carmen-jochmann.suite101.com/fear-of-change-a178729>] Change is a transitive verb meaning "*to alter in some particular way, to transform and make radically different, or simply to change course to take a different position or direction.*" [<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/change>] "*Fear of change doesn't just hold you back it stops you truly living.*" [<http://www.hypnosisdownloads.com/fears-phobias/fear-change>] Fear of change is like driving your car while looking in the rear view mirror – not a good idea unless you intend to go backwards. Looking through the windshield of your car is the only way to move ahead and make progress to your destination of choice. "Conform no longer to the pattern of this present world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds." [Romans 12:2] Transformation, resurrection and renewal are the patterns for a life of satisfaction and joy.

Then you need to shake off your grave clothes. Most people put on a new change of clothes each day for a very practical reason, to start the new day fresh and clean. It is also important to choose the right clothing for your plans for the new day. You know what I mean; you would not wear an evening gown or tuxedo to the beach any more than you would wear a bathing suit to a formal affair. A true Easter experience will absolutely bring transformation and a new spirit but it will not dress you up for the occasion. These verses from the letter to the Colossians may help me make my point, "*Put*

on, then, garments that suit God's chosen and beloved people; compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. Be tolerant with one another and forgiving, if any of you has cause for complaint: you must forgive as the Lord forgave you." [Colossians 3:12-13] To put it simply, we must act the part. The transformation of our hearts and minds must be outwardly worn and seen by others. When we shake off our grave clothes we clean up our act.

Each day let everything become new. You surely have heard this saying, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." Another one is from an earlier milk commercial, "There's a new you coming every day". These and others remind us of what an Easter life is all about; starting over, renewal, recreation, rising to the occasion. It is our privilege each day to let everything become new in all areas of our lives. As followers of Jesus we need to remember this good suggestion from scripture, "*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:...*" [Philippians 2:5] "*The Power of Attitude = Your Attitude Determines Your Altitude. Attitudes are the established ways of responding to people and situations that we have learned, based on the beliefs, values and assumptions we hold. Attitudes become manifest through your behavior.*" [http://www.1000ventures.com/business_guide/crosscuttings/attitude.html] There have been several books written on this theme – Change your mind and change your life. Renewing one's mind is absolutely essential, especially in this day and age when new information is added every day. Learning and studying is key to letting everything become new.

Finally, make sure you enjoy your new life. True enjoyment is not complete if you are only thinking about yourself. Jesus made it clear that he did not come to be served but to serve others and that was the real joy and purpose of his life. When I was young and in a Vacation Bible School one summer I learned a chorus that speaks to my point, "Jesus, Others, and You – that's a wonderful way to spell JOY".

Jesus was crucified because he spoke out against the injustice of his day and criticized the rulers and wealthy who cared little or nothing about the majority who were poor (no middle class in those days). He taught that God's Kingdom would be dramatically different by offering justice for all. Not that all would be rich, but that they would have the basics of food, clothing, forgiveness and would not be treated with wrath or malice. With the wealth confined to less than 3 percent of our world's population, the diminishment of the middle class, and the preponderance of growing poverty, there isn't much room for joy today for most people.

Others, as Jesus would say, "love your neighbor as yourself" meaning everyone other than you. "*Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?*" [Book of Common Prayer, pg. 305] There is a concept that is prevalent in our land today, even among so-called Christians, a concept that maintains prejudice for others regarding race, creed, color, sexual identity and a host of other categories. Jesus, experiencing these attitudes and practices, spoke out against them in every arena, especially to the religious people in his day.

You are the primary source and a light in the world. "*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*" [Matthew 5:14-16] The darkness in our world will dissipate when we choose to become illuminated with good deeds and praise.

JOY will come to our earth when people place their primary concern for themselves on the cross and let the gift of Easter raise them to a new level of a just concern for all life on this planet. The more that the comprehensive love of God is proclaimed and practiced the more we see and experience the

joy of that love in our lives. When we begin to truly live the saying “All Are Welcome” and rebuild a just community in our families, neighborhoods, nationally and internationally, new life will become a reality for everyone. To discover what All Are Welcome really means, please read an earlier article of mine that describes it more fully here [note: new location for Welcome goes here]. These then are my basic suggestions for “What now?” I do not really believe we will ever have a perfect world, but I do believe that these few simple thoughts and actions can make it more perfectly wonderful for many more people.