Audience Participation Sermon: Christ is Risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Life! That’s what we are celebrating today. No, not the cereal. God Life! Jesus Life! Holy Spirit Life! Pure, abundant, vital Life. Life without death or sorrow or sickness or fear. Life bursting with love, energy, beauty, and joy! That’s what the Easter Resurrection is all about. Life!...

…Which is hard to celebrate in a world that seems to worship death. We’re relentlessly taught that the meaning of life should be about hating certain people’s lives, or destroying lives to snatch easy success, or clinging to tools of terror in the name of life. Life, for some, has lost all meaning, and death is treated as a religion. Suicide rates are climbing, killing for the sake of killing has become fun and games, and violence is used over and over again to solve our problems. Money problems? Kill your family. A woman rejects you? Shoot up a mall. Have a rough life? Blow some people up. The more this killing saturates our world, the easier it is to become indifferent to it. “Oh well, another mass shooting. Another terrorist attack. Another crucifixion.”

But Easter stands in the face of this culture of death and shouts “No!” No to the violence, no to the killing, no to the death that humans cause. The Resurrection of Jesus from the dead is God’s final “No” to the religion of death that tries to infiltrate our lives.

“Christ is Risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**” Every time we say this Easter call and response, we are announcing God’s “No” to death and God’s “Yes” to life. With this single phrase, we proclaim the central belief of the Christian faith: that the God of Jesus Christ is a God of Life, a God of Love, a God of Hope. “Christ is Risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia**!”

A man died and arrived at the Pearly Gates. When he asked to enter, St. Peter said, “First you tell me what Easter is.” The man replied, “Oh, that’s the day that the Vikings discovered North America.” St. Peter shook his head. “No, I’m sorry. You can’t get in.”

Next, a woman arrived at the gates and asked to enter. St. Peter again said, “First tell me what Easter is.” The woman said, “That’s the day when the jolly fat guy in the red suit passes out toys to those who have been nice.” St. Peter shook his head. “No, I’m sorry. You can’t get in.”

Then another man came to the pearly gates asking to enter. St. Peter said, “First tell me what Easter is.” The man smiled and said, “Oh, that’s easy. That’s the day when we celebrate the man who died and was buried, and three days later he rose again. And when he rolled away the stone and looked out, he saw his shadow and went back inside for six more weeks of winter.” Peter just shook his head in sadness because so many had forgotten the meaning of Easter.

Easter is the highest holiday/holy-day that Christians celebrate. That’s why we go all out with the music, the singing, the Easter Lilies. It’s a day to fill the air with “Alleluia’s, Amen’s, and Praise the Lords.” And yet, like Christmas, Easter has lost its meaning, even for Christians. It’s become more about bunnies, shopping, and family dinners than Jesus Christ.

Why? Well, maybe it’s because some hear the good news of the resurrection as an idle tale, an impossible joke that can only be an April Fool. This shouldn’t be surprising since as Paul says in Corinthians, “the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.” To a death-worshipping world, new life will always look like an April Fool.

Or maybe people don’t embrace the full meaning of Easter because they fear it. After all, the Easter story is a big threat to our earthly way of life. You see, Christ’s resurrection changes everything. Everything AND everyone! No longer does death have the final say. No longer does killing rule the world. No longer does violence govern life. For those who worship at the altar of death, the Resurrection threatens the way the world works at its very core.

How? Well, you see, the Risen Christ is THE Resurrection and THE Life, and God’s pure, abundant life in Christ is now the only power that matters, the only power that can win. The Resurrection is the most explosive power that creation has ever known, so great that it causes people to freeze in alarm and then run away in terror. That’s what happened with the women at the tomb. They stood in alarm as the angel sitting in the empty tomb calmly said, “Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he isn’t here. Look, here is where they laid him. Go and tell Peter and the disciples that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” But instead of praising God for this wonderful news, the women turned around and “fled from the tomb because terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid.” According to later verses in Mark, Jesus himself appears to Mary Magdalene, but when she tells everyone, they still refuse to believe. It isn’t until they saw Jesus with their own eyes that his friends and followers finally released their terror and believed.

Christ’s resurrection is the most scary thing this sin-filled world has ever known. No wonder people fear it. In Christ’s resurrection, sin is wiped clean; evil, hatred, fear, and violence are annihilated; death is destroyed. To a world that worships at the altar of death and destruction, the announcement of the resurrection is the most terrifying threat it can hear. For this threatening gospel declares God’s “No” to death and God’s “Yes” to Life. “Christ is Risen! **He is Risen indeed. Alleluia**!”

