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Pataskala Church of the Nazarene
B. G.

"The Difference Easter Makes"

Matthew 28:1-10

The Call to Worship had just been pronounced starting Easter Sunday Morning service in an East Texas church.

The choir started its processional, singing "**Up from the Grave He Arose**" as they marched in perfect unison and step down the center aisle to the front of the church.

The last lady was wearing shoes with very slender heels. Without a thought for her fancy heels, she marched toward the grating that covered that hot air register in the middle of the aisle.

You know what is going to happen before I tell you.

Suddenly the heel of one of her shoes sank into one of the holes in the register grate. In a flash she realized her predicament.

Not wishing to hold up the whole processional, without missing a step, she slipped her foot out of her shoe and continued marching down the aisle.

There wasn't a hitch. The processional moved with clock-like precision.

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The first man after he spotted the situation and without losing a step, reached down and pulled up her shoe, but the entire grate came with it!

Surprised, but still singing, the man kept on going down the aisle, holding in his hand the grate with the shoe attached.

Everything still moved like clockwork. Still in tune and still in step, the next man in line stepped into the open register and disappeared from sight.

Can you see this in your mind?

The service took on a special meaning that Sunday, for just as the choir ended with "Allelujah! Christ arose!" a voice was heard under the church shouting... "I hope all of you are out of the way 'cause I'm coming out now!"

And a little girl closest to the aisle shouted, "Come on, Jesus! We'll stay out of the way."

Aren't you glad this morning Jesus Arose from the grave and He's Alive this morning and none of us were in His way!

Around the world today sanctuaries are packed with people celebrating Easter.

Unfortunately, many of those worshipers will not return next Sunday. And I have asked myself the question Why?

A recent study gave these reasons:

74% - There is no value in attending church

81% - Churches have too many problems

48% - I don't have the time

42% - I'm simply not interested

34% - The church is irrelevant to the way I live
[Barna Research Group]

Now I want us to hear what these figures are saying

For the most part people think the church and it's message is irrelevant.

I find that staggering – It's so very hard for me to relate to that.

For you see - I can't think of anything more relevant than the issue of life after death and how to prepare for it.

This morning I want to show you SOME of the relevance of Easter for our lives.

Go with me to Matthew 28 and let's see how the fact of Easter can change us today. (Read the Scripture here!)

The Resurrection

"1 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.

3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Don't Be Afraid . . .

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Twice in this simple account and it is also found in the other gospels we hear the command, "***Do not be afraid***".

In verse 5 it is the Angel telling the women not to be afraid.

In verse 10 Jesus tells these women the same thing: "***Do not be afraid.***"

The message of Easter is one that says to all of us, "***You no longer need to be afraid.***"

Fear runs rampant in all of our lives at times.

Steve Brown writes,

"We're afraid we might fail; we're afraid people may not like us; we're afraid that we might get out of the will of God, we're afraid of the wrath of God, we're afraid of what people will do to us if they get angry; we're afraid of cancer, pollution, war and AIDS. We're afraid not to be afraid, lest, in our moment of weakness, we get destroyed. We're afraid of losing our material goods and our spiritual superiority. We're afraid, with Satchel Paige, to look back lest something should be gaining on us. And, most of all, we're afraid of death."

We can add the fear of speaking in public, the fear of water, the fear of tight places,

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the fear of failure,
the fear of being alone,
the fear of losing control,
the fear of loud noises,
the fear of rejection,
the fear of our past.

The list goes on and on.

We can be so afraid that we never risk commitment or intimacy.

We can be so afraid that we never get beyond our "**comfort zones**".

We can be so afraid that we never try anything new, never risk reaching out, and never dare to express ourselves.

Fear causes us to cling to each other, keep our fingers on the trigger of our handgun, and keep 911 on speed-dial.

But we must admit that fear has its place.

The Psalmist David said, "***Who is the man that fears the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses. He himself shall dwell in prosperity, and his descendents shall inherit the earth. The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.***"
Psalm 25:12-14

Fear is an emotion that is designed to alert us to possible danger.

Fear causes the adrenalin in us to increase which at times makes us more alert and able to deal with dangerous situations.

Fear, properly dealt with can energize us.

But . . . most of the time fear paralyzes us.

That's where the Resurrection comes in.

As Christian believers

1. The Resurrection means we no longer have to worry about the future.

The greatest threat we face in life is the threat of death.

The fear of death controls our life much more than we realize.

This fear can dictate what we eat,
what activities we engage in,
where we live.

The fear of death makes us fearfully attentive to every ache and pain in our body.

But folks, listen to me, the **Resurrection of Jesus takes the teeth out of death.**

Easter shows us that there is life beyond the grave.

I like it where Paul said in I Cor. 15, ***“For the trumpet shall sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ Where, O death, is your victory? Where O death is you sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law, but thanks be to God! He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Vv. 52b-57***

Death is no longer a giant . . . Christian believer, it is just a mere blip on the screen of eternity for those who have had their hearts and lives changed through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus' return from the grave allows us to face death with new understanding and a new confidence.

We understand now that for the child of God, death is a transition point. Nothing more!

Oh, I wish I could stay on this point for a while!

If you could know that everything was going to turn out Okay in the end . . . would that calm your fears?

Sure it would.

I loved to watch the OSU basketball games this year, but I hate the seesaw nature of the game. Sometimes it makes me a nervous wreck.

I remember one game where the Buckeyes were down 20 points in the first half. Most of us gave up on them and didn't give much of a chance to win.

I dread these times because of the agony that has to be endured before you get to the final buzzer of the game.

I taped every one of the games this year.

On occasions I wasn't home when the game was being played and had to watch the taped game.

I usually knew what the final score was before I watched the game.

You know - it is surprising how the fear and anxiety disappears if we know how the game is going to end.

The Resurrection tells us how it is all going to end up for the child of God.

Knowing the ending helps us deal with what comes in between. People PTL!

Jesus shows us that in the end the home team wins.

I'm not overly fond of flying in airplanes. I'm much better now than what I used to be, because Dru flies with me and somehow I get more confidence when she is flying with me.

I tell her if this thing goes down we'll go together. She's not too keen on that idea.

But there is something about the idea of this metal cylinder hanging precariously in the air that unnerves me a little bit.

This fear is not helped when we encounter turbulence.

But I have learned a little trick to help me deal with this fear.

I ask myself, "what is the worst thing that can happen?" The answer? "We could plunge from the sky and go crashing into the ground and be destroyed beyond recognition."

(I always try to be honest with myself.)

And then I ask, "**Are you prepared to die?**" And I can respond, "Yes, I know where I am going. I'm going to heaven if I die. Death has no power over me because Jesus has overcome it."

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Then I can sit back and look strong for everyone else. Do you understand that? Sure you do!

Joan Chittester reaches into the literature of the masters to remember a time when a great army invaded the country and created a path of destruction wherever they went.

Their greatest wrath was reserved for a holy people they found, particularly the monks. The author writes,

"When the invaders arrived in one of the villages...

The Leader of the village reported to the commander, "All the monks, hearing of your approach, fled to the mountains."

The commander smiled a broad, cold smile, for he was proud of having a reputation for being a very fearsome person.

But then the leader added, "All, that is, but one."

The commander became enraged. He marched to the monastery and kicked in the gate. There in the court yard stood the one remaining monk. The commander charged at the figure. "Do you know who I am?"

The commander demanded. "I am He who can run you through with a sword without batting an eyelash."

And the monk fixed the commander with a serene and patient look and said, "And do you know who I am? I am one who can let you run me through with a sword without batting an eyelash."

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The future may not be pleasant, but friends, hear me, if you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, you and I will overcome it. . . . **if our faith is in the One who rose from the dead.**

There is no need to be afraid of the future.

Can I hear an Amen?

2. We no longer need to fear the past.

Does your past haunt you?

Do you worry that people will find out what you are really like?

Do you fear that they will discover what you did or said in the past?

Do you fear that some of your past decisions will come back to haunt you?

Do you fear that some of your past deeds will disqualify you from Heaven?

If so, you have just joined a large company of people.

Easter has good news for you.

When Jesus came back from the dead He proved that the sacrifice of His life was acceptable to God.

His Resurrection shows that the debt for sin has been paid.

God's wrath has been satisfied. Hallelujah!!

We are assured that **"everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through his name"** (Acts 10:43)

And in the book of Isaiah our Lord says, **"Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool."** (1:18)

He's here to meet you at the foot of the cross.

Sure, I agree with you **our past may embarrass us.**

Our past may lead people to think differently of us BUT.... ultimately, our past is dealt with.

When we have this relationship with Jesus Christ - **It is erased in the blood of Christ.**

We are forgiven. And we know it is true because of the Resurrection.

Folks, - What wonderful liberating news this is to every believer.

3. We can face the present with new confidence.

The road we travel is often bumpy.

We look at what is ahead of us and we rightly think:

"I am weak, I lack the necessary powers, the task seems overwhelming, I don't think I can make it."

But we must not stop there!

We must go on in our discussion with ourselves.

We must continue by saying, **"BUT, God has given me His Spirit. I do not have to face the future in my own strength. My strength is weak but His is without equal."**

Folks, this is the only way I can make it at times, knowing that God has given me His Holy Spirit – I'm weak, but He is strong.

When Jesus returned from the grave He told us that He would give us His Holy Spirit to lead us.

This Spirit, He promised, would guide us into all truth.

This Spirit would give us the words to say when we are in difficult situations.

This Spirit would give us courage when our knees would buckle.

We do not face our present difficulties alone if we are trusting the One who has risen from the grave.

The Lord promises that **NOTHING will separate us from His love.**

He also promises that in **ALL THINGS He is at work in our lives for the good.**

These are promises that can calm the most anxious heart.

When we face the fearful times of the present and look at the Lord and realize that He has promised to give us the strength and resources to get through whatever comes.

We now focus not on our ability but His

There is one thing in the Bible that we are told that we should fear.

We are told that we should fear the Lord.

In fact we are told , ***"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"***.(Proverbs 1:7)

What does this mean?

In the classic work Pilgrim's Progress the fear of the Lord is described as: **"the conviction of sin, which leads to repentance and saving faith, and results in a holy reverence for God."**

Fear of the Lord is seeing God for who He is and giving Him the proper place in our lives.

And when we have that holy reverence of God – it really straightens out a lot of things in our own walk with God.

You see, as long as we are looking at the Lord . . . the fear disappears.

Brown tells this story,

There is a great comedy record featuring Mel Brooks as a very old man whose life is measured in thousands of years.

The interviewer asks the old man if he was there when people started talking about God.

He replied that he was there; and not only that, God's name was Phil.

He said that this guy, by the name of Phil, went out into the fields and said that he was God.

A lot of people followed him. Then, one day, a lightning bolt came down and killed Phil.

Brooks went on to say that the man who was standing next to Phil said, "There's somebody bigger than Phil!"

Listen to me - There is somebody bigger than Phil.

Christians who are facing fear need to remember that.

Easter tells us we don't need to be afraid any longer.

The Second part of that Scripture says,

“Go and Tell . . .”

The second command given by both the Angel and the Lord was to **“go and tell the disciples”**.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven He told His disciples: **“Go, and make disciples of all nations.**

Christianity is a **“go and tell”** faith.

People Need to Know How to Find Life Beyond the Grave

Would you like to know how to find this eternal life?

The Resurrection of Jesus shows us that life does not end at death.

But it not only reveals that there is life beyond the grave . . . the resurrection of Jesus Christ points the way to this life.

The world in which we live is made up of people who are lost and confused.

They either believe:

- there is no life beyond the grave which results in a lifestyle that says: "Grab all you can, this is all there is".

These people live in a constant state of panic. Their only concern is to do what they want to do because nothing else matters.

- They believe that only those who live by a certain set of rules can get to Heaven.

These people knock themselves out trying to be "good enough" and live in fear that they will make that one "fatal mistake" and ruin their chances.

- Or they believe that everyone goes to Heaven and there are still no consequences for their behavior.

All three of these groups are like sheep heading for the slaughter.

Unless they turn from their ways and place their trust in Christ, they will be forever cast from the Lord's presence in a place called hell that was prepared only for the Devil and his angels.

Love Demands We Tell People About Eternal Life

This morning the people of this church and all the staff and myself want you to know about Eternal Life.

You see - We don't really love people if we withhold the most important information in the world from them.

How can we be silent when we know someone we care about may spend eternity in torment?

Are we silent because we don't care? Or because we don't believe?

We sometimes hear people say, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere."

What nonsense! If someone you cared about told you they believed they could drive from Pataskala to Columbus blindfolded and were going to prove it by doing so . . . wouldn't you try to stop them?

Wouldn't you try to stop them even if they were sincere? Why?

Because even though they are sincere, they are sincerely WRONG.

Sincerity is not able to save you.

Only the truth of Jesus Christ can save you from your lostness.

Even sincere people need to hear the truth of the gospel.

Others tell us (even about their own children) that they "want them to make their own choices. . ." so they are not going to influence them.

They will not bring their children to worship.

They will not teach their children the Bible or in any way seek to "influence" a person.

Do you feel the same way about your children's education?

Do you give them free choice as to whether they will go to school or not? NO. Why?

Because it's too important?

Because they are unable to make that choice by themselves?

Is that choice more important than where they spend eternity?

Do you think the opposition is concerned about NOT influencing those we love?

We have an obligation to get the word out. People are literally dying to hear about Jesus.

Let me ask you, my friends, are you trusting the Son of man who rose from the dead?

Do you recognize that Jesus was God become man?

Do you see that He died willingly as a payment for your sin?

Do you understand that there is no way that you can save yourself?

You can't be "good enough", you can't "earn enough credit".

Do you realize that when Jesus came back from the grave He showed us that everything He said was true?

Now, here's the important question.

If you believe all that, are you willing to entrust yourself to this Jesus Christ?

Are you willing to stop depending on your efforts to get to Heaven and start resting in what He has done?

Are you willing to trust Him for more than your eternal destiny?

Are you willing to trust Him enough to follow Him today?

If you are willing to do so, then my friend you need to tell the Lord that very thing right now.

How do you do that?

Surrender your life to Him.

Make that step of faith.

And if you do, you will find that you know how to have peace and joy that will last forever.

Friend, you can live with spiritual confidence beginning right now.

All because Jesus died in your place and rose again victoriously.

And unless I've severely misread your situation . . . this is some of the most relevant information you could ever receive while you were here in church on Easter Sunday morning!

Invitation:

Would you allow me to give you an opportunity to pray and ask Jesus to come into your heart and life?

Would you repent of your sins and confess to Him that you need Him and don't want your fear anymore?