

Easter 2017

04/16/17

John 11:25

I am the resurrection, and the life.

I always chuckle at our cultural penchant for combining sacred and secular values for our two most prominent Christian holidays: Christmas and Easter. Even Valentine's Day started as a pagan holiday celebrating fertility. There is also All Saint's Day and Halloween weaving together. We are a social species and we like to come together and celebrate.

But it can be confusing. I saw a video that has a 3 year old girl talking to her daddy about Easter. She asks, "Why do you give me chocolates. The whole country is gripped by obesity. But all our celebrations have loads of chocolates." At one point she asks, "Are the Easter Bunny and Jesus pals? Is the Easter Bunny in the Bible? Does Jesus totally love chocolate then? You know what I really don't get? Bunnies don't even lay eggs."

Amidst all the lessons we have to sort through as we clarify the secular and the sacred distinctions for ourselves and our children – Christmas, Jesus, and Santa, and Easter, Jesus, and the Easter Bunny – there are many important lessons that surround this holy week that culminate today with the resurrection of Jesus.

One part of this week that we miss is the crucifixion. Jesus is betrayed by Judas, and in time is brought before Pontius Pilate,

who was the Roman Governor of Israel. Pilate serves as an excellent example of where ego-based thinking leads.

As you recall, Pilate could find nothing wrong, no crime committed. But instead of pronouncing him not guilty, he succumbed to the pressure of the crowd that wanted Jesus punished, and gave them the choice of freeing Barabbas or Jesus. The crowd demanded the freedom of Barabbas.

Pilate then took water and washed his hands stating that he was innocent of the blood of this person. He lacked the confidence to face conflict. Many of us suffer this trait – we value what others think more than we value our own beliefs, and place more importance upon their opinions than on our own, even when we know we are correct.

Pilate saw that even if he made the right decision, nothing good for him would come of it. Apathy often overcomes us when we do not have the conviction to do what is right despite the lack of personal gain. This is how the ego responds.

Pilate may have been fearful that he would lose face among the people, and lose control and his power and esteem in their eyes would diminish. He didn't want to fail; he knew there was trouble brewing and probably didn't want to look bad to his superiors.

He would not take responsibility for his choices, so he tried to 'wash his hands' of the results.

So Jesus was crucified and buried.

His disciples felt lost – their teacher, mentor, and leader was gone. Hope was lost. The Pharisees and all the religious leaders were delighted that their chief competition was out of the game. The Roman government was glad to see the distraction removed and the turmoil resolved.

Yet it was anything but a normal crucifixion. Just prior to the death of Jesus, it was reported that there was a mid-day darkness that affected the entire region. I look on this as a blessing from God. There may be times when we are at our lowest, and experiencing our own trials and crucifixion, that God will grace us with relief, and temper the heat of the experience for us; shielding us from the greatest pain.

Upon giving up his spirit, a large and substantial curtain on the Temple was torn. Sixty feet long, 30 feet high, and 4 inches thick; this was no easy task. The curtain was there to deny access of the Jewish worshippers to the “Holy of Holies”, that innermost tabernacle. It represented the separation between God and man; because of our sins they thought we were not worthy of communing with God.

The torn curtain symbolizes that there is no barrier between us and God, which is one of the lessons the Christ brings. When we free ourselves from the control of the ego, relinquish our attempts to control other people and the circumstances around us, and allow

our spiritual natures to express, we realize we have full access to God at all times through the Christ within.

Also at Jesus' death, there was an earthquake that split rocks and opened up tombs of holy people. At a deeper level this represents the buried good thoughts, words, and actions that are latent within us. We are awaiting Spirit to 'shake us up' and reveal our true nature.

We have all gone through a crucifixion of some kind: we've felt the fear, the pain, the dread, and sorrow. At some point we have faced the dark and walked into it. Perhaps the journey is tougher than we anticipate, and our vision of the outcome may not include the intensity of the effort and the skills required, or the length of time involved. At times we will feel alone in our struggles, as Jesus did when he quoted the Psalm 22 and said, "My God, why have you forsaken me?"

This is not unlike what Jesus faced; he knew what was in store for him. He knew there would be pain and suffering, but he also knew he would come out the other side intact, whole, and his mission accomplished.

Yet, God's will cannot be denied. He strengthens us, and we endure. When we fall He offers His hand. He guides us, but we must make the effort; we must take the steps, and we must look for and accept the help.

Jesus knew that part of his purpose was to demonstrate in a dramatic way the provisional nature of death: it is not the end of anything, the grave holds no power over us; we are made to be victorious.

The Christ knew he would fulfill his mission, but what does that mean to us? I think in part it means that we can accomplish whatever God has placed in our hearts with a new hope. The visions, dreams, goals, talents, desires, and inclinations to do good works and accomplish much through service to others are within our grasp. We are divinely held when we are doing God's work. We experience the resurrection within us as we trust in God's hands to gently carry us above the human condition.

The Easter story is a personal story for each of us; a time to remember who we are: a child of God with the indwelling Christ as the center of our lives, thoughts, words, and actions. Through the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus showed the way past our limited and erred human thinking to the salvation of God's love, light, peace, power, and joy.

He is risen! Hallelujah! This is the joyous message of Easter. Let this phrase be the call for us to examine our own lives. Where are we in the Holy Week? Are we celebrating? Are we going through a crucifixion? Are we in the cold dark tomb awaiting the angel-thoughts of God to awaken us to our true nature? Have we fully embraced our Divine nature and chosen to express our Christ-light rather than unleash the ego nature? Have we had a resurrection experience of our own?

Let us rejoice that through Him we rise out of every belief that would limit or bind us. Let us rejoice that through Him we rise out of our old selves, out of our old thoughts into new life, new light, new joy, and new strength. Through Him we rise to the reality of our divine nature, of who we truly are.

My prayer is that the lessons of this Easter Season instill within us the faith and courage to face our trials knowing that we are not alone. I pray that we can allow the Christ within us to come forward, express through us, and raise us up in the Light of God so that our hearts shout, "Hallelujah! He lives; He has risen!"

Let us pray....