

Easter Day 2010 Sermon. Fr. Hugh. St. George.

Acts 10. Colossians 3. Luke 24

As I'm sure, many of you have heard the new speeding rule in Florida is totally without mercy. The customary allowance of getting away with a five to ten mile per hour margin is gone by the wayside. If you're just one mile over the limit, you're speeding.

One woman was pulled over for speeding by a police officer.

He said "Ma'am May I see your license".

She said "When are you guys going to get your act together? Yesterday you take my license away and today you want me to show it to you."

It's my pleasure to wish all of you a blessed and joyful Easter. - And to say a special welcome to all of you who are our guests today. Easter morning is of course the best Sunday of the year to check out a local church - because you can go in under the radar and be fairly confident that no one will call you.

Easter... So... Why do those of us who believe insist that Jesus was more than a Master Teacher?

Why do we insist on calling Him Lord?

Christianity hinges on the claim that the Christ became a man; that He died and He rose again from the dead; that He is still living and reigning in Heaven; and that through faith in Him we also may gain entrance into God's eternal kingdom.

The true power of Christianity springs from the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

The love of God made its ultimate expression in the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. And either the resurrection is the truth, or this life is all there is.

An atheist was on vacation and was touring some historic buildings. On this particular day, he was going around a monastery and admiring its beautiful architecture.

However, at the end of the tour he couldn't resist going up to an elderly monk and saying:

“Do you realize that if God does not exist and no sane person can believe He does, you will have wasted your entire life?”

The Monk answered, “If I am wrong I will have wasted sixty years. But if you are wrong you will have wasted all of eternity.”

I believe a hundred per cent, and I hope you do too, that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ opened up a new possibility for people – the possibility that this life is not all there is; but that this life prepares us for an eternal life far more magnificent than we can imagine.

Twenty-eight years ago, President George Bush Senior attended a remarkably unusual funeral.

He went to Moscow for the funeral of the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev.

The widow Mrs. Brezhnev stood quietly beside her husband's open coffin. Then just before the coffin was closed, she suddenly reached in and made the sign of the cross over her husband's chest.

Can you imagine this extraordinary act of silent protest against the world's most powerful atheistic regime? The wife of the man who ran the Soviet machine hoped that her husband had it wrong.

She prayed that there was another life after death and that Jesus who died on the Cross and rose again, in His mercy, would give her husband one final chance to cross over to that life.

Some people find the idea of the real physical death of Jesus, followed by His real physical resurrection to be a stumbling block; because obviously it flies in the face of normal expectations. But God is not limited by our normal expectations.

God is absolutely supernatural, and fortunately for us, He chose to act in the way He saw best to rescue us from dead end lives stained with sin.

Every year, people whose intellectual growth has outstripped their shallow capacity for spiritual insight, publish important sounding books that claim that Jesus and the Resurrection are just a myth.

They pursue desperate theories to explain away the power of God, but in the end, Jesus' tomb is hauntingly beautifully empty.

Saying the Resurrection is 'just a myth' doesn't make it so, any more than stating that 'water is dry' would make it so.

A young man named David Nelson went to college, where he soon lost his faith. Imagine that.

But his conscience remained strong.

His more enlightened friends told him that feelings of conscience were just a hangover from his ridiculous early religious training and he would get over it soon enough.

Wanting to get along with his peers, he tried reading the works of leading atheists. But the more he read the more he became clear that their arguments were bankrupt. He became wholeheartedly converted and ended up writing a book about his journey, called “The Cause and the Cure of Infidelity.”

Dr. Greenleaf was a Professor of Law at Harvard University. He was considered the leading authority on legal evidence in his day. Now only a law professor could come up with a title like this one... This has to be one of the least juicy book titles I’ve ever encountered – Wait for it...

“An examination of the testimony of the four gospel writers, by the rules of evidence that are administered in the Courts of Justice.”

Just reading the title could put you to sleep.

But Dr. Greenleaf stated that according to the laws of legal evidence used in the Courts, there is more evidence for the historical fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ than for any event in ancient history.

On Easter morning, the huge stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty.

You have to think that the tombstone weighed two tons, as much as a Mercedes.

They used to roll the stones into place down a slope. To open the tomb you’d have had to roll a two-ton rock back up the slope. Not an easy chore.

Then think that the Romans had placed guards around the tomb. The Roman Army employed a powerful motivational technique for keeping the guards on task. Any soldier who fell asleep on guard duty was spit roasted over an open fire.

I think that kind of pressure might just help you to stay awake for the night shift.

And here's a thought. In those days, women had no rights and their opinions were given no consideration.

If Jesus' disciples were inventing a story about His rising from the dead why would they say it was three women who were the first to know, when that suggested an embarrassing lack of credibility.

But the Almighty God in His Wisdom chose to honor those three wonderful, devoted women, Mary, Salome and Mary and let them be the first to discover that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Personal life changes are the most compelling testimony to the power of the Resurrection.

On that Friday Jesus's disciple slunk away disheartened, depressed and defeated.

On the Sunday, they were transformed into joyful and courageous optimists.

One minister was challenged to a debate by an atheist. The minister replied "Sure I'll debate you if you can tell me of a hundred people whose lives have been marvelously changed by atheism –

- people who've been freed from alcoholism, or drug addiction, or a life of crime for example.

His challenger just stared at him blankly.

"Well then, how about fifty? Ten? Five?" He could only weakly reply, "I don't think I can do that."

On the other hand, to be fair there are people who look at some churchgoers and say “If those people represent Christianity, I don’t want any part of it.”

To which we can only reply honestly, “If you think I’m bad now you should have met me before!”

Christians are not perfect. We’re just forgiven - And we have the seed of perfection – the seed of the spirit of the resurrected Jesus Christ, in us.

The Resurrection says that God loves us.

He loves us just the way we are and He invites us to share in His resurrected life. At the same time, He loves us too much to let us stay the way we are. But He leads us into a finer, more loving way of being.

When people really get the power and magnificence of the risen Lord and how it directly affects them, a wonderful change starts to come over them –

A change that when we embrace it, will fill us with love, joy and wisdom.

True Christianity is not a “pick and choose” Easter basket. It’s a “Yes, I believe,” or it’s nothing.

You can measure your retirement in terms of years, or, you can measure your retirement in terms of infinity. A self-indulgent life here is a sorry substitute for a glorious eternity there.

The death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is either a myth, or it is the truth. Some people like to debate that.

But I say it’s not a debate, it’s a decision. A decision we each have to make for ourselves once and for all.

If we decide that it is true and commit to living in harmony with the risen Christ, we will know the difference. No one else can decide for us.

How do you vote?

Do you agree with the Good Friday Panel of Herod and Pilate, of Judas and Caiaphas?

Or do you agree with the Easter Day panel of Mary and Peter; of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John?