

The Happiness of Easter

A Family Sermon by Rev. Patrick A. Rose

“Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you” (John 16:22).

Reading: Matthew 21:1-9; Matthew 28:1-6; *Apocalypse Explained* 659:19

The story of Easter begins with Palm Sunday, when the Lord rode into Jerusalem. He rode into the city on a young donkey, which is what a king would ride on when he returned home in those days. When the people in Jerusalem saw the Lord coming, they knew that He was coming as their King, and so they ran out to welcome Him. They were very happy indeed, and, to show just how happy they were, they cut branches off palm trees and laid them in the road. Some of them waved more palm leaves as the Lord rode into the city as a sign of their joy.

Palm Sunday was indeed a happy day. But just five days later something very terrible and sad happened. Even though many people in Jerusalem had been happy when the Lord rode into the city, there were other people there who didn't like the Lord. The scribes and Pharisees, who ruled the Jews, hated the Lord and were trying to kill Him. And so, on Thursday night, just four days after Palm Sunday, they had the Lord arrested. Next day they took Him to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, and asked that the Lord be put to death. And so the Lord was crucified. Then some of the Lord's followers took His body down from the cross and put it in a sepulcher.

But, of course, these evil people couldn't really kill the Lord. The Lord is God. He is life itself. Everything that is living gets its life from the Lord. And the Lord is all-powerful. Nobody could really kill Him. So to show everybody that He really was God and that all life comes from Him, the Lord came out of the sepulcher. He was crucified on Friday, He was in the sepulcher on Saturday, and then, on the third day, on Sunday, He rose again. This was the first Easter Sunday, one of the happiest days in all of history.

The Lord's disciples rejoiced when they learned of His resurrection. In fact, the Lord *told* them to rejoice. The gospel of *Matthew* says that after the Lord rose, the very first thing He said to His disciples when He saw them again was “Rejoice.” He told them, “Be happy!”

The Lord always wants people to be happy. And the story of Easter is, above all, a story about the Lord making people happy. In fact, this is the very reason the Lord came down to earth. During His life here, the Lord fought against the evil spirits of hell—evil spirits who were making people wretched and miserable. And the Lord also taught people many things about how they should live if they wanted to be happy. He also showed people how much He loved them and how He wanted to make them happy forever and ever.

And, then, on the first Easter morning, when the Lord rose from the sepulcher, this work was finished. He had done what was needed so that people could be happy once again. When the Lord came out of the sepulcher, He showed that He was God Himself. And He showed that if someone believed in Him, and obeyed His commandments, He would make that person happy forever and ever. This is why, when He showed Himself to His disciples on the first Easter morning, He told them to be happy. And this is why we also should be happy at Easter time.

Now the Lord's resurrection does, of course, involve many things. By rising from the sepulcher, He proclaimed the truth that He is God Himself. By conquering death, He showed that He has power over death and that He has the power to give us eternal life beyond the grave. By rising again on that first Easter morning, He also symbolized the dawning of a new era, the Christian era. The Lord established the Christian Church, a church which would, for a time, bring light and love to those who had been in ignorance for so long. But the Lord, in rising from the sepulcher, also showed something else.

He showed that He has power to rise from another sepulcher as well, the sepulcher within each individual mind. And we all have such a sepulcher within our minds. We all have memories of past sins, of evils committed, of duties left undone. And, when we are in the midst of temptation, these memories can haunt us. We seem to see our hope of salvation buried beneath the debris of past evils. What we have done in the past, we sometimes imagine, will condemn us to a future in hell. And so, as we struggle to resist evil, at times we almost give up hope.

But while a person lives here on this earth, what he has done in the past does not have to condemn him. There is no need to focus forever upon past deeds. The past is dead. The Lord and His salvation do not lie buried forever beneath the sins of earlier years. As the angels asked those who came to the sepulcher early in the morning, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" The Lord's salvation is not lost in the past. It lies in the future, if we will only persevere along the pathway to heaven.

The Lord can rise again in our hearts. When the night is over, morning comes, and the Lord brings spiritual light and spiritual warmth. We are no longer torn by a desire to do evil. This desire has disappeared, for the Lord has laid it to rest. And now the Lord no longer seems absent, for now we have trust in His presence, and His many blessings seem so obvious, so apparent. Deep within us we sense peace. Once again there is joy and happiness. The Lord has risen within us! And now our happiness can be eternal.

This can happen to us. When we feel despair in trying to live a good life, when our Lord seems far away, let us remember that He will rise again and come to us, as He came to His disciples. The Lord had promised that He would come and bring them joy. And this promise, the promise of joy and happiness, the promise of light and warmth, the promise of salvation and peace, is the promise of Easter. It is a promise for all who trust in the Lord and abide in His ways.

Easter is the time when we celebrate the Lord's resurrection from the sepulcher. It is the time when we rejoice and say thank you to the Lord for making people happy. And it is a time when we especially remember that the Lord is our God, and that if we believe in Him, and if we do what He says, He will make us happy forever and ever.

"Now you have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.... Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

Amen.

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