And guess what? You get to share in this new life. The announcement that “Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed. Alleluia**!” isn’t just a history lesson or a fact for you to memorize. The truth behind those words are God’s greatest gift to you and to the whole world. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, those words change who you are and fill you with the risen Life of Christ. To say “He is Risen indeed” is to say “I am alive because of Christ.” To say “He is Risen indeed” is to know that your life matters, that God has accepted your life and made you a part of Christ’s own life through pure grace. To say “He is Risen indeed” is to be welcomed into God’s family with a resounding “Yes” of love, forgiveness and eternal life. Although the religion of death, sin, and evil still tries to destroy us, each and every day we die and rise again to new life *with Christ* and are given a new beginning every time we hear those words, “Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**”

In this Resurrected life, we are called to Be the Resurrection for others. But what does that mean, to Be the Resurrection in a world that seems to worship death? Well, it means being Christ’s risen life for all. In Christ, you are the light of the world; you are the salt of the earth; you are filled with Christ’s resurrection and life. The life-changing power of this Resurrection spills over into you so that you are empowered to live differently than the world does. Instead of letting death win, the Christ-follower exudes life. Instead of giving into despair, the Christ-follower proclaims hope. Instead of falling into apathy, the Christ-follower stands up and says no to violence, no to fear, no to hate. The Christian stands firm in the new life given in Christ, affirming God’s Life despite being constantly attacked by a religion of death that refuses to die.

There was a Jewish woman and her two children who were imprisoned in a concentration camp near Vienna during WWII. They were Hungarian Jews and, like all who were sent to the camps, they suffered terrible horrors. One day, the woman told her son, “Sneak through the hole in the fence and go to the nearby houses to beg for scraps of food, clothing, anything they can spare. Tell them your 3-year old sister can’t get off the bed because she has no shoes.” At first her son resisted. “I won’t beg,” he said. “I’ll steal instead.” “No,” his mother said sharply. “We are not thieves. Just ask.” Finally, the boy gave in. Later that night he snuck out through the hole barely his size and walked 4 miles until he found a house on the outskirts of a village. He knocked on the door and a woman answered. She was alone, her husband probably off fighting the war, her kids asleep. And she probably knew the boy was Jewish. The boy offered his plea as his mother instructed. “Come back tomorrow,” the woman whispered and then closed the door. The next night the boy returned. The woman opened the door, and with a smile, piled his arms with bread, clothing, a pair of shoes a child had outgrown, and a pair of hand-knitted woolen socks. That night, the boy’s sister put on her new socks and shoes, squealing in delight. The food, the boy and his family shared with everyone in the barracks, a quiet celebration of human kindness for all. Several months later the Russians liberated that camp and sent the prisoners to walk home. The little boy, his sister and his mother trekked 28 miles through the Vienna woods, the little girl walking all the way in her new socks and shoes.

The author, who later became the son of that 3-year old girl, concludes his story like this: “To the anonymous righteous Gentile, I thank you. Thank you for knitting with your hands the pair of socks that warmed my mom’s little feet and skinny legs. Thank you for finding those shoes and clothing and giving them to a stranger. Thank you for sharing your bread during wartime. In the despair of a battered land…when many hearts were closed and evil reigned and death was more likely than life, you gave my family light. You gave them kindheartedness and you gave them life. If you had not looked past the years of poisonous hatred that had enveloped your country in order to help my family, would they have survived to tell this story? Would I even be alive?”

That Gentile woman’s actions are what it means to Be the Resurrection in this world: To share our risen life with others no matter who they are, even in the most frightening, dangerous, death-filled places imaginable. Christ’s resurrection people announce the abundance of God’s Life using every gift, word and action given to us by the grace of God.

Today, I invite you to See the resurrection through the lenses of your new life in Christ. Discover the resurrection in a journey through the awesome wonder of God’s creation. Or see the resurrection in the kindness and beauty of people. Contrary to the negativity that we are bombarded with in the media, people regularly do acts of kindness, love, and life for each other. Like the Wandering Piano man who pushes his piano all over the world to play music in the outdoors. Or the teacher who gave one of her kidneys to the mother of one of her students. Or the students who collected money and gave a married couple the honeymoon they’d never had because 60 years before they’d been turned away at the inn simply for being black. Far from being just “random acts of kindness,” these are glimpses of what it means to See and Be Christ’s resurrection in the world.

But you know, we can also see the Resurrection right now, here, today. In fact, God has promised that we’ll see the risen Christ most frequently here in worship. We can see him all around us, in the stained glass, the shining cross and especially in our fellow followers of Christ, even in the midst of our sin. We can hear it in the Word, the music, and the voices raised in Alleluia! We can taste it in the bread of life and smell it in Christ’s wine and touch it in the waters of baptism. And we can trust the Resurrection down to our souls through the Faith, Hope and Love given to us by the power of the Spirit. Christ is the Resurrection and the Life, and you are his resurrection people. God has already filled you with the fullness of Christ’s Life. Now, may God bless you with the courage, power, and strength to Announce this Life, Be this Life, and See (C) this Life for everyone you meet. **Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!** Amen