

Easter, 4 April 2021
Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 28:1-10
Called to DEEP Living
First Mennonite Church

On this grand day some will



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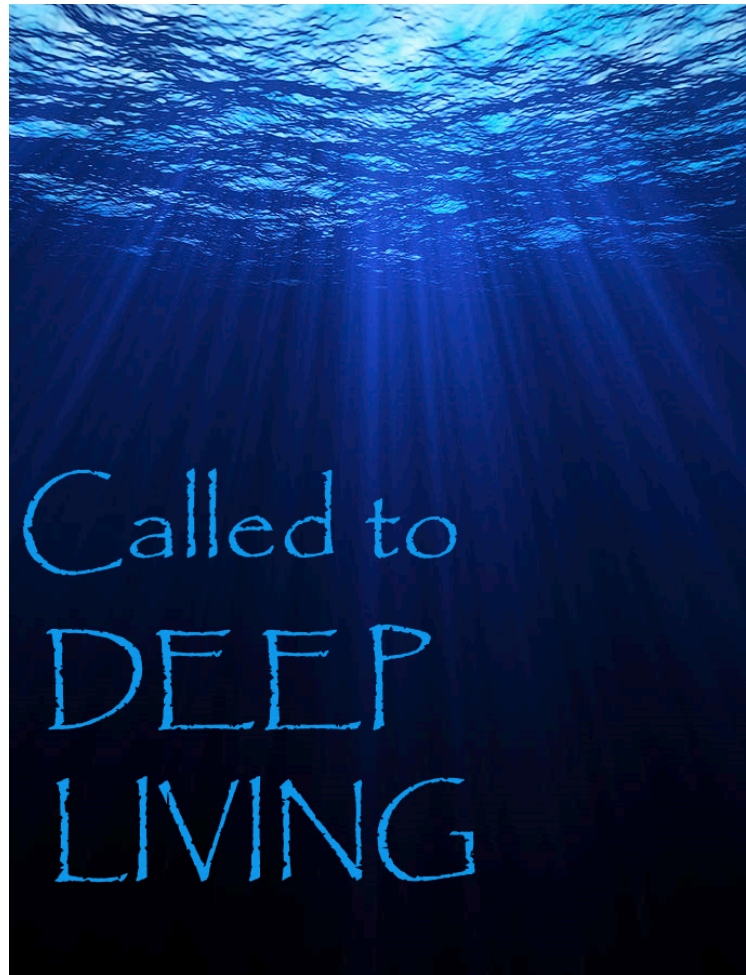
Easter dinner. Here in the church, we gather to celebrate an event that nobody actually saw—the resurrection of crucified Jesus—but which God wants everyone to know about.

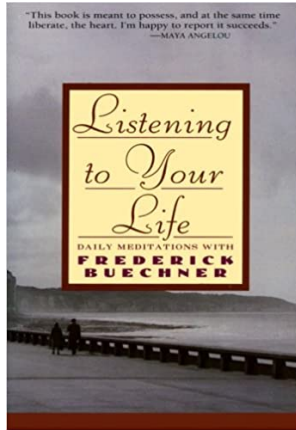
Nobody witnessed the resurrection. All we know about the resurrection of crucified Jesus from the dead is the

aftermath. Many of us wish we could have seen the first Easter with our own eyes, but that's not possible; even those who spent years as Jesus' followers, those who deserted him on Thursday and Friday didn't actually see him rise from the dead.

I'm sure that something actually happened in real space-time human history. Whatever happened was mysterious and difficult to comprehend on the basis of how we usually make sense of ourselves and the world. Nobody has ever seen a resurrection; what we do know for sure is the aftermath.

Those who were here yesterday at the memorial service will soon hear me repeat myself with my next point. You see, us preachers don't often get good ideas, but when we do, we've got to take advantage and use them a couple of times! One of the things I said yesterday was, those very first witnesses to the empty tomb and the encounter with Jesus believed what they had experienced. They had faith. From their faith came a group of believers...the Church. From the faith of the Christians in the church came the testimony to what they had seen and heard. We find their testimony in the books that comprise the NT. The church today,





you and me, stand as a visible testimony to their witness. Frederick Buechner, in his book *Listening to your Life*, put it this way:

“Unless something very real took place on that strange, confused morning so long ago, there would be no Christian faith, no church, no NT.” The apostle Paul said much of the same thing in 1 Corinthians: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15: 17).

It’s the aftermath of resurrection that enables us to believe in the truth of resurrection. Thus, in this morning’s Easter Gospel, Matthew proclaims the resurrection by telling us its effects on those who were there after the resurrection of Jesus.

An important first step toward making sense of Easter is to understand that the resurrection is more than simply a dead body being raised from the dead, though of course that would be newsworthy enough. New Testament scholar N. T. Wright calls the resurrection of crucified Jesus the “the launch pad for something which many Christians have just not got on board with at all.”¹

Easter is a launch pad. What does that mean?

After the Good Friday service, I was at home eating lunch and listening to CBC radio. As it was Good Friday and the feast of the Passover, CBC interviewed a Christian, a Roman Catholic young man, and someone from the Jewish faith. One of the questions they asked the Christian young man was about his faith. Why is your faith important to you? Great question, I thought.

The answer he gave would not be out of place in most churches. He said, “Jesus died on the cross to save me from my sins. When I die I will go to heaven to be with Jesus for eternity.”

The person implied that resurrection is a belief about human destination, a matter of our being resurrected when we die. But that’s not how Matthew presents the first Easter.

¹ (*Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*, Harper One, 2010).

Most of us don't spend much time thinking about the resurrection because we assume it's mostly a matter of life after death. We're still living, so why think about such matters now? When resurrection is mentioned—say, in Easter sermons—some pastors will often say things like, “Jesus died and was raised and therefore we believe that there is life after death.” Or, “Jesus rose again; therefore, we know that we will go to heaven when we die.”

Of course, there is a bit of truth in such statements. But Matthew wants to tell us that the resurrection of Jesus Christ means **so very much more**. In Matthew's account of Easter, you will note that almost nothing is said about the movements of the once dead body of Jesus. Most of the focus is on **the effect of the resurrection**, what resurrection meant to the first followers of Jesus. What we see is Jesus's resurrection's significance reflected back in the lives of people like us. The way the New Testament scholar N. T. Wright puts it is, “Jesus is raised, so God's new creation has begun—and we, his followers, have a job to do!”²

The resurrection is not simply the resuscitation of the dead body of Jesus: resurrection is the first act, the launching pad for God's new creation. As Paul says, the resurrection of Jesus is the “first fruits” (1 Corinthians 15:23) of what God plans to do in all creation, transforming the world, moving from death to life, until the glory of the Lord will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

There are some preachers who talk about how terrible things are in the world, they are getting worse, so we need to be ready to be raptured away from a world that is going to be destroyed in some terrible Armageddon. No. This has nothing to do with the resurrection.



Nor is it the gospel. The resurrection is a concrete sign of God's plan for all creation. God's plan is nothing other than the complete transformation of the world—salvation for the

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. (Isaiah 11:6)

² (*Surprised By Hope*, HarperOne, 2008).

birds, plants, rocks, insects, trees, animals—in other words, a new heaven and a new earth. The resurrection of Jesus is the launching pad, the first act in a grand comedy of re-creation. The resurrection is a concrete sign of God’s plan to restore all creation.



...they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. Isaiah 2:4

That’s the resurrection promise in a nutshell. But we who live now in the meantime, the age between Easter and the fulfillment of God’s promise of complete restoration and new creation, are not just passive spectators. We are not just people who know a secret that we can keep in our hearts that gives us secret reassurance of eternal destiny. We are not merely the beneficiaries who, because we believe in the resurrection of Jesus, have got our own tickets to eternity. We are not spectators, possessors of secret wisdom, or smug beneficiaries of a privilege that’s denied to others: we are the agents of Easter, the ambassadors of Easter, the witnesses of Easter.

We’re at the core of our faith so listen carefully. Easter not only launched Jesus Christ into the new world of the resurrection and earth in a whole new, victorious way. Easter is also **our launching pad as witnesses of resurrection**. We are Christ’s, commissioned ambassadors who represent God’s resurrection reign in a world that, in spite of Jesus’s victory, still grants death sovereignty. We are Christ’s agents, Christ’s representatives, having learned the truth about where the world is headed, who are sent forth publically to live deep lives.

