

“Christ is Risen Indeed!”*John 20: 1-18*

Rev. Ed Hoekstra

We need to be reminded regularly. Every week we need to be reminded. Regular church attendance is helpful in being reminded that Christ is Risen Indeed! Each Sunday service celebrates Christ's resurrection! We easily get distracted away from the foundational knowledge of our lives that because Christ rose from the dead - that gift of eternal life is given to each one of us!

I would like to share a story with you about Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin. At this time in history he was a very powerful man. At the time of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917, he was a confident Communist leader. He was editor of the Pravda newspaper (Pravda means 'truth'). His writings are still read today.

The story goes that Bukharin travelled from Moscow to Kiev in the 1930's to deliver a speech on the subject of Atheism. It was a huge crowd that assembled. During his speech he spoke about the attributes of Atheism. He hurled insults and gave strong arguments against the truth claims of Christianity. After his speech he looked satisfied that he had dealt a large blow to the Christian faith. He then asked, "Are there any questions?" The silence was deafening, but then one man slowly approached and walked up to the podium and stood only a few feet away from the communist leader. The man looked at the crowd, then gazed to the left and then over to the right. Finally, after a few moments he shouted the ancient greeting well known to the Russian Orthodox Church, **"CHRIST IS RISEN!!!" All at once everyone rose together and in mass as a crushing sound of thunder they shouted, "HE IS RISEN INDEED!"**

It only took one man to remind the crowd that CHRIST IS RISEN! On that first Easter Sunday, Mary Magdalene got up before the sun and walked to the tomb with the purpose of embalming the body of Jesus. She saw the stone rolled away and Jesus' body was gone. She ran to John and Peter and said to them, **"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they had laid him."** (John 20: 2). In her sorrow Mary had forgotten what Jesus said about rising from the dead.

Sometimes Jesus did speak about his death in more vague terms using metaphors. In John 2: 18-19 for example, we read, "The Jews then said to him, 'what sign can you show us for doing this (the story of Jesus cleansing the temple)?" Jesus answered them, *"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."* However, in other scripture we read Jesus speaking plainly and in a direct way about his imminent arrest, his death and resurrection. For example in Matthew 16: 21 we read, **"From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the chief priests, and scribes and be killed, and on the third day be raised."**

Ultimately, we don't know the answer why the disciples did not have more of an understanding about what was happening to Jesus. However, I believe we need to remember that much of their confusion was attributed to the fact that they were human. Like everyone, we are prone to

forgetfulness and misunderstanding. Perhaps the disciples who had seen Jesus' life-giving and resurrection miracles and heard the parables, would have found it difficult to believe Jesus' most dramatic claim – that he would be killed and then rise from the dead. That would have been such a stressful thing to comprehend. After seeing Jesus alive, his earlier words together with his resurrected presence, helped the disciples understand. We read in John 2:22, *“After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he said this. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.”*

We can be tempted to blame the disciples for their lack of faith. But if we do that, we miss the lesson – the lesson that we are no different! Similar to the disciples, we do not always understand how God is working in our lives. We shout ‘CHRIST IS RISEN, HE IS RISEN INDEED’ on Easter Sunday yet too often we quickly succumb to anxiety and fear when life becomes difficult. Sometimes, it is not until a problem has passed that we see how God’s presence was with us guiding us from the beginning.

‘Not so perfect’ disciples: God loves us as he loved his disciples. God sincerely desires that we remember and understand that nothing can separate us from his love – not even death. We can look at the disciples and think that they were weak. However, we can be grateful for Jesus’ ‘not so perfect’ disciples because they help us understand our own human ignorance and at the same time - God’s divine patience.

Needing to remind and be reminded: In our culture, the message of Atheism does not come to us by a speech from a powerful communist leader; it comes to us more subtly in the form of an individualist, greed based consumer culture. Our charter of rights and freedoms certainly has Christian values of justice and inclusion. However, we are all tempted on a daily basis to be distracted away from faith with repeated messages of acquiring more (greed); messages of individualism, competitiveness and consumerism.

We are not so much what we think, but what we do (our habits). Big business messaging become part of our cultural liturgies (habits) and we slowly get wrapped up in all its stresses and trappings. We need to be reminded that CHRIST IS RISEN! “HE IS RISEN INDEED!”

When we meet together in worship each week on the day of resurrection – that is Sunday, we are strengthened by the loving presence of Jesus Christ who knows us by name and comforts us through his Holy Spirit. The message of Christ is a message of unconditional love (Grace) where we are freed from the fear that we do not have enough money, enough stuff and/or success - and the freedom of the fear that we matter. Because of the resurrected Christ, we know that we are loved and there is no fear in love (I John 4). Indeed we matter to God. We come to worship to support one another and be supported. We help to remind one another that though we experience fear, pain, loneliness and loss in our lives - that is not the final word. “CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Say to your fellow believers: “CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!!!” Ok – let’s do it! Amen.