

Sermon - Acts 10:34-43 Mark 9:30-32, 10:32-34 I Cor 15:1-8,12-22 3/22/09

#### Lent IV The Promise of the Present Christ

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead.

15 young people - most of them 8<sup>th</sup>. Graders - good kids – your kids – the members of this year's confirmation class - and I met with them for awhile last night near Hillsdale on the confirmation class retreat - 48 hours of study and faith sharing and just plain fun.

Bright kids - good kids – trying to figure out who they are – and what kind of people they will become – and how they can make the right choices of what they should do in life – when so many of the choices they are offered are so very bad.

And as we talked about what it means to be a Christian, to be a follower of Jesus Christ, who lived and died and rose again, who is the head of the Church and the Lord of our lives, one of the young people said - Wow! But I've got so many questions.

And Scott Hobart, and Peggy Simon, a parent chaperone, and I, all said – Wow – that's great - so do we all. Jesus Christ is our living Lord and Savior - Yes? Wow! And - We've got some questions about that. I mean - given this extraordinary claim of Paul's - and of our faith - that Jesus Christ lives and is the guide for our lives - don't you have some questions, too? About how all this works - and how it could work better than it does...? How Jesus Christ's way and truth and love should be more nearly the way we all choose to live?

Please pray with me....

Lord of life, We've done all this before – getting ready for Easter. We know the story by heart - crucified, dead and buried – and risen. An empty tomb, and a world filled anew with Christ's living presence. But why not now Lord. Why isn't life better, now, Lord. Help us speak your word, Lord, and to hear it - and know a new your call to us to live as disciples of the living Christ. Amen.

It's reported that Yogi Berra said it - It's de ja vu - all over again. De ja vue - which means something happening all over again - all over again.

I think the words fit this season of Lent very well. We've done it all before - marked off these 40 days - sometimes some of us actually fasting... and doing other things to try to draw closer to God - or better, to let God in Christ be more present as a force for good in our lives and so more present in the world.

And here we are – doing it again. I hope some of you are doing it again, marking Lent – doing some thing different in this season to celebrate better the wonder of Christ's presence with us. And ...the wonder is – the promise in life is - God with us in Christ

But sometimes – it just feels like - da je vu – all over again. It seemed that way for Johnny - all dressed up in his best Easter clothes - but very unhappy about being taken to Church - as the family entered the sanctuary – in a loud little boy voice Johnny asked – “Why do we have to go to Church on Easter. It just always ends up the same way every year.

Thank God - it does - it does always turn out the same....Thank God. But watch it going out. and Christians watch it – because in some ways it doesn’t always turn out the same - and it shouldn’t. It should change the world -

Every time we Celebrate Easter = the great good news of Easter should change us in some way - and through us – change the world. That’s the promise of a risen and living Lord of life. That’s the promise of Easter, and of our faith.

To be sure - there is something wonderful about the sameness of Easter - year after year after year - yes the same old hymns - but great hymns of faith. The words of promise – He is not here. He is risen....

And the date of Easter - how good it is fixed the way it is. What a symbol for us of how the promise of Easter should affect our lives. Yes – always the same – the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox. Always the same. But here’s the thing I like - here’s the mystery of Easter right in its date.

It’s always the same – and its always different - always the same formula – But every year a different date..... and that holds for me - the promise that things can be different - every Easter – or every Sunday, which is for us, really like a little Easter. Things can be different - we can be different – the promise of Easter of a living

Lord of life – can move us and encourage us, stir us, to be different – in the way we live - in the number of good things we seek to do - in the number of hurts we seek to cover with new kindnesses....

The promise of a living and present Lord of life.... But we can resist the promise - we too often do. Because we often find more comfort in the sameness of life - then in change. We’d rather be comforted than to be challenged = to learn and grow and know new things.

One preacher confessed the failure of his own faith on this point - because he wanted some more of the same – and less of the challengers to new ways of bearing witness to a living Lord of life.

He confessed to preferring to do funerals more than other things in ministry. He said - the first baby I baptized ended up in reform school.. one of the first adults he helped become a Christian fell away from the church; one of the first couples he married got divorced, and too many others too.

But – he said – the first person he buried, and every other person he buried – stayed buried. He didn't feel disappointed by funerals...but relieved.... He missed the deep truth and great promise of the very faith he was called to preach - Whoever lives believes in Jesus Christ, though he die, yet shall he live.

He missed the great promise of our faith,... that as much as we fail, and the things we put our energy into may fail, too. God's purposes will not fail - no cross or nails, not sin, not death, can withstand the power of God's love.

That's the power in the promise of the Risen and Living Lord of life. Christ lives – and because he lives we too can live – into hope. Into the surprises of life, the ever new beginnings. Mark's story of the resurrection is record of surprise after surprise. .. Mark tells us the women who went to the tomb on that early first day of the week, Easter – ready to care for the broken body of the crucified Jesus – were surprised.. the rock was rolled away, the linens were folded and wrapped, and Jesus was gone.

Expecting the worst – a rock they could not move , a broken body to tend ... The women lived into a future with some fear – and we do, too, A meeting with the boss – and these days not often a good meeting to want to attend.... A test to be taken.... A Doctor's appointment ... or ... yes... even an Easter family gathering ... can be a trial or test for us... gathering with offensive uncle Ed coming ... and you wish he weren't. Miserable soul he will be.

