

RESURRECTION!!!!!!

A Sunday school teacher asked her class on the Sunday before Easter if they knew what happened on Easter and why it was so important.

One little girl spoke up saying: "Easter is when the whole family gets together, and you eat turkey and sing about the pilgrims and all that."

"No, that's not it," said the teacher.

"I know what Easter is," a second student responded.

"Easter is when you get a tree and decorate it and give gifts to everybody and sing lots of songs."

"Nope, that's not it either," replied the teacher.

Finally a third student spoke up, "Easter is when Jesus was killed, and put in a tomb and left for three days."

"Ah, thank goodness somebody knows" the teacher thought to herself.

But then the student went on: "Then everybody gathers at the tomb and waits to see if Jesus comes out, and if he sees his shadow he has to go back inside and we have six more weeks of winter."

I can just see my eyes rolling if a child told me that! If Easter isn't Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Ground Hog day then what is it? Is it candy, cards, bunnies and eggs? Just what is Easter all about?

In the 1970's, a student reporter called Duke University Chaplain William Willimon the week before Easter break. He explained that he was doing a story on fun things for students to do during their week off. He thought it would be

cool to mention the Chapel at Duke University. "So, Dr. Willimon, can you tell me, what is the goal of Easter?" The eminent preacher was unprepared for the question to be put in just such terms. "The goal?" he thought to himself. In his stunned silence, he could almost imagine the headline, "Preacher says Easter is pointless."

Pointless? Hardly! But what exactly is the goal of Easter, why do we celebrate such a day like today? I have heard over the years from preachers many different theories: One is that Good Friday's here and now, but Easter's on the way! This perspective on life says that things are horrible now, that the economy is terrible, that your kids are failing in school, you don't know how to pay the pastor, Good Friday's here! Suffering, great pain, a slow agonizing death, that's

what life offers us today...but Easter Sunday's on the way!
Easter is the great getting up morning, that hope on the other side, when we die, our troubles are over, and we get the life God meant for us to have. A life of peace, no more suffering, a life where justice and liberty and love and grace are all words that are tangible and concrete in heaven. Many hymns in our hymnal end with this glorified theological perspective on Easter, resurrection, and heaven. Good Friday may be here today...but Easter Sunday's on the way!

Now on the far left end of the theological spectrum there is the perspective that Easter gives us hope, it is a message of God's victory over the direst of circumstances, and that we can overcome the injustices of this world and make it a better place today and for our children. This

perspective says that heaven may be good, but we ain't there yet, so let's start bringing in the Kingdom of God right here and now! This is an earthy, get down in the dirt and let's work for Jesus perspective on Easter, resurrection, and heaven.

Both are good messages, and both provide good visions on today: how God is presently working in our lives and our world through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But as I think about the sermon series on Romans this past six weeks, and the whole week of worship that we went through together this Holy Week, and listening to Jesus talk about rising again in three days, and the words of the angel sitting at the tomb...I'm getting the message that God is surprised that we are surprised by Easter.

You see, once Jesus took sin and death and killed them on the cross on Good Friday...resurrection was going to happen! Once Jesus won the victory once and for all over that sin that we cannot get out of, sin that pervades every part of our mind, body, and soul, sin that warps our mind and our perspective on everything we do...once Jesus' victory over sin wiped that out on the cross, then all that remains after the final battle is won, is to bring in the fruits of victory! The fruits of victory are resurrection and eternal life! Does it make sense that we are so limited and boxed in by our understanding of life and death because of sin that when Jesus blew up those boxes on Calvary, we still think in the same limited ways? For example, years and years ago, it used to be you could buy baby crocodiles in pet stores and five-and-dime stores. Little lizards only about six inches long.

The creatures came home in a carefully prepared box, about twelve inches long. The vast majority of these poor reptilian pets died out within a few weeks or months, the cost of having compassionate five-year-olds as owners. But a few survived. An even lesser number enjoyed transplantation to more spacious living environments.

Crocodiles are one of the few animals in nature that keep growing as long as they keep living. In other words, there is no limit as to how big a crocodile can grow. And they grow about a foot a year, so you know very quickly how old a crocodile is. But there is one little qualifier: a crocodile will only grow as big as the container it finds itself in. If the kid kept its baby croc in the small shoebox they bought them in, they would forever have a shoebox-sized crocodile. But if the

child transplanted them into an aquarium, and then into a larger container, say a bathtub, or a river — the croc would happily expand to fulfill its new greater space. Crocodiles grow to whatever size “box” they are put into. What if, just what if the victory of Jesus is not Easter, it's not heaven, but Good Friday? What if Jesus' suffering and death is the final battle won by Christ, and Easter is the natural result of a world put back the way that our Creator God made it in the beginning? Doesn't that blow all of your boxes up? Can you begin to expand your mind and heart to believe that Christ has already won the victory for you and I on the cross, that Good Friday was the end of our boxes and limitations in life? Can you begin to imagine a world where resurrection is both a natural logical conclusion and the new beginning for those who believe that Jesus has won the victory on the cross?

Yes, Good Friday is here: pain and suffering are real, debt and stress over money truly exists and tries to suffocate us every day! And yes, Easter Sunday is on the way: we will overcome it all someday, in that great getting up morning when we see Jesus face to face and all the people who have gone before....I can't wait for that day of resurrection...Amen! And, and, Easter is here right now because of what Jesus has done on the cross and what Jesus is doing in us and through us in our communities and our world by acts of justice, compassion and mercy!!!! Sin and death have ended...God's love and grace are here today!!!! Hallelujah!

Let me leave you with this story: Father Basil Pennington, a Roman Catholic monk, tells of an encounter

he once had with a teacher of Zen Buddhism. Pennington was at a retreat. As part of the retreat, each person met privately with this Zen teacher. Pennington says that at his meeting the Zen teacher sat there before him smiling from ear to ear and rocking gleefully back and forth. Finally, the teacher said: "I like Christianity. But I would not like Christianity without the resurrection. I want to see your resurrection!"

Pennington notes that, "With his directness, the teacher was saying what everyone else implicitly says to Christians: You are a Christian. You are risen with Christ. Show me (what this means for you in your life) and I will believe." That is how people will know if the resurrection is true or not.

Does it affect how we live? Does Jesus life, death, and resurrection and ascension mean anything to you? If so, show me! Show the people next to you! Show the community you live in! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen!