

THE FINAL FRONTIER

Easter Sunday Year B

Is. 25:6-9; Ps, 118:1-2,14-24; 1 Cor. 15:1-11; Jn. 20:1-18

Gladstone 01/04/2018

There was a man who lived for fifty years on a mountain which was located next to a small town. People sometimes wondered what the man was doing up there, but nobody ever went to find out. Then suddenly one day, the “Mountain Man” started down from the mountain heading towards the town. Word spread and everybody was extremely curious to see what this man had to say, and by the time he had arrived, everyone in the town had gathered to see him. When the man had reached the crowd, he stopped and greeted them.

A reporter approached the man and asked, “What were you doing on the mountain for fifty years?”

The man replied, “I was meditating on the meaning of life.”

“Well, what have you decided about the meaning of life?”

The man took a deep breath, opened his arms to the heavens and in a deep voice said, “Life is like a TOMATO.”

The crowd went silent as everybody attempted to understand this strange notion. Suddenly a man from the back of the crowd shouted, “Hey, but life isn’t like a tomato!” The old man thought about this for a few moments and then replied casually, “OK, it isn’t.”

The biggest problem in life (well, for many of us), is finding a meaning for it. Why am I here? What is my purpose in life? What will happen when I die? And just when we think we have discovered it, something happens to take us back to square one.

The truth is, throughout our lives, we are constantly being distracted from thinking about the true meaning of life. We are often too busy to think about eternal things. Instead, we spend our time thinking about more immediate concerns—getting through school—getting a job—getting married—buying a home. All short term goals—the next stage in life—the next hurdle to overcome.

When we reach that time, that our teenage children consider us to be really old—like anything over 40—we begin to look back over our lives and reminisce about the kind of life we have lived. Among all the good things we have experienced, maybe there are also some regrets—some wrong decisions, some bad choices, struggles, bitterness, unforgiveness. And we find that so often, our lives have been filled with chance and coincidence and nearsightedness and lost opportunities.

At that time also, we look towards the future and assess the time we have left and somehow try to balance the two. It's at that point that many suffer a mid-life crisis which consists of realizing that even though maybe half your life is gone, you've never really begun to live—that you've squandered half your life on short-range goals and bad snap decisions that you cannot now undo—that there are still many things that you would like to do in life.

What is it about all this that causes us so much distress? I suggest to you that it is caused by the fact that sooner or later you are going to die—that there is only 'so much' time left for unfinished business—when you begin to realize just how much of what you did was either a waste of time or could have been done better. No-one lays on their death bed and wishes they had spent more time at the office.

Death is something that that we don't like talking about, but it is the ultimate statistic: ten out of ten people die. You can't escape it. No matter who you are or what you've done with your life, someday you and all the people you know will die. It is, as they say: The final frontier—and unless you die prematurely, there is only a certain amount of time left in which to achieve all the things you want to achieve in your life. Jesus lived for only 33 years but completed all that had been set down for him to achieve.

Now, before I'm accused of being overly pessimistic and morbid on such a special day as this, the good news for us this morning is that even though we will all die, death is not the end for us. Yes, we will all die physically, but after that, Jesus Christ—he who was crucified and raised again—has told us that there will come a time of resurrection for all of us—a time when Jesus promises to take all those who believe in him, with him into His glory!

In our reading from 1 Corinthians, this morning, Paul writes:

¹ Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand,² through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

³ For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,⁴ and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures... (1 Cor. 15:1-4)

The biblical commentator, C. K. Barrett summarizes these three essential elements of the gospel, that Paul describes here, in a wonderfully succinct way:

Christ died, but he is not now dead. He was buried, but he is not now in the grave. He was raised, and he is now alive.¹

Today, as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we do so from the perspective of after the resurrection. From this side of the resurrection, the message of Jesus' life and work becomes clearer. From this side of the resurrection we catch a glimpse of the future which God has in store for each of us. And in our celebration, we rejoice in the new life Christ's resurrection brings to each of us.

As Christians—as people, like everyone, who undergo all kinds of experiences throughout life—some good, some bad—we look forward to the joy of resurrection in our own lives—that time after the suffering, after the death, when we look back on our lives and see them from the perspective of having gone through all those struggles...and survived.

So often, though, we want the joyous experience of resurrection, without having to go through the pain of suffering and death. We want the victory without the agony. We want the joy without the sorrow. For Christ, there could be no resurrection, unless he had first passed through his Passion and death. So it is with us. There can be no resurrection—no new life—no victory over past hurts—no restitution of relationships—no dealing with sin—without first passing through our own 'passion' and death—

¹ C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (New York : Harper & Row Publishers, 1966) 28

without first dying to our own self and our own selfish will. It is only when we die to self that we can be raised to a new life of freedom.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ reminds us just how much God loves and cares for each one of us. It reminds us that we can be forgiven for the wrongs we do. It reminds us that past mistakes can be healed—that relationships with one another can be mended. It reminds us that although there are times when we may feel dead emotionally, physically or spiritually, there is a resurrection to come. It reminds us that pain and suffering and even death is not the end—but is the beginning of a glorious new life in Christ. Death is not the end of life, it is a part of life—and it's also a part of our new life in Christ.

It's a shame that our friend the mountain dweller had obviously never heard of the resurrection of Christ—for therein lies the true meaning to all our lives—that we might be restored in our relationships with one another and with God and might worship God forever.

This Easter, think about what Christ's resurrection means for *you* personally. Think about how *you* might enter into Christ's resurrection in your own life. Look at your attitudes and the way you express your feelings and desires. Look for ways in which *you* might express your resurrection life in your relationships with one another and in the way in which you live out your life.

This Easter, may God richly bless you as you seek to be faithful disciples of the resurrected Christ and live the resurrected life in him.

To Christ our Saviour, be all glory, honour, majesty and power. Amen.