



New Life – Luke 24:1-12 Easter Sunday 2016 Larry DeLong

Well, it's Easter – and we're all gathered here the way we should be. But what does Easter mean? Even though it's the celebration of the central theme of our Christian faith, what does it have to do with us, this Day of Resurrection?

The whole of the New Testament – the whole of the Bible for that matter – comes to a very fine point in this one event, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, an event that is a problem for those outside the church looking in, and a difficulty even for many inside it. Some people just reject the whole idea; others, well, they try not to think about it: it makes their head hurt; of course, for still others, it's the rock of faith on which they stand.

But Christ has risen indeed: not just certainly, but in deed, an actual occurrence.

Paul, especially in his first letter to the church in Corinth, emphasizes just how important Jesus' resurrection is to the Christian understanding of God's relationship with us. He writes, "Now if the rising of Christ from the dead is the very heart of our message, how can some of you deny that there is any resurrection?...If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a

few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot. But the glorious fact is that Christ *did* rise from the dead!" (I Corinthians 15, *passim*, Phillips and Peterson paraphrases.)

But there are questions, were questions even in Paul's day: "Show me how the resurrection works. Give me a diagram; draw me a picture." (*ibid.*, Peterson) And lots of people struggle with "why?" "Why did Jesus have to come back to life? Why did he even have to die in the first place?"

The answer to those questions begins from the same point: the basic fact of the matter. Jesus *did* rise from the dead; Jesus *has* defeated death; God *did all this for us*. That's the foundation that Christianity is built upon. The rest doesn't make any sense if that's left out. The truth of Jesus' resurrection makes everything else possible; it proves the truth of his teaching, what he said about God.

Having said that, this focus is too narrow for us. Jesus' resurrection is *Jesus'* resurrection, and that all by itself is not something we can reach out and touch. The truth of the resurrection isn't just about Jesus, it belongs to us, too: it's about you and me. We are *all* headed for resurrection; we all will conquer death. Jesus' example is just a taste of what's to come for all of us.

We don't know much about what happens at or after death. That's okay. If we had to know *everything* about *everything*, I, for one, would be in a lot of trouble! All we really need to know is that it will be all right. That's the faith of the Church: God is in charge, and makes all things right. We're part of the plan. As the old saying goes, "Everything will all be all right in the end. If it *isn't* all right, then *it's not the end.*"

Still even that's a bit abstract. That's *then*, we live *now*. For example, we all know, in the abstract, that we will die, but the details – how? When? What, if anything, happens next? Those things we don't know.

How do we make the resurrection more than just a disembodied fact? How do we make it concrete? We know that one plus one equals two, but we need to make that real. See it. One packrat plus one packrat makes two dozen packrats – well, at least that's how it seems! Something a bit more agreeable: one apple plus one apple makes two apples. We can see them; we can touch them; we can eat them. They're real. We can count them. But our resurrection, like our death, for that matter, can't be grasped like an apple and examined.

Given that, what use *is* this resurrection business to us here and now? This: the new life that Christ promised us isn't just after we're done with this one; it's right smack-dab in the middle of it.

Christ didn't just break the power of death to hold us forever, he broke the ability of sin to keep us down. We're right with God, and if we can be right with God, well, anything's possible. We don't have to carry the guilt of our life's mistakes, misjudgments, and misunderstandings one more minute. We can experience a kind of resurrection, a fresh start, right now. A new beginning for you and me, from this moment.

There's a Sunday School song, "Every morning is Easter morning from now on." That's it, precisely: every morning – truthfully, every moment – is a new reality, if we take Jesus at his word. The Letter to the Hebrews, 4:7: "God keeps renewing the promise and setting the date to *today*." [Peterson]

Olympic speed skater Chad Hedrick had a career anyone could be proud of – a champion both as an in-line skater and an ice skater. In two Olympic Games, he won five medals: a gold, two silver, and two bronze. Pretty impressive.

Chad decided to retire after the 2010 games. What a surprise! Getting out at the top. For most athletes, Olympic competition is the high point of their life, the thing that defines their identity. Many keep on going back as long as they possibly can. Forever after, they're introduced as "former Olympic athlete Whomever."

But what made Chad Hedrick's retirement unique was this: asked how he felt about retiring with five Olympic medals, he replied:

“It's a good start to a great life.”

A good start to a great life. That's Easter talk; that's a statement about what life is about: not medals, not celebrity, not memories of what you were – it's about *today*, it's about *tomorrow*. Paul writes, “if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. The past is over and done, everything has become fresh and new.” [RSV]

Look back on your own personal history. Some's been good, some's been great, some's been very, very forgettable – some we've even forgotten. It's made us what we are, though, brought us here, we can be grateful for it. For most of us, it's been a *good life*.

The truth is, all of our life so far is a good start to a great life. You may not see the past as good; that's irrelevant, because it is only the setup to what lies ahead. You may wish to see that “great life” as the one to come, the new resurrection-life after we die that Jesus bought for us on Easter, or it can start this very day; your choice. Many of us Green Valley folks are already half way there: you left *what you were* behind, and now it's *who you are* that matters. What you *were* made what you *are* a reality.

Perhaps you're thinking, well, that's fine, but it's just talk. And you're right – if you leave it at that. “After I die” is unknowable; but you can choose to make a new start *today*. It's not an “either/or”: you can have both.

You see, God lays a beautiful future right in front of each of us, but you've got to take that future and use it. If today's a new day, treat it that way; the surest way to make today the same as yesterday is to refuse to take what God offers. Just because it's a cliché doesn't make it any less true: “Today is the first day of the rest of your life.” Will you treat today as a beginning, or more of the same?

Whatever your past has been like, whatever has been at its center; whatever you've put first; whatever you've allowed to push you around, or whomever you've spent your life pushing around, Easter is God's way of inviting you to start again, and from a place better than where you were a moment ago.

Does that mean your hair will grow back, your family will start speaking to each other, and there'll be world peace? Well, your hair won't grow back, but it will be a step in the right direction for the rest.

You can have your own resurrection Sunday right here and now. Take God at his word, that today is a new day for you to enjoy, you and everyone you meet. Christ died and rose again for

you to have it. The Message's version of Psalm 18:24 says, "I feel put back together, and I'm watching my step. God rewrote the text of my life when I opened my heart to his eyes."

In today's reading from Luke, two important things happened among Jesus' followers that first Easter. Number one: the women discovered his body was missing, and they were confused. Then the angels reminded them: "He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again?" (Lk 24:6,7, NIV) They remembered, believed, and told the rest. They spread the good news they'd already known, news they now knew to be true.

The second thing was this: most of the rest of Jesus' followers didn't believe them. No surprise; the women heard it straight from angels – it was easy for them to accept. And it's easy for us to understand why the others didn't believe them – they'd only got it secondhand. But Peter kept his heart open. He decided to check it out, went to look for himself, saw enough, and went home, amazed, taking with him everything he needed to change his – and our – world.

We're like Peter. You, like Peter, will all go home from here. And that's where you make the resurrection a part of your

life: will you live a new life there, today? It's yours, and Jesus Christ offers it to you. Happy Easter.