

Easter Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

Bishop of Saskatchewan

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

This is our message to all the world, to every human being, every man and woman and child, of every language and nation. It is for the rich and the poor, the weak and the powerful, the prominent and the rejected, the criminal and the hero, the vicious and the meek. This Gospel is for you, and this good news - great news - is for you and for all of creation. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead!

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for all times and all peoples, because his death and resurrection is eternally and universally relevant.

Death is our common enemy and experience. God told Adam and Eve that if they sinned, they would surely die. This is the

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sentence that belongs to sinners, and we all will surely die. We began Lent remembering this universal reality - that we will all die. But today something new is promised, something new is said to humanity: you shall live forever. "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." You see, the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Just as we were, and are, all involved in what happened to Jesus on Good Friday, no matter how good or bad we think we are, Christ died for our sins.

So as we are all involved in Easter Sunday, he rose again for you and me, restoring to us everlasting life.

The Church affirms boldly the reality of Death and of Eternal Life. We often prefer vague notions, glossy sentiments and polite euphemisms for both our own mortality and our continued existence. But these are neither helpful nor hopeful, and they rob of us of honest sorrow and solid joy. Whether it is confused notions of

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reincarnation, or the baseless whimsy that the dead continue to exist in the memories of the forgetful, or the idea that the dead (like parasites) live on in the living, there is about as much real comfort to be found here as in the fact that our fingernails and hair continue to grow after we die. Human death is real. The pain, loss, and separation are real. And only an equally real resurrection and life can speak to our reality.

The Gospel is not make-believe or wishful thinking. Jesus really suffered and died and was buried, and this will happen to us, too. And Jesus really did rise again from the dead. He took up his body and he is alive for evermore, never to die again, and has gone into heaven, body and soul united in eternal bliss, and this can be our future, too. He gave his body and blood on the cross for us, to save us, body and soul, our humanity entire and whole, to everlasting life. We gather this morning with Mary Magdalene in the dark at a cemetery. And it is here, in the presence of darkness and death, in

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the face of their reality, that she and we may find light and life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Mary will stay at the grave that morning after Peter and John return, and there she will be the first to see and to know the risen Lord Jesus.

But our reading ends before that, and we are left wondering what exactly Peter and John thought and believed. The Gospel tells us this: "As yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead."

He must rise again from the dead. The Scripture here is most likely taken from Psalm 16: "My heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to hell, or let your holy one see corruption." Jesus rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, that is in accordance with the prophecies of the Old Testament, including the figure of Jonah, for example. And note that it was on the third day - the first day of the week - that the Lord rose again. This is the first day of the new

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creation, the beginning of the new era, and it was again on the first day of the week, Sunday, that the Lord appeared once more to the Apostles a week later, that he sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, that the Church met for preaching and the breaking of bread and for the collection of offerings. This first day of the week, this Easter Day, the day of the Resurrection, became for the earliest Christians the Lord's Day.

But I want to think with you for a second more, about what it means that he must rise again from the dead. Christ rose again from the dead, and his victory over death and the grave was complete and total. Nothing is left behind but the grave clothes. Why did Jesus Christ have to rise again? Let me offer you two reasons.

1. Because he was and is the Son of God, human but not just human.
2. Because he was sinless, and in his sinless death for the sins of the whole world, he conquered sin once and for all. He had to

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rise again, because as sin leads to death, forgiveness leads to life. Resurrection life for Jesus, and resurrection life for us.

Now, to many, the idea of resurrection seems absurd and impossible, but those who do not know the truth and power of God the Creator, who deny the Creator, will never know or embrace the Redeemer. For God created everything, out of nothing. This God, the one and only God, resurrects life out of death. He had to rise again from the dead, because he was and is more powerful than death. This is the gospel that there is more to human existence than sin and death, that God's grace is greater than all our sin, God's life is mightier than all our death.

In the love Song of Solomon we read, "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death."

Many wonder who that love poem is about. It is about the love affair of God with humanity, about God's love for you, a love for you that endures the cross, that is as strong as death. What we learn

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and know this day is that Love is stronger than death. God is Love, and we know the love of God in Jesus who laid down his life for us. And if we believe that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world, and that this Jesus rose again the third day, we know the Love that is stronger than death.

Hatred is Death, and Love is Life, and we know that we have passed from Death to life if we love. This is the moral victory of Christ in us, Easter in us here and now, which we know in the forgiveness of sins. And it is that victory which will be extended to our bodies in the resurrection, and to our days in the life everlasting. The forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting - these may be ours, if we would but believe and trust him who died and rose again and ascended into heaven for us, Jesus Christ. Love is stronger than death and Christ is risen! Alleluia!