

This morning please allow me to begin with an overview of the shape of the particular season in which we find ourselves in the church calendar. Easter is the pivot around which this portion of the calendar is organized. The week before Easter, or Holy Week, or the last week of Lent, is an intensive time of mourning and sorrow as we closely follow Christ's last week before His death. Holy week is the last of the 40 days of fasting. Today is the Octave day of Easter – the week which, following Easter, should rightly be marked by celebrations. Unfortunately, it can end up being more of a recovery week from Holy week.

But today isn't the end of the Easter season. Rather Eastertide continues for 40 days, all the way to the Ascension, which always falls on a Thursday. This year Ascension is on May 9 and we will have a Eucharist that night to commemorate it. During Eastertide, we light the Paschal candle, which remains lit throughout the season and represents the resurrected and glorified presence of Christ in this world, pointing to our glorification in the world to come. So we have more intense weeks on either side of Easter, part of larger 40 day seasons.

It is important to note that this structure isn't just an arbitrary definition by the Church. The number 40 is central to this calendar arrangement. Lent takes us into the wilderness with Jesus for His 40 day fast, and ends in His Passion. Likewise the scriptures tell us that Jesus remained on earth with His followers for 40 days from His Resurrection. Forty is the number of preparation and purification. During this time, Jesus is preparing His disciples to take up their new roles as the Apostles, when He leaves and sends the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, 50 days after His Resurrection. Thus we also celebrate Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit, 50 days after Easter. This beautiful arrangement of seasons is truly a gift to us from God in the church.

The central reality of Easter is the bodily resurrection of Christ, which St. Paul says is the first-fruits, the first portion of the harvest which is a promise of the harvest to come. We understand this therefore to point us to our own bodily resurrection. Easter is eschatological. It points to our ultimate end. This is part of what we celebrate during Eastertide.

The sermon this morning is largely based upon the book study that we started in Lent and will finish this Thursday at the vicarage. If anything I say, then, brings fresh understanding, then the credit should largely go to N.T. Wright. Even if you have not been participating in the study, I would commend his book, *Surprised by Hope*, for your reading. We are only touching on the last section of the book this morning, which I find to be very encouraging as well as convicting.

Wright makes the case that our resurrected re-embodied state will be a transformed, glorified

version of our life here and now. You will still be you in the resurrected life. In our lives now, we all, as imagers of God, are involved in creating in this world. Of course we pro-create: new human life is engendered from us. But then we also create from our imaginations and through our work. We make things for art's sake and for usefulness, and sometimes we combine the two, creating things both beautiful and functional. Through creation we express love, and this suggests that all of our acts of love and service to others are also a creative – life giving works. Wright suggests that all of our work done in love for others, which is ultimately love for God, will be transformed and persist into the new world.

And St. Paul says as much in 1 Cor. 3:8-15:

Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.

For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

In other words, what you do, here and now and everyday of your life, has eternal import.

What does this mean for us? Well, let's apply it to the task of mission, of evangelization. One common analogy for what we are doing as Christians, particularly with regard to evangelization, that you all may have heard, is that we see a house on fire and are rushing into the house to pull people out in order to save them. The problem with such an illustration is that it views this world as a burning house which ends up, therefore, as a pile of ashes. Salvation is viewed as escaping from the house – good riddance to it, it is destined for destruction. Why work to preserve a world that is going down in flames? Why should we polish the brass on a

sinking ship? Unfortunately, too many Christians in the last five hundred years have thought like this. These are the ones that strip the forests bare and carelessly pollute because it is all going to be destroyed. Some do this in the physical world, but still more troubling is those that do it metaphorically. Yet, if we can't take care of the simple and small house that we have, then we surely are not prepared to take care of a glorious mansion.

It is notable that the glorified body of Christ about which we read this morning in the gospel lesson, is not a newly materialized body subsequently invested with Christ's spirit. It is the old body of Christ that has been transformed and refreshed with the spirit to which it was previously joined. Wright points out two facts in the biblical narrative that support this. First, the body that was placed in the tomb was the body that was resurrected. The tomb was empty when the disciples came to see for themselves what had happened. The old body wasn't just discarded for a newer model. Second, the body of Christ that appeared in the presence of the disciples bore the wounds of the crucifixion. The scars of this life are transformed to become badges of honor in the life of the world to come. In that world, they will not carry with them the limitations or lack of functionality that they subject us to in this world. Rather the scars we bear will testify to the love with which we loved God and neighbor in this world. These are the scars we gained through our suffering.

