Isaiah 65:17-25, John 20:1-10

“Understanding the Resurrection”

What a way to end our Lenten Season and our emphasis on Spiritual Disciplines and lunch into Easter. He is risen! He is Risen Indeed! What a celebration we are having today as we rejoice over the most important theological fact of our faith and that is that He is Risen! He is Risen indeed!

We have had such an important week in the life of our church, as every Lenten season should be one of the most important in the life of our church. But this year was special, wasn’t it? Maundy Thursday you filled the church as we gathered around the table of the Last Supper. Good Friday we commemorated the death of our Savior with a moving tenebre service. Every year I find myself in a bit of a dilemma because I can do all of the study for my sermon for Easter ahead of time but there is no way that mentally I can write the sermon before Good Friday. It just doesn’t feel right, especially after the service that we had this past Good Friday. It was really powerful and the whole community came together to commemorate the death of our Savior.

And then this year we are in the middle of March Madness and my Gators are still in it. I asked a couple of you for some help yesterday at the Egg Hunt but none of you were very helpful. So today, we are just going to talk about the resurrection and try to truly understand the resurrection. Our first Scripture gives a wonderful depiction of the promise of the resurrection. It tells us that it will be depicted with the attributes of joy and delight. If you were at the church yesterday morning between 10-12 you would have thought God’s kingdom of joy and delight had comfortably settled for the long haul in our Fellowship Hall. 250 people, over 125 kids were swarming around. It was awesome. It was exactly what Isaiah speaks about, and gives us a perfect understanding to the resurrection.

What a great image of the kingdom. Some of you have called me or texted me, or left me a message on facebook and since I don’t tweet, you didn’t tweet me, to let me know how much you have enjoyed this new Bible series on the History channel. One of you even said I never really thought you knew what you were talking about until I started watching the Bible show and hey, you do know a few things. It is so nice to be appreciated.

But coming to a full understanding of matters of faith is so important. Today, as we look at the resurrection we are going to take ourselves from belief which just manifests itself in a weekly display of worship and emotion to an understanding of the resurrection which takes us to a deeper, fuller understanding of our Savior that will change your relationship, your way of life, your attitude. I hope each of you will leave today with an Easter understanding of the resurrection that provides you, in the words of Isaiah, a life of joy and delight.

**READ**

The story is told of my father, and this happened before I was born when my family was at Red Clay Creek Presbyterian Church, and they had at that time three young boys. It was the Saturday before Easter and my dad found one of my brother’s bow and arrows with the sunction end and stuck it on his forehead and my brothers thought it was the funniest thing they had ever seen, so he wore it for a couple of hours. He took it off his head and there was this bright red mark on his forehead. He went to sleep woke up on Easter morning and went to church with a bright red circle on the front of his head. But for the sake of joy and delight of his boys, it was worth it.

Look at the Isaiah Scripture and it depicts a new reality as a result of the resurrection of the Messiah that will affect our reality. The former things will not be remembered, he will create joy and the people will delight. There will be no more weeping or cries of distress. Infant will not die, all will live out a full lifetime. It should sound a lot like Revelation 21 where it tells us that he will wipe every tear from their eye, death will be no more…There will be no cancer, there will be no undiagnosed pain or medical conditions. There are no strokes. There is no divorce, and youth will be respected, and a nation will not threaten war against another nation. This image of what the Messiah will bring about was fulfilled in the resurrection of our Savior.

If you are sitting there in the pew wondering of what application is the resurrection to you? These verses lay it out in a very practical way. This year’s March Madness has had special significance for me, in a not very positive way. You heard of Florida Golf Coast University, a small school that made it very far in the tournament, the farthest of any 15th seed ever. Their coach played for John’s Hopkins all four years that I played at Swarthmore and they were in our same division. My senior year he had an instrumental part in beating us in overtime in the last game of the year to prevent us from going to the DIII NCAA tournament. Now 22 years later 7 or 8 of us who have kept in touch on that team remarked how we still lose sleep thinking of how we could have won that game. Isaiah 65:17 tells us the former things shall not be remembered.

We don’t have to live in a past as we think of what could have been if only we had done something differently. The Easter story is about living in the present and understanding the potential of what can be. So many of you have come to me and confessed that you just have a hard time forgetting the hurt that you have experienced from someone, even someone who might be sitting close to you today. I know, I can preach it, but it isn’t easy when someone has hurt you and your life has been significantly altered by their action, it is hard to just let it go. But ultimately if we don’t we aren’t hurting them, we are just hurting ourselves. Resurrected people live with joy and delight, we don’t carry grudges and walk around as angry people.

John’s Easter story that we read earlier has a couple key verses that we are going to focus on today. It describes the disciples’ journey in understanding the resurrection, and if it is any consolation they didn’t understand it right away. Let’s look at the Scripture again, but we are going to focus on verses 8 and 9, with the words of Isaiah still resonating and ringing in our ears where it foretells us of what exactly the resurrection is going to look like. What difference Jesus’ death and new life makes on our lives. Verse 8, let’s look at it, tells us that the other disciple went in and believed. Verse 9 states that they did not understand. Okay, let’s try to make sense of this.

First of all, as you would expect, John’s resurrection story is unique. Only Mary Magdalene goes early in the morning to the tomb, early, before the sun rose, any recovering Baptists here? Early while the dew was still wet on the grass, it was early, before the rooster crowed. She sees the stone rolled away and the tombs back then literally had this huge stone wheels over the entries that had tracks that could be rolled back and forth on a track. This stone was rolled away from the entry.

In John she doesn’t go near the tomb, she leaves to go get the only two disciples that we read had not run away and scattered after the arrest of the Lord. John, the beloved who was at the foot of the cross, and Peter, who had denied Jesus 3 times but had still stuck around. She tells them both and John is the athlete and he gets there first and just kind of waits for Peter to take the lead. Peter arrives finally and goes right into the tomb.

Peter sees the cloths lying on the ground, and so does John when he goes in. And then we read in vs. 8 that as soon as he saw the bands of cloth he believed. We know that the disciples were worried that someone was going to steal the body of Jesus, but seeing the bands of cloth, that very same cloth that Joseph of Arimathea had placed on his body in John 19:38 in preparation for his burial, there they were scattered on the floor of the tomb.

No one took this body because they couldn’t waste the time to take the strips of cloth off. Something else happened here. It is here that we read that they believed, they saw the cloth and they believed that Jesus was not dead, that the tomb did not hold him, that death did not have the final word, but rather God did and that meant that all of our sin was washed clean. Well, maybe they didn’t quite get all that, but they believed.

But their belief was limited to that, belief in Jesus. There was no real understