

"The Difference the Resurrection Makes"

In the living of life, we have all experienced at one time or another good news that just seemed to be too good to be true. An encounter took place one day in a hospital corridor. The man approached with joy and a radiance written all over his face. He joyously said, "My wife....she's going to live! I can't believe it but she's going to live!"

How true this very feeling must have been for the disciples. As we hear from our text, it was almost too good to be true. The Jesus they had lived with was alive again! Notice what a difference the good news of Jesus' resurrection made in their lives. This difference is still evident today, too. Look at "The Difference the Resurrection Makes!" It drives out fear. It empowers for witness.

The setting of our text is that first Easter Sunday, at evening. On the Friday before, all the hopes and dreams of these disciples came crashing to the ground because their leader, Jesus, had been killed. He was dead. All seemed to be lost. Fear began to become a very big part of their days and their lives. But there were now reports about the women going to the tomb of Jesus and finding it empty. Two disciples who had been walking on the Emmaus Road had just returned and informed the disciples that they had seen the Lord and talked with him. But it still seemed too good to be true.

And it was fear itself which played such a big part in the disciples' failure to really believe that Jesus was alive. Notice how Jesus breaks down the unbelief of the disciples: "While they were still talking about this (the report given by the disciples who had been on the Emmaus Road), Jesus himself stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, 'Why are you troubled and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.'" The risen Savior appeared in his glorified resurrection body. By showing them his hands and his feet, Jesus was, in effect, pinching the disciples to assure them that they were not dreaming. He wanted them to believe and not be afraid. He showed them he was alive to do just that.

But he not only showed those disciples that he was alive. He drove out their fear as he spoke the Gospel, God's Word of Truth. Jesus said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." Notice how Jesus drove out the fear which blocked a hearty trust and faith! He spoke the Scriptures, the Word of God, the Gospel! The Scriptures, the Bible, they contain the good news of Jesus' suffering and dying to pay for the sin of the world. These same Scriptures – Old and New Testament – contain the Good News of the Savior's victory over sin and death clearly demonstrated in the fact that he rose from the dead. This good news of the resurrection drives out fear and inspires a faith and trust. Look again at verse 45 of our text and see how it is God alone as he works through the good news of the resurrection of Jesus who can drive away fear once and for all and can create faith: "Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."

There are still too many who, even today, prevent the good news of Jesus' resurrection from taking root in their heart because they let fear and worry dominate their lives. Isn't it also true that fear and anxiety have filled our hearts and minds too often and have stopped us from growing in our faith, in the good news of the resurrection. Jesus' rebuke could still be directed very appropriately at your life today: "Why are you troubled and why do doubts rise in your

minds?" Why are you so pessimistic and feel that no one and nothing can help you? Why are you so anxious about those things which you have no control over – what other people think, what's going to happen tomorrow? Why have you given up on me and my Word of truth? Friend, why do you let grudges and agitation fester? Friend, why do you let restlessness invade your soul and heart by reliving that which is past and done? If you examined your life truthfully, you'd find that fear and anxiety have prevented the good news of the resurrection from really working as it can!

Linus was talking to Charlie Brown in the Peanuts comic strip and observed, "I guess it's wrong, always to be worrying about tomorrow. Maybe we should think only about today." Charles Brown replied, "No, that's giving up! I'm still hoping that yesterday will get better." How many aren't still – even today – living in "yesterday?" The good news of the resurrection of Jesus is that we have a God who not only makes all of our yesterdays better – he makes all of our today's and tomorrows and forevers better because he forgives us our sin in His Son, Jesus Christ. Even today and we can count on it – even tomorrow and forever – Jesus stands among us and says, "Peace be with you." This peace that Jesus announces to you is not just a wish – it is a fact! Jesus has won peace with God for us. Because he took away our sin on the cross, we have peace and are at peace with the God of this universe. The fact that Jesus lives proves we have peace with God.

The good news of the resurrection still works. It drives out fear. It will drive out fear and anxiety from your heart. Don't you want to live at peace with others and live at peace with your God? Don't you want to live without the tension and fear and anxiety which saps strength and makes the days all so long? Let his Word sink into the deepest parts of your life! The good news of the resurrection still works. It's been said before but it's worth repeating: the only thing you can do to prevent the Lord from bringing you resurrection peace is to simply say, "No thanks!" To give him only an hour a week, if that, and then spend most of your other waking hours worrying about this and that, what you are going to do, what you're going to make, who's talking about you or what they are saying. That will bring restlessness and anxiety into your heart permanently. But is that really what you want?

And where are you right now? Look not only at the benefit you personally receive! What could you become as you permit God's Good News of the resurrection to work? Let's look at the last part of our text to see how the Good News of the resurrection also works. For, it not only drives out fear. But it also empowers for witness.

The Good News of the resurrection of Jesus empowers people for witnessing. Jesus wants all people to come to know the peace which he won. He wants all people to find out how they can live eternally. See, Jesus doesn't want people to live with fear and restlessness – not when he has provided a solution to the fear and restlessness. And he has! The forgiveness of sin which he won is the very news which people need to drive out fear. And Jesus wants to drive that fear away. We hear him stating just that in our text: "He told them: 'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.'"

It's obvious how we are involved in all of this. We are witnesses of his resurrection. We cannot claim to be unaware of that good news! We have received the good news of the resurrection which not only drives away fear but also empowers us for witnessing, yes for witnessing, for showing and telling others about the good news of the resurrection. We have received the gift of the Holy Spirit as he works in his Word. We have been clothed with power from on high because God has shared his Good News with us. "I am going to send you what my Father has promised," Jesus said. Unlike the disciples, we don't have to wait! God has empowered us for witness. We can say with Peter in the Book of Acts, "He commanded us to preach to the people

and to testify that he (Jesus) is the One whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." Peter's words remind us that our witness must be specific. If we are given the chance to speak or to add our two-cents worth, we can't be general. We can't give people the impression that everyone will make it to heaven eventually, no matter what they believe. You may pat a neighbor on the back for doing good or for being a good Joe but you can't forever leave that person with the impression that his goodness must mean he's OK with the Lord. Look again at Jesus' specific instructions: "Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.... You are witnesses of these things."

The simple fact of the matter is that we, as God's people, cannot live in a neutral position, neither for Jesus or against him. We need to be his witness – for our own soul's sake! If the good news of Jesus' resurrection really is good and sounds good and means good for you and me, it will be shared. How can we find salvation and not want to share it with others?

Survivor Eva Hart remembered the night of April 15, 1912, when the ship Titanic sank 12,000 feet to the floor of the Atlantic Ocean after an iceberg ripped a gash in its side. Eva Hart recalled years later the horror of that evening: "I saw all the horror of its sinking and I heard, even more dreadful, the cries of drowning people." Although twenty lifeboats were launched, most of the passengers ended up struggling in the icy sea because those who managed to find a lifeboat didn't call out for those still in the water, they just wandered aimlessly in the night, silently, because each feared a crush of unknown swimmers would cling to their lifeboat, eventually swamping it.

Isn't that example a parallel to the very thing the Lord shares with us this morning? One of the biggest obstacles we face in sharing the good news of the resurrection is fear. What will others say? How will it affect me? But it is the very news of the resurrection which is to drive away that kind of fear in you so you can witness! May the good news of the resurrection work THAT way in you, too. May it work both ways in you, too! May it work to drive out fear and then may it work to empower you for witness. While people drown in the treacherous waters around us, we are tempted to stay dry and make sure no one rocks the boat. Yet, that boat is not ours and OUR safety came only at the expense of the One who overcame our own fear and our own death with his resurrection – and saved us.... So we can help others! Let us always look to the One who has overcome our fears and death itself with his own life and death and resurrection. Let us always live in the difference the resurrection makes!