

Please pray with me:

Almighty God, you give us the joy of celebrating our Lord's resurrection.
We ask also that you give us the joys of life in your service,
And bring us at last to the full joy of life eternal;
We ask this in the name of your Son, our Lord. Amen

My message this morning is adapted from an article in the March 11, 08
TGG Newsletter by Shelia Heil. The full text is available upon request.

The later chapters of John's Gospel relate the stories of Jesus:

- Triumphant entry into Jerusalem
- His betrayal, trial, crucifixion
- And the events that followed

This morning in chapter 20 we will focus on the appearance to the disciples. They had gathered (once again) in a small room, perhaps much like the upper room, to plan their next move. They had to be in a state of shock and confusion. Some had witnessed the crucifixion – now Mary Magdalene comes along and says, "I have seen the Lord!"

Read: John 20:19-31 May God add his blessing to the reading of this portion of His Gospel.

Despite all of the assurances that Jesus would overcome death, His band of followers was falling apart.

What kinds of thoughts and feelings do you imagine were going on in the garden, that room? Sadness, fear, frustration, skepticism? Most likely the whole spectrum of emotions. Quite probably a healthy portion of Guilt!

- Mary did not recognize Him until He spoke to her in the garden.
- The disciples didn't recognize the man they had spent the last three years with when He came through the locked door and said "Peace be with you." It wasn't until Jesus showed them His wounds, they knew who he was.
- Then there is Thomas. Thomas unfortunately has become the poster child for doubt. His questions and doubts, in this case, were legitimate. He was not in the room with the others. Thomas would not accept that Jesus was alive until, a week later, he was able to feel the wounds for himself.
- Peter had denied that he knew Jesus, **three times**, just as predicted.

These "loyal followers of Jesus" had to be feeling pretty low about now.

There was a recent newspaper article about a California elementary school that received a \$2,500 cashier's check with an unsigned note.

The note read: "Approximately 32 years ago, myself and a group of local kids broke into a classroom and vandalized the room terribly. I have felt guilty for far too long and want to give something back to the school that I personally took from. I am sorry for any grief that I caused anyone at that time. [signed] A Regretful Baby-Boomer"

It is certainly commendable that this person took responsibility and tried to make restitution for an action that happened over 30 years ago. At the same time, it is sad that the person had to live **with** that guilt and live **without** forgiveness for so many years.

Can you imagine living life under such a weight of guilt? Many people do, often for many years.

Men and women live with guilt because they may feel responsible of the break up of a relationship. Children live with guilt (sometimes carried into adulthood) because they failed to live up to their parents' expectations. Parents live with guilt because a child didn't make a right decision. Some may have guilt because they try to get away with a crime. Others live with guilt because they got a little creative on their taxes. There are those that live with guilt because they can't take the time to make a difference in the life of a child. There may be those in authority that live with guilt for abusing that authority. [All we need to do is check the headlines out of Albany or Washington, DC.]

People live with guilt because of things they have done or should have done.

People live with guilt **because of sin**.

People live with guilt because they have **not** accepted forgiveness
-from others, -from themselves -or from God.

The Bible has many other stories of people in need of forgiveness.

From the very beginning, we read about Cain and Abel. Cain killed his brother.

Jacob took Esau's birthright and blessing and then had to flee for his life.

Judas Iscariot couldn't deal with the guilt in his life after leading the authorities to Jesus.

When I look at Easter, I see the cross and the bloody, cruel death. But, that isn't all.

There is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But even that isn't the whole story.

I see the ascension of the Lord. But, there's even more.

When I look at Easter, I see forgiveness. Jesus forgave from the cross. He looked down at the people who were cursing and killing Him and prayed that they be forgiven.

Even after His resurrection, He forgave Peter. He didn't avoid talking about what was on Peter's mind. He asked whether Peter loved Him and assured Peter of forgiveness. Knowing forgiveness is one reason that Peter could fulfill his life's mission, to go and boldly proclaim Jesus.

The forgiveness of Easter wasn't limited to that time and place. Jesus provided forgiveness for **our** sins on that cross. With His ascension, He sat at the right hand of the Father where He intercedes for **us** today.

Easter is an important time historically. Easter **is** forgiveness. I personally am thankful that such forgiveness as was available in Bible times. I am even more thankful that forgiveness is **still** available now to you and me, and **will** continue to be available as long as there is sin in this world.

It is forgiveness that is life-changing.

Jesus paid the price.

You get to keep the change.

Please pray with me.

Risen Lord, stand among us and cause us to hear what is written in the Scriptures so that we come to truly believe that you are the Son of God; and that by believing, we may have life in your name.

Amen