

Easter 2
April 11, 2010

Acts 5:12, 17-32
143-150-154-166

Now That Easter's Over – What Do We Do with It?

- I. We faithfully cling to our risen Lord.
- II. We boldly proclaim our risen Lord.

Dear Christian friends,

Do you know what I did last Sunday afternoon? I took about a nice long nap. Boy, did that FEEL GOOD! I had made it through another Lent and Holy Week.

Easter is over for another year. That's TRUE – but it's also dangerous to think that way. That's EXACTLY THE WAY the **devil wants** us to think. The devil hates it when churches are PACKED for Easter. Perhaps more than many people may **realize for themselves** the devil understands that **“faith comes from hearing the message.”** But the devil can TOLERATE people going to **church for Easter** if he can get those same people to think that Easter is OVER for another year.

Easter is done for this year. So, NOW THAT EASTER'S OVER – WHAT DO WE DO WITH IT? These verses answer that **all-important question**. WHAT DO WE DO with Easter now that it's over? 1)We faithfully cling to and 2)we boldly proclaim our **risen Lord**.

I. We faithfully cling to our risen Lord.

Easter was OVER for the apostles in these verses. Over **not just by one week** but **at least** several months. Jesus had already ascended into heaven. Pentecost had come and gone. **In the meantime** the church had been growing BY LEAPS and bounds. At LAST COUNT the **church in Jerusalem** was way over 5,000 members. Caiaphas wasn't exaggerating when he said, **“You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.”**

What did the **apostles do** now that EASTER WAS OVER for them? They faithfully clung to their **risen Lord!** Peter once told Jesus, **“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that You are the Holy One of God.”** The angel here told the apostles to continue proclaiming **“the full message of this new life.”** The apostles understood that that **“full message”** was ALSO MEANT for them to believe.

Can you imagine HOW MUCH that **“message of this new life”** meant to FOOT-IN-THE-MOUTH Peter? It wasn't just a few months that had PASSED SINCE EASTER. It was just a few months ago that Peter had SWORN UP and down that he **didn't know** Jesus and that he didn't want to BE ASSOCIATED with Jesus **in any way**. But then there was that look that Jesus had given him. That look that had said, “I STILL WANT you, Peter. I still love you. I warned you about this – I know what you've done – but I FORGIVE you.” It was just a few months ago that Peter and the others had seen their **risen Lord as we heard** in the gospel reading. **“Peace be with you!”** Jesus had told them. Jesus could have JUMPED ALL OVER them for being such cowards. **“Peace be with you,”** Jesus said a second time. They had been SO SLOW to believe. But Jesus had been SO PATIENT with them – so loving and forgiving.

WHAT DO WE DO now that **Easter is over?** For Peter there was no question. FIATHFULLY CLING to our **risen Lord!** In Jesus there is **“new life.”** The **“new life”** of sins forgiven – FORGOTTEN – wiped away in Jesus' blood. The **“new life”** of peace with God. The **“new life”** with its glorious promise of **eternal life** in heaven – a promise GUARANTEED by Jesus' own resurrection from the dead.

Can we do ANYTHING OTHER **than that** with Easter? Easter is a day we celebrate once a year – but it is SO MUCH MORE than that! **Holy Week** and **Easter** are the FACTS and HEART of our Christian faith and hope. Jesus – the sinless Son of God – died on the cross to **“take away the sin of the world.”** Jesus TOOK THE BLAME for all our sins and was punished in our place. And now – NOW JESUS LIVES! We have a RISEN, living Lord Jesus who promises us that **“Because he lives, we shall live also.”** Clinging to our risen Savior we have the sure hope of eternal life in heaven when we die – AND the sure hope of OUR OWN resurrections from the dead on the Last Day. The DAY of Easter may be over – but definitely not the JOY and COMFORT of Easter.

We’re told, **“All the believers used to meet together”** in the temple in Jerusalem. That’s the ONLY WAY we can faithfully cling to our risen Lord. We MUST USE God’s Word – hear – read – learn – study it. To faithfully cling to our risen Lord we must faithfully use our Bibles. The place worship has in our lives shows the place GOD HAS in our lives. There’s no getting around it. **“If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed.”**

You read these **opening chapters** of Acts and you find those first Christians BUSY WORSHIPING and studying God’s Word. We can argue we’re TOO BUSY for that. There are so many things going on in our lives. It’s **probably SAFE TO SAY** that **for these early Christians** it was MORE OF HARDSHIP to worship regularly. They didn’t have all the MODERN CONVENIENCES we have – stoves, ovens, microwaves, etc. **All** their meals were made FROM SCRATCH – every meal – **every day**. They couldn’t just grab something out of the **freezer** or frig. They couldn’t just HOP IN THE CAR and make a LAST MINUTE DASH for church. They worked more than **40 hours** a week and WITHOUT THE EQUIPMENT we have today. But what did they do? They made worship a TOP PRIORITY in their lives. They didn’t want anything to COME BETWEEN them and their Savior. They understood nothing could REPLACE Jesus and what they all had in Jesus. So they made sure they MADE TIME to spend time with their risen Lord and His Word.

Easter was OVER. The high priest Caiaphas and his **cronies** had thought they were DONE with Jesus on Good Friday. But try as they did they COULDN’T STOP Easter from happening. They couldn’t keep Jesus DEAD and buried. They tried spreading lies about Easter that **“the disciples had stolen Jesus’ body.”** But that didn’t work – not with the HUNDREDS of eyewitnesses to the risen Lord. They couldn’t get the **apostles** to KEEP THEIR MOUTHS SHUT. They threatened the apostles. They jailed Peter and John. They had arrested all of them. **Easter** was OVER but they couldn’t make it GO AWAY. Now that EASTER’S OVER what do we do with it?

II. We boldly proclaim our risen Lord.

That’s what Jesus has told us Christians to do. We heard Jesus in the gospel reading, **“As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you.’ With that Jesus breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone their sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’”** We have that same DIVINE COMMISSION. God has authorized us to SPEAK FOR HIM. We call this the **Ministry** or **Use** of the Keys. Do you remember how the catechism explains it? “THEY MINISTRY OF THE KEYS is that special power and right which Christ has given to His Church on earth to forgive the sins of **penitent** sinners, but to refuse forgiveness to the **impenitent**, as long as they do not repent. I believe that WHEN THIS IS DONE it is as valid and certain in heaven also as if Christ our dear Lord had dealt with us Himself.”

What happens when we **boldly proclaim** our risen Lord? SOME people listen and BY THE GRACE and power of the Holy Spirit they believe in Jesus as their risen Savior. Christ **crucified and risen** is the only Savior for ALL people. ONLY in Jesus’ blood is their forgiveness of all sins. ONLY

in Jesus' resurrection is there the sure hope of eternal life in heaven. Nobody will GET TO HEAVEN by the way they live their life. **Nobody** will get to heaven because their NAMES were on the church books or mom went to church every Sunday. ONLY by themselves personally trusting in Jesus and all He's done is ANYONE SAVED. **"He that believes and is baptized will be saved. But whoever does not believe will be condemned."** ONLY FAITH in Jesus saves a person. And there's ONLY ONE WAY a person can believe in Jesus – by hearing the gospel. That's WHY we boldly proclaim our risen Lord. That's why mission work and **Christian education** are THE WORK of the church on earth.

At the same time MANY reject – even fight the gospel. **"Then the high priest and all his associates were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail."** But God sent an angel to deliver them. The angel brought them out of the jail and gave them a STRANGE COMMAND. **"Go stand in the temple and tell the people the full message of this life."** If something GETS YOU IN TROUBLE it only makes sense to **stop doing** it. **Boldly proclaiming** our risen Lord Jesus got the apostles in trouble. COMMON SENSE said stop doing that – but GOD TOLD them, "You keep right on boldly proclaiming My Word."

Caiaphas didn't like what Peter was saying. **"You are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."** The TRUTH IS they were guilty of Jesus' death and Caiaphas knew it! He had a GUILTY CONSCIENCE and was fighting it. **Actually** Caiaphas' problem wasn't WITH PETER but with God. But it's a lot easier to BLAME THE PREACHER than argue with God. People still try to WEASEL OUT of what God says by doing what Caiaphas tried here. It's the PREACHER'S FAULT.

God's Word has that affect on people. God's **10 Commandments** confront us with our sins and condemn us to hell because of our sins. Those commandments proclaim that God has ABSOLUTE STANDARDS of behavior that God expects us to LIVE UP to. If we don't obey EVERY commandment all the time we've **sinned**. We're GUILTY and deserve to be punished. ONLY when people realize their sinfulness and despair of their **worthiness** will they TREASURE the gospel. If I don't think I'M SICK I won't go to the doctor. If I don't think I'm a DAMNABLE SINNER I won't rejoice in having a **risen** Savior.

There is the temptation to TONE DOWN what God says when we run into opposition. That's why the angel told people, **"Tell the people the FULL message"** – or as Jesus said, **"teaching them to obey EVERYTHING I have commanded you."** The church is not in a POPULARITY CONTEST. God calls for FAITHFULNESS. Peter understood that. **"We must obey God rather than man."** We have no right to SACRIFICE a Bible truth to keep people happy or have a BETTER IMAGE in the community. Sin is sin no matter WHO DOES it or what OTHERS THINK. Jesus is the ONLY SAVIOR. That we must **BOLDLY proclaim**.

What are the RESULTS? We are not to worry about that. That's God's business, not ours. **"We are witnesses of these things,"** Peter said. That's NOT ALWAYS EASY. It's not always glamorous work. But it's WHAT WE DO with Easter now that it's over. Amen.

APOSTLES' CREED