

Text: Matthew 28:1-8

Date: Easter - April 8, 2007

Theme: Be More Than Just An Easter Morning Christian

In the name of our Risen Lord and Savior, Dear Christian Friends,

Easter is a special time for Christians. Why just look around our church this morning and you can't help but notice all the special flowers filling our chancel area. We have special Easter paraments on our altar, lectern and pulpit. People are wearing special clothes for worship today. Look around you and see all the people who have filled our church this morning

Something special must be going on. Volunteers have planned a special Easter fellowship breakfast this morning. We have a special order of worship filled with special hymns and songs by our choirs, Scripture readings which speak about the wonderful and glorious resurrection of Jesus from the grave. In light of all the special things that happen on Easter Sunday morning a worshipper once made the comment, *"You know Easter worship is so very special, so beautiful, so wonderful, so comforting, so reassuring. I wish Easter could be put into a little box and opened again and again whenever I needed. I wish Easter joy could be more than just an hour long."*

Many of the Easter worshipers here today and across our country also wish that Easter joy could last longer than just an hour or so. And yet they won't return to church next week to hear the Easter message of Jesus' powerful defeat over sin, death and hell by his resurrection from the grave. Many people wish that the joy and peace of the Easter message could last longer than an hour or so and yet they are more than willing to return to the same family arguments, the same fighting, the same disobedience and lying that there was before Easter. Many people want the comfort of the Easter message to last longer than an hour or so and yet there are not willingly to share that joy and comfort with a neighbor or family member who doesn't know about Jesus the risen Savior. People who like the special things of Easter Sunday, special worship, flower, singing, but don't do anything with it can be called "Easter Morning Christians." It seems that these "Easter Morning Christians" enjoy all the special things about Easter but when the day is done some are all too quick to turn the page on the calendar and forget about Easter for another year. But for such Easter Morning Christians, Easter is only a page on the calendar that is torn off and forgotten by Monday morning.

Today God's Word reminds us that Easter with its special message is much more than a day on the calendar. For the true believer Easter joy doesn't stop when the sermon has ended or when the choir is done singing or when the flowers fade or when the church doors are locked. Easter joy is not kept in a little box, but it is kept in the heart of faith. Faith in the risen Savior is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is created and preserved in the heart only one way; through the Word of God. And on this Easter morning may the Holy Spirit once more through the Words of Holy Scripture instill in us real and lasting Easter joy that will not fade away in a week or two or be locked in a little box. May the Holy Spirit give us the faith to **BE MORE THAN JUST EASTER MORNING CHRISTIANS.** We know that we are more than just Easter morning Christians when we 1) worship the risen Savior each new morning of the year, when we 2) celebrate his victory over death and when we 2) share his message of love and forgiveness with others.

1. By Worshipping

Do you know on what day of the week it was that Jesus rose from the dead? If you do, you've probably learn it from the words of our text today. The Bible says: **AFTER THE SABBATH, AT DAWN ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, MARY MAGDALENE AND THE OTHER MARY WENT TO LOOK AT THE TOMB.** A person might ask, *"What's so important about knowing the day of the week on which Jesus rose from dead?"* Knowing the day of the week on which Jesus rose from the dead is extremely important to the heart of faith. The day that Jesus rose from the dead is the exact day that he predicted he would rise from the dead. Jesus had said about his body: **DESTROY THIS TEMPLE AND IN THREE DAYS I WILL RAISE IT AGAIN.** Jesus died on Friday. Three days later would be Sunday according to the Jewish method of counting, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Sunday was the day Jesus predicted he would rise from the grave. His enemies knew exactly what day Jesus was speaking about so they posted guards in front of his tomb. They did this to make sure that the disciples wouldn't steal the body of Jesus and claim that his words had come true. The Bible makes it very clear that Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday.

When people quickly lose their Easter joy, when it only lasts for one special day it may be because they have forgotten what day it was that Jesus rose from the dead. It was Sunday and since that time Christians have been using the first day of the week to remember that first Easter Sunday as they continue to worship the resurrected Savior of the world. But there seems to be a lot of things that cause us to forget about that Easter Sunday joy. The first day of the week is a day when many would rather sleep than worship. Some would say, *"It's the only day of the week for myself and I'm going to use it for me."* But the happiest people today are those who have been worshipping Jesus their Savior every Sunday, every week, throughout the whole year. The people who will have the greatest and longest lasting Easter joy will be those who come back to church next week and the weeks after that to hear the wonderful assurance of sins forgiven, peace and pardon before God in heaven.

God gives us this promise concerning a lasting Easter faith: FAITH COMES FROM HEARING THE MESSAGE AND THE MESSAGE IS HEARD THROUGH THE WORD OF CHRIST. God's promises are always true. And the truth of the matter is that lasting Easter joy fills our hearts with faith every time we hear the Word of God. And so we can worship our risen Savior not only on Sundays, but on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, or any day. And we do. We worship with other believers in God's house of worship throughout the year. We worship God in our own houses through home Bible reading and family devotions with our spouse

and children. When we worship our Lord every day our lives are filled with his love for us so that we have real power to stop arguing with family members, real power to forgive as we have been forgiven, real power to stop the cycle of doubt, worry and despair. God promises us that when we hear that special Easter message of the resurrected Savior more than just on Easter Sunday, he has made and will continue to make us more than just an Easter morning Christian.

2. By Celebrating

For the first Easter morning Christians it wasn't a happy scene at all. The Word of God tells us that the women who came to the tomb brought sweet-smelling spices to anoint the body of Jesus. This march to the tomb was not a joyful sunrise worship service; instead it was a funeral procession. At least that's what was on the minds of the women. But what had happened to their faith? They had followed Jesus for now three years, hearing and believing his many other teachings. They heard him predict his own death and his victory over death. Where was there faith in the promise of his resurrection from the dead? Why were they so afraid and worried on that first Easter morning?

Like the women on that first Easter, we all have things in life that make us sad and afraid. Our life is full of worries and trouble and problems. There are strained relationships in our family. Our bodies are getting older and weaker with every passing day. We can't seem to find a decent job or the one we have is on shaky ground leaving us wondering how long we will keep our job. But most of all our sinful nature causes us to question and worry about the day when we will be placed in our own tomb.

When the women approached the tomb they had proof after proof that there was nothing to be sad about, nothing to be afraid of. The huge stone which had sealed the tomb was now rolled away. Looking inside they saw an empty tomb. Two angels announced to them that Jesus was alive and asked: **WHY DO YOU LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD?** And if that wasn't enough proof that Jesus keeps his promises then listen to what happened during the days that followed. Jesus appeared to Mary, to Peter, to the Emmaus disciples, to the disciples behind locked doors without Thomas and with Thomas and to more than 500 other witnesses. Yes Jesus kept his promise of the resurrection and that's worth celebrating. It's worth celebrating because we know that if Jesus kept this promise he will keep every other promise as well. And doesn't everyone need the assurance of Jesus' promises more than just on Easter Sunday morning. When we face fear and loneliness don't we need Jesus' promise: **SURELY I WILL BE WITH YOU ALWAYS EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE?** When we can't seem to understand why things happen they way they do in our life don't we need Jesus' promise: **AND IN ALL THINGS GOD WORKS FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.** And when we struggle with our guilt and shame over sin don't we need Jesus' promise: **BE OF GOOD CHEER, YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN.**

We cannot put the joy of Easter into a little box, but we do carry that Easter joy around with us all the time by the way we trust in God's help to raise us above every trouble, and by the way we live each day as a victory, not a defeat. Jesus won, and no matter how bad our life gets, in the end we will win, too. When we live in faith by celebrating Jesus' victory each new day, we are more than just Easter morning Christians.

3. By Witnessing

There is yet another way by which God wants us to be more than just an Easter morning Christian. We see it in the actions of the women on that first Easter morning. The Bible says: **SO THE WOMEN HURRIED AWAY FROM THE TOMB, AFRAID YET FILLED WITH JOY, AND RAN TO TELL HIS DISCIPLES.** These women had had their funeral march turned into a victory parade. They had had their worries and doubts put to rest by knowing that Jesus had indeed been true to his promise of the resurrection. And now they just couldn't keep it to themselves. They had to share that Easter morning joy with the disciples. And so with great urgency they hurried back to the disciples and told them about the good news.

This urgency to share the Easter message of the resurrection of Jesus was not just for those women. It's a message Jesus commands all Easter Christians to share with others. Jesus said: **YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES... PREACH THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE.**

If there is any lasting sadness about this Easter day, it is that many Christians misunderstand these words of Jesus. They mistakenly think that sharing the Easter message with others is an optional thing or something to do when you have some spare time. Some think it's a job for those who have nothing better to do with their time. It's a job for those who don't have families to raise or for those who are retired and no longer have a career to work at. Others think that sharing the Easter message is just something that pastors and teachers need to do. Who do you know who doesn't have lasting Easter joy in their life? Who do you know who is lonely and afraid, who is doubting and questioning, or who is searching for peace and forgiveness? A friend, a family member, maybe a neighbor? Share the Easter joy with them today and tomorrow and in the days to come. God keeps the joy of Easter in our lives when he uses them to bring Easter joy into the lives of others.

Easter is a special time for Christians. But Oh, how it is so much more than a one morning event with choirs and songs, flowers and an Easter breakfast. Easter is so much more than a family gathering feasting on ham and all the trimmings. Easter is more than a one day celebration that ends on Monday morning. Easter joy is a way of life for every Christian. My dear Christian friends, may God's grace, love and forgiveness move each of us to be more than Easter Morning Christians by worshipping, by celebrating and by witnessing to Jesus' certain victory of life over death. Amen.