And so - we face the future not with excitement and energy and hope.... But fear or dread. And often - often – our fears are far worse than the fate we find we actually need to face. Facing the rock that stands in our way in life we forget the promise of the rock maker and the rock mover - we forget about God - about trusting God. About leaning into the strength God gives to God's people.

The women – at the grave - they found – the rock moved. And often, more often than we may even admit, we find rocks moved in our lives too. Either our fears were too big or our faith too little - and we've lost site of the Easter promise... God with us.....

The rock was moved – for the women – Rocks get moved in your life and mine - And more.... the women discovered that Jesus word could be trusted..... the body was gone – he was not there. They were surprised that God's word was true. But Jesus had told them .

Sometimes - I suspect we are, too. Surprised that God's word is good. And we shouldn't be. God is good to God's word. Disobey God's best ways for us to live, trash the 10 best ways to live, and then claim to be surprised about morality being in the tank in our society, truth telling almost gone, and keeping commitments, now rare thing,... and we live by lies – little lies - Your call is very important to us – please stay on the line for the first available associate - a young lady in India currently taking 100 calls before yours....

And --- we find trust and truthfulness and faithfulness rare things. We find our strength and wisdom, our power is not enough to meet the challenges of our day.. And God's word and spirit - are . He is not here – he is risen.... The power of death and defeat are broken.

Still we are struggling with all our human wisdom trying to figure out how to put our society's main structure back together - the existence of strong faithful bounds of family loyalty, commitment, faithfulness - Where in the past values were explored and tested and adopted and Shared. Now there is no similar structure in existence .

In our wisdom, our strength, we are struggling to find the replacement for the family which our economic and legal and social actions have almost destroyed - We undercut marriage, and then struggle to find ways to replace it - that have not worked -

Some - see some great new freedom rather than a dire fate in the figures that show nearly half of all births were to unmarried women, and fewer and fewer people are taking on the covenant, the promises and the responsibilities of marriage, the promises of marriage that at their best offered protection to women and children and men. And those words of faithfulness in the ceremony, helped knit societies together. And we've lost all this at our peril.

The women who faithfully went to the tomb expected to find one thing, and were surprised to find another....having forgotten God's word they were surprised by its faithfulness. Jesus said he would arise. Maybe that's our problem, we've forgotten what to expect.

To expect God's promises to be kept - to know the living presence of the living Christ .... To be our guide ....When we face the struggles of life - the economic struggles so real and fearsome right now, the struggles with illness and disease, the loss of a loved one and the loneliness it can bring -

When we face these events in our lives - is our faith up against a stone that we can't move – and our hope can't hope....

Or can we see the image of the women at the tomb, or hear the words of our faith – lo –I am with you always - can we celebrate that nothing , no nothing can separate us from the love of God - God's with us thru the promise of the risen and living Lord of life.

Can we hear the words to the women... go tell the disciples and Peter to meet him in Galilee... He is not here – go meet him where he said he would meet you. Surprise -

Jesus words were spoken to get his disciples moving again, into the flow of life.... Not to dwell on loss or suffering, but to find in the power and promise of the risen and living Lord, reason to live into hope.... To go into life looking for and expecting to find Jesus already there

If Jesus Christ is risen, where do we expect we should find him? Where do we think we should expect to experience the presence of the living Christ?

If Christ lives, if Christ is present by his spirit in the world, and in our lives, won't we most likely find him still where he sent us into world - to be with and to serve the needs of the least and the last and the lost?

Do we want to experience the presence of the living Christ in our lives? Ah, that could be our challenge - because the living Christ will challenge us in much of what we are doing now with our lives.

He would and does, offer us his comfort, the promise of his healing forgiving new life, and forever life giving love.... But he also calls us to be in mission, to be his witnesses, to take on the struggles of the world.

But the promise is, Christ's promise is, that he is for us and with us, that he meets us in the common experiences of life, and calls us to make the most common experiences ones in which we can meet him.

He meets us every time we hold a child in loving caring embrace, and or yes, when we act to be sure that a child has the health care he or she needs; He meets us every time we help an aging person travel the last part of the journey of life not alone... but cared for with the care most needed.... And every time we speak the truth in love, and vote for what we know to be right, and act to resist what we know to be wrong.

We come here to hear the story of Jesus' life and teaching - and we should... But we will find the Promise of the Present Christ, the risen and living Lord of life, we will find him in the midst of the busy lives we lead.

It's where the disciples met the risen Christ first - not in a synagogue, not in the temple, but out in the world - on the shore where they were working, fishing.... And they found his presence most at a table - breaking bread - It is why the table is always here.... It is why we always send each other out of here with a promise renewed.... God's love and grace and spirit to go with us into God's world .....

It is my hope for the symbol of what we have done here - a church now more open to the world around us - where Christ calls us - where we will see and experience the promise of the presence of Christ - with us. Now, day by day... and always...

Worship the risen Lord of your life here. ...find his presence in the very midst of the life you lead - in the miracle and the wonder of God's world. Amen....

David W. Robertson Pastor