What would be a better model or illustration for what kingdom life in this present world is all about? First, our message is not that you can escape the dumpster fire of earth as it is, by going to heaven and therefore don't have to care about it. Rather our message is first that Christ is King of all, He is Lord of all, and the Kingdom has come. Therefore every man, woman, and child is called to submit to the King. This means that every person is called upon to embody Kingdom life now, here. Each one of us is tasked with building for the Kingdom every day and every moment of our lives. We are each outposts of the Kingdom. Where ever we go, we represent the eternal life of God which breaks into this world, transforming it into the eternal kingdom.

Instead of picturing the world as an house on fire, we should see it as a giant junkyard, something that was once good and has been subsequently abused and corrupted. And all of us human beings have our own little piles of junk that we passionately guard. Kingdom life begins first by letting the love of God transform us from junk hoarders into sons and daughters of the King. And then it is about transforming our patch of junk into a beautiful and productive garden. And then it is about sharing the produce of our gardens with those around us and then telling others that they too can become children of the King and create something beautiful and flourishing with their junk piles too. We Christians are about transforming hoarders into gardeners and the junkyard into an incredible garden.

This transformation, mind you, is not the end state of all things. Salvation is not about a social gospel in which humans can fix all the problems by themselves. We will not eradicate all the evil in this world. We will not create a human utopia. But in the power of the resurrected Christ, we and those who come into the Church will be transformed and that transformation necessarily works itself out into the world. Salvation begins with the life of Christ transforming us from inside out. A social gospel cannot change the heart. Only Christ's love for us enlivening our dead spirits with His Spirit, enables us to love God and to become children of God.

In our current world, we will always run into those who stubbornly refuse to give up their junk piles and who reject the King. We will run into others who like to look as if they are part of the King's family, but who secretly hoard their junk, supposedly out of sight of the family. One day, Christ returns, and the spiritual realm of the presence of God will be reunited with the physical realm of this earth. This is described for us in Revelation 21:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

At that time, those rebellious towards God and the pretenders within the kingdom will be judged and removed from the renewed earth. Only he that overcometh shall inherit all things. What things must be overcome? Our natural selves which are grasping, hoarding,

fearful, and prideful must learn to trust in Jesus and to humble ourselves and get to work. We do not have here any indication that one can merely say a sinners prayer or get baptized or ... fill in whatever easy requirement or box to check that one imagines ... and then ignore God or His call to righteousness. The life of Christ in you must work itself out in the world. And we must always continually nurture this life in us. We must seek to be obedient in all things. We must dedicate ourselves to the Kingdom and heed the call to mission, working diligently in the love of Christ.

The Resurrection of Christ does not give us a get out of hell free card. Rather the Resurrection empowers us to truly serve God. Wright makes this point in an observation about St. Paul's great chapter on the Resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15. Throughout that whole chapter, Paul focuses upon the bodily Resurrection of Christ. He begins by emphasizing the importance of the resurrection. "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. ye are yet in your sins. ... But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." So the resurrection is absolutely central to Christianity, and the resurrected Christ is the vanguard for what our resurrected life will be. "in Christ shall all be made alive." Then Paul says that Christ must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. This is our job now. That in the power of Christ, we extend the reign of Christ to all things, for the love of Christ.

Paul then continues with a discussion of the resurrected body which will be our physical bodies transformed in a way that we do not understand, but for which we look to Christ, who, for an example, appeared in the midst of locked rooms, as the prototype. The chapter ends with this glorious passage:

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,
In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound,
and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

But then the very last verse of this chapter, which has been focused primarily on Christ's resurrection and also upon our similar bodily glorification which is ours because of the resurrection, reads like this: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

I do not see here anything that says, "Christ is risen, therefore you go to heaven when you die and can just take the easy way out, here and now, cause it is all going down in flames." What Paul says is, "Christ is risen. Now get to work in the power of the resurrected Christ, for Christ working in and through your works of love, cannot help but to change the world. Christ must reign until all things are subjected unto Him."

This is the message of Easter. This is what we as a parish should be about. This is what each one of you individually should be about. There is a whole community out there that needs to know Jesus. There is a whole world out there that needs to be transformed by the love of God. In the power of Christ's resurrection, may God grant us the grace to truly be His disciples in the pursuit of personal holiness, may God grant us the grace to bring life and beauty into the world in all of our endeavors, and may God grant us the grace to share the overflowing abundance of the joy and life of Christ with all those around us. We have work to do. So let's get to it!

Lord, may Thy Kingdom come, and may Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN.