

## EASTER, 2018

### Mark 16.1-17

---

And they went out from the tomb, but said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Easter changes everything.

\*\*\*\*\*

In 1996 the Dodge car company came out with a commercial that claimed for one of its new car lines, "This changes everything." Almost twenty years later the Ford company came out with an ad for one of its redesigned trucks. It, too, proudly boasted, "This changes everything."

Of course, nothing really changed. A car is a car. A truck is a truck. Under all the fancy accessories and high-techy gadgets, both are still vehicles to get you and whatever else is in them from one place to another. This changes everything? Hardly.

So many things in our celebrity and media frenzy culture are played up as momentous changes, but in the end are not. In the end, though the names and places and particulars change, nothing really changes. It is the same old, same old.

Events and inventions are trumpeted as "revolutionary changes." Something totally new, unique has happened. We might remember that the word "revolution" is from the same root as "revolve," meaning to go around in a circle. Nothing really changes; you always come back to where you started.

The earliest form of human religion, and even today, conceives of reality, of life, as an eternal wheel that goes round and round. Beneath the outward appearances of what goes on in the world – which we mistakenly regard as "news – there is a pattern that is eternal and unchanging. Life is really just one big circle. Your job in life is to figure out your place in the scheme of things, make peace with it, and do what is necessary until you die. But don't expect anything to really change.

In our time the cycle of sports fills the void of the ancient but no longer believed mythologies. One season follows another as teams vie to become

champions. But beneath it all, nothing really changes.

Two years ago, the Chicago Cubs won the World Series. It was their first in over a century. But nothing really changed. This week a new baseball season began. Who will be champion seven months from now? Whoever it is, nothing will really have changed.

Tomorrow college basketball will have a new champion. For one brief shining moment some people from some university will be able to stick their arms in one of those big foam hands and boast, "We're #1." And then it will be back to the same old, same old. And nothing really will have changed.

\*\*\*\*\*

The only real change that ever happened was when God raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus, or something that happened as a result of the resurrection or was influenced by the resurrection of Jesus is the only thing of which it can be said, "This changes everything."

Why? Well, to begin with, Jesus was dead. Dead as the doornail in Charles Dicken's A Christmas Carol. Or as the Munchkins would say, "He is not merely dead, but really and sincerely dead." And dead people, as we know, have this unhappy habit of staying dead.

But then came Easter morning and the light that shone out of the darkness of a tomb, "He is risen." Jesus is risen: that is the first and fundamental confession of the Christian faith.

But what does it mean? Not even the first followers of Jesus comprehended what was going on. Read every one of the Gospels and you will see the disciples – or should we say, "duh-sciples"? – did not get it. They did not understand what was going on. It was not like Jesus came back on Easter and said of the three days just passed, "Well, that was an interesting time, wasn't it? Sure glad it is over." It took a while for even Jesus' closest followers, the ones whom he had spent so much time teaching, to "wrap their heads around it," as we say.

In some ways, the Church ever since then has been trying to understand what is going on, since Jesus is risen and lives. One person described the resurrection like a time-release medicine capsule, gradually releasing its healing capacity through the centuries, quietly, even subtly changing the world for the better.

What happened at Easter? What does it mean to say, "Jesus is risen?" Several things can and must be said.

First, the disciples did not make the story up. As I said, not even they believed the message at first. The language they used to describe it clearly indicates something happened to them. They were the receivers, not the doers, of whatever took place.

Second, the resurrection was not a revivication. Being raised from the dead is not resuming life where you left off when you died.

Back in 2000 we got two puppies. Two Shelties. I've always liked the breed. They are so intelligent looking. And they are: they trained me well. We named them Bonnie and Clyde. Bonnie died early, hit by a car. But Clyde lived until we had to put him down in November of 2012. I buried him out back, in a garden under an oak tree.

My grandson Jack, then almost three, noticed on his next visit that Clyde was not around. He wanted to know why. We tried to explain that Clyde had died. But for a while Jack would say, anytime he visited, "Some day Clyde is going to get up and come back into the house."

Well, Clyde never did get up and come back. That would have been a revival of life, not a resurrection to new life. The raising of Lazarus was a revival of life, not a resurrection. Lazarus died again. But the risen Jesus did not and will not die again, ever. He lives with His death in His past. And that is something truly unique. No one else has ever done that. And that, it can said, really does change everything.

\*\*\*\*\*

What the resurrection of Jesus showed is that death does not have the last say on our lives. God

does. This simple claim, based on the resurrection of Jesus, means that our God is a God of life.

The resurrection is, therefore, the triumph of hope over despair. Since that first Easter morning Christians have been able, even in the most difficult of circumstances, to hope in a future God prepares, not give in to the sorrows of the moment.

The resurrection of Jesus changed how we understand history. I had a history professor in college who would write on a blackboard all the terms and dates and names and events he was going to include in his lecture that day. Then we were to regurgitate what he told on the test.

That is one way of looking at history. But Christians, being people of the Bible and the resurrection, look at history as His-story; that is, Jesus' story. That story is Creation – Fall – the call of Abraham – Exodus – the prophets – exile and return – the incarnation – the Holy Week – Easter – Pentecost – the coming again and the life of the world to come. That is God's history. It is history with a meaning and a purpose, which enables us to live in faith and hope.

And, ultimately, to do the greatest gift of all: to love. The resurrection is God's victory over sin and evil. It is the power of God's love to conquer evil and turn us from sin to live for Him. On the cross Jesus took in the world's hate, its ignorance, its anxious fears, its pride and prejudice, and gave back love. Like a water purifier that takes in bad water, filters it, and gives back pure water, so did Christ with our sin on the cross. That power is here for us, in every Eucharist, in the body and blood of Christ.

\*\*\*\*\*

And that, good Christians, really does change everything. Amen.