What does it mean to live deeply? I think it means to live far below the surface. Not superficial lives, but deep lives. It means thinking deeply about all that we do, and why we are doing it. Sometimes it means examining our emotions and actions. Sometimes it means acting as God’s spokespersons, proclaiming to the world a truth that the world, caught in the strictures of sin and death, cannot tell itself. It’s learning to listen to the Holy Spirit inside us that is pulling us toward meaning, value, and purpose in our lives.

For example, the women—who had not expected resurrection, who are dumbfounded to find the empty tomb, who had no full understanding of what all this meant, who are completely mystified, surprised and astounded by the empty

tom, these women—were the very first ones invited by the angel perched on top of the stone, “Go! Tell! Christ has risen. God wins!”

Two thousand years later, there are still many Christians who struggle over whether females can be called to preach. One of the earth-shattering effects of the resurrection is how our sacred cultural norms of who can do what, of who can speak or be silent are shattered into bits by the resurrection. The resurrection is the dawning of a whole new world, a new creation.

Another way we live deeply as witnesses of the resurrection is by being good caretakers of this earth that God created, called good, and is determined to transform and make new. I like how the affirmation of faith we read a bit earlier put it. It said, “to live with respect in creation.”

Can I be honest and say that it’s not always easy to live with respect with



creation! I have a recent dilemma to share with you. I’ve had my smartphone for a number of years now. A number of months ago, I received a notification saying my phone was now too old and it would no longer receive security updates. What this means is that I could be more at risk to get viruses and malware. In addition to this, my phone’s battery isn’t very good. What are my options?

I could keep my phone and live with the increased risk of getting a virus and charge my phone several times a day. Because of the phone’s design, I can’t just pull out the old battery and replace it with a new one. If I want to keep using a smartphone, one of my only options is to buy a new one.

Why? I’ve run up against one of the fundamental principles of our economic system. It’s called **planned obsolescence**. When companies make products—whether that be a toaster, washing machine, blender, or smartphone—they design them with an artificially limited useful life or a purposely frail design, so that it becomes obsolete after a certain pre-determined period of time. If you’ve ever look at getting a small appliance repaired you have discovered that its easier to buy a new product rather than repairing your old one. With planned obsolescence your risks of using a product increase. Some products will just stop working after a predetermined time. This is planned obsolescence.



So, I'm now being encouraged to get a new phone. But, my concern as a Christian is what happens to my old phone? It will be recycled, people say. All modern electronics contain a lot of highly toxic chemicals that are terrible for the environment. I encourage you to watch some videos about e-waste. If I get a new phone

and it gets recycled, chances are pretty good that it will wind up getting pulled apart in the third world where environmental regulations are weak or non-existent. I've seen some of these e-waste sites in rural China.

Living with respect in creation—let me tell you, it's challenging!

Other ways we live deeply as ambassadors of the resurrection is:

- Where there is injustice, we seek to make things right.
- Where there is pain and brokenness, we seek to bring healing
- Where there is conflict, we seek to bring peace
- Where there is misunderstanding and failure, we seek forgiveness

From the very first of his earthly ministry, Jesus called people to him in order to send them out from him. His main activity, immediately after his resurrection is delegation: commissioning and sending. Before resurrection and after, whatever Jesus wants to do in the world—whatever wrong set right, evil made good—Jesus chooses to do it **not without us**.

Certainly, Jesus helps us. Jesus also came to commission us—you and me who are frail, weak, not always the sharpest tack in the box—to help Jesus. Jesus is not among us to reduce stress in our lives; he puts us in stress we wouldn't have had if Jesus had not barged in on us. You'll never hear Jesus say silly things like: "Are you looking for more meaning in your life? Would you like to have a more positive attitude about yourself?" His first word: "Go! Tell."

Easter is not only the supreme sign of God's plan to defeat sin and death and to bring about a new heaven and a new earth. Easter is when you and I got enlisted

as Christ's chosen ambassadors of Easter. You can't "give your life to Christ." *He takes it.* You can't "take Jesus into your heart;" he takes you places. Evangelical Protestantism made a big mistake to detach salvation from vocation. Jesus's "Come to me" is always linked with his resurrection commission: "Go! Get out of here and live deeply. And don't just hang around Judea. The whole world belongs to me and you're going to help me get it back. 'How?' By living deeply as God's representatives. Thanks be to God!