

Ephesians 1:15-23

Second Baptist Church, Lincoln, NE April 4, 2010
EASTER worship.

Celebrating the Gift of Life

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,

¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength,

²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,

²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,

²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

I read a note on a computer blog a few days ago. The person wrote, *"I wish that I could afford a bigger house, I wish that I wasn't married to a man that is mentally and verbally abusive and I wish he would also hold down a REAL job for once, I wish that I could be with my daughter's real father, I wish that I knew how to change the downhill slope my life is on!!!"*

Do you ever find yourself wishing your life could be different? All around us, we see people whose lives are in despair. Broken families, emotional pain, fear of the future, guilt about the past, and dissatisfaction with the present? All of these hurts amount to frequent tears, and deep feelings of anger and resentment. The hard part of having those feelings is that we also feel alone in our pain. We ask, *"How could anyone ever know what I'm feeling."*

Too often, when we feel this way, we further isolate ourselves by running away from those who could best help us. We cut off family and friends. We stop going to church and we withdraw more and more and sink into the depth of despair. To make matters worse, since we don't tell anyone, we somehow become resentful when someone doesn't come along and help us. Somehow they are supposed to read our minds.

It's a vicious circle that is life depleting. It sinks us lower and lower into despair. I'm here this morning with Good News for you. It's not about a temporary solution or an emotional bandaid to mask over our pain. The good news I'm talking about is promised in the Bible and hand-delivered by the Holy Spirit.

You might be reacting to my remarks by now, thinking, "*How does he get off making these kinds of claims? How does he know what I'm feeling – and what I've been through?*" Well, admittedly, I don't know what you are feeling. I may not have walked in your shoes, experienced what you felt. I DO know a solution, however.

There were twelve men and several women who walked with Jesus for three years. He brought them joy and guidance and a purpose for living. Their whole lives revolved around this one man who merely by SPEAKING, made everything about life make sense. They saw him as their master and savior and they knew that without Him, there was very little hope. It all seemed to begin to make sense when they went with him into Jerusalem and the crowds hailed him as the messiah as they laid palm branches down on the ground. Peter was excited to see Jesus finally fulfill his destiny. John was overjoyed to be with Jesus as he entered the city that kings had occupied since the time of David. All the other disciples could hardly wait to become his "cabinet" for this new kingdom.

But that week brought about a horrible, dismal turn of events that left the disciples scared and confused. When they left that upper room, they clung to the last few moments with Jesus before his arrest. Desperate Peter lashed out at a soldier and cut off his ear. Jesus healed the guard but was taken into custody. After that we lose track of most of the disciples except Peter who three times denied that he even knew Jesus. These guys hit bottom. They didn't know where to turn. All their hopes and dreams of being with Jesus died when he died on the cross. They lost everything.

Perhaps you can relate to those disciples. You have hit what seems like "THE BOTTOM" and you don't know where to turn. That pretty much describes the disciples. Yet Jesus wasn't finished. I liked what the Wizard of ID Cartoon had in edition a number of years ago. The king is standing outside the church on Good Friday talking to the Monk. "Lemme get this straight...God comes to earth as one of us...and we kill him? Your Lord is Dead! There's a big earthquake, and the temple is torn from top to bottom! What the heck is so GOOD about that FRIDAY?" The Monk answers: "His curtain call!"

What a great, simple lesson in the meaning of the gospel. Satan thought he had defeated Christ. Everyone had turned on Jesus: the Jews, the Romans, even the crowd. They killed him on a cross and they buried him in a tomb.

Just as Satan was walking away thinking, *“Well, I took care of him once and for all”*, The stone was rolled away and Jesus stepped forth from that open grave. The women came to the tomb and found it empty. The disciples, Peter and John RAN to the tomb and they too found it empty. A day or two later when Jesus, the risen Lord, entered that room where the disciples had gathered, amidst disbelief, they saw him and Thomas even placed his fingers on the wounds on his hands and his side. There was a new day that had dawned for these depressed, defeated followers of Jesus.

These disciples, people who LIKE US, would sometimes feel defeated, broken, living with seemingly impossible odds. In Paul’s prayer written in Eph 3:14-21, Paul alludes to the curtain call, the completed act of God’s love through Jesus Christ extending to each one of us. This prayer is for you as much as it is for the Ephesians. There is HOPE! There is God’s assurance that all would be well. And the exciting news comes in the last words of this prayer: *¹⁴For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵from whom his whole family^[a] in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. ²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

Now I can hear some of you say, *“Sure, Jesus came out of the tomb and came back to life and ascended into heaven, but how is he going to help me with my problem?”* How is he going to help you with your problem? He came back to life after being killed. He’s proven himself as the son of God. Giving us assurance and genuine help is what he does! Let’s take a few minutes and examine what it is he can do for you and me.

First, Jesus is the **Giver of Life**. In John 10:10 Jesus said, *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”* The bottom line? If your life is miserably unhappy, chances are YOU’VE BEEN RIPPED OFF. The Thief has come and robbed you of your joy. It doesn’t mean life is supposed to be EASY, it means it will be FULL.

For example, the disciples did not have it easy. They were constantly being jailed and persecuted as they preached the gospel during the days of the early church. Of the 12 original disciples, 10 of them died martyrs deaths, suffering terribly. Yet they were certainly not miserable and they were not without joy. If your life is without JOY, then you have been robbed. The same Satan who thought he had victory over Jesus when Jesus was crucified, also believes that he has victory over you if you are living a life without the joy that Christ has to offer you. The theme of our Lenten adventure (which ends today) has been Seeing the Unseen Christ: How His presence Transforms Life. We have been using the scenario *“If Jesus were present here with us today, how would it transform our lives.”* Today’s theme is *“We would celebrate God’s gift of life at its best.”*

But many folks have “settled”. You know, they have been kind of like Eeyore in Winnie the Pooh. Moping around saying, *“Well, I guess this is as good as it gets. I’ll just have to settle for what life has to sling at me.”* I can assure you that this kind of attitude is a far cry from what God has to offer each of us. He wants us to celebrate life as a great gift.

Satan just loves this because if he can keep us distracted from God’s gift, then he wins the battle. It’s easy for us to get distracted in our daily lives. Overly crowded schedules with far too many things packed into a week can send us into a tail spin. It especially keeps us off balance in our spiritual lives.

Conclusion....

Here we are at the end of this Lenten adventure and I pray that it has been a joyful trip for you. I hope you’ve started some new habits that will continue. I also pray for those of you who might be facing circumstances you don’t believe you are able to face. The fact is, you CAN’T do it on your own, but you belong to the one who can help you through.

I pray that you will have the joy the disciples had when they experienced the risen Lord. He IS the resurrection and life. He IS your only hope. My Easter wish for you is to *“know the unseen Christ”*. Let him transform your life.

AMEN

Let us pray. Lord, you gave your son as the sacrifice for us. And he overcame the enemy of death. Yet we still struggle because of the overwhelming sense that there is still more that we need. We sometimes feel cheated by life and we fail to experience your full joy. Instead of joy, we become trapped in the pit of anger

and resentment. Father, help us to give all this to you and receive your good gifts. Amen.