

EASTER SUNDAY APRIL 4, 2010

TITLE: CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

**READINGS: Acts 10:34-43, Ps.118:1-2,14-24, 1Cor.15:19-26,
Luke 24:1-12**

You probably do not remember the name Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin. During his day he was as powerful a man as there was on earth. A Russian Communist leader he took part in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, was editor of the Soviet newspaper Pravda (which by the way means truth), and was a full member of the Politburo. His works on economics and political science are still read today. There is a story told about a journey he took from Moscow to Kiev in 1930 to address a huge assembly on the subject of atheism. Addressing the huge crowd he aimed his heavy artillery at Christianity hurling insult, argument, and proof against it. After an hour, he looked out at what seemed to be the smoldering ashes of men's faith. "Are there any questions?" Bukharin demanded. Deafening silence filled the auditorium but then one man approached the platform and mounted the lectern standing near the communist leader. He surveyed the crowd first to the left then to the right. Finally he shouted the ancient greeting known well in the Russian Orthodox Church: "CHRIST IS RISEN!" The entire audience arose as one person and the response came crashing like the sound of thunder: "HE IS RISEN INDEED!"

It is Easter Sunday. I stand here before you and can declare with my entire being that Christ is risen! Why? Because I believe with all my heart and soul that Christ was dead and he was buried and I also believe with my entire heart and soul that He arose from the dead and will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead! I can truly tell you that this defines all that I am. If I came to you and asked each one of you face to face, "Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ?" How would you answer? If yes, then has this truth had an effect on your life? And just what convinces you that the resurrection of Jesus is really true?

First of all I would say that I believe in the resurrection because someone told me about it. Gee, not a strong argument? Yes, but most of

what we know is simply because somebody told us about it. How do you know that Columbus discovered America in 1492? Because we were told it by some who were there and witnessed it. Remember when Mary came to the tomb expecting to finish the burial ritual on the dead body of Jesus? The tomb was empty and she stood there weeping. Then imagine her joy when she realized that the risen Jesus called her name, Mary. The joy of that first Easter can be found in her one word response, "Rabboni!" "Teacher!" Then in the Gospels and Acts over and over again we have eye witness testimony of the risen and living Christ.

Secondly the resurrection has stood the test of time. Fame fades and new fashions emerge. Sports figures come and go, a song becomes a hit and then is replaced by another. But the resurrection of Jesus remains as vivid, fresh and new now as it was when Peter and John peered into the empty tomb over 2000 years ago. The resurrection of Christ is not something that was here today and gone tomorrow. As long as there is life on earth there will be people talking about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But the third and most important reason for me that the resurrection is true is because I have experienced it. Does this sound strange? Not really. The disciples of Jesus did not believe in the resurrection because they could explain it; they believed in the resurrection because they had experienced it. Their Master, whom they had known in the flesh and had seen die was now alive and with them. And how did they respond to this wonderful happening? A frightened band of disciples huddled together in a house with the door barred. That is the scene before the resurrection. A powerful band of mighty witnesses thrust out into the world. That is the scene after the resurrection. So, too, with you and me! At our first service today, we saw two children who descended into the waters of Baptism and rose up to new resurrected life in Christ. When we receive communion we come up to the altar rail and kneel. After you have descended to your knees you rise, strengthened with the body and blood of Christ, with the new resurrected life which comes through faith, Word and Sacrament. This is a symbol of our participation in the death and the resurrection of Jesus. As we kneel or as we are taken down into the waters of Baptism, we are descending into death, and when we are raised from the baptismal waters,

or we rise after we have received communion, we are experiencing the resurrection of new life in Christ.

We just like the disciples, become witnesses of the resurrection. It is never easy to disregard the testimony of witnesses who are ready to die for their faith. This was true of the disciples and it is still true today. Christians are still being martyred for their faith in the resurrection. Like the disciples, too, they knew what they had experienced and seen. They believed in it so passionately that they were willing to put their lives on the line in their efforts to tell the story to others. They are resurrection people.

We can sing the great hymns of Easter we can hear again the familiar stories of scripture, we can enjoy the lilies, and we can join in on the Halleluiah chorus. Easter can be experienced in these ways. But the real power of Easter is the way that people's lives are moved from death to life, from sealed tomb to open doorway, from despair to hope, from the old ways to new opportunities. That is Easter. That is resurrection! When we participate in that process, we see the risen Christ raise people from the death of despair to the joy of new life. We not only believe it, we experience it, live it! We truly see the God of the resurrection at work. Go my Christian brothers and sisters and make the resurrection of Jesus Christ a reality in your life! **CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! Amen.**

Pastor Barney

ADDENDA:

One young boy who was part of a family, not frequent church-goers, looked up at his father as they took their place in church on Easter Sunday and said, "Dad, where are all the Christmas trees we saw here last time?"

A man stopped to shake hands with the pastor after the Easter service and said, "Pastor, your last sermon was so good, it lasted me an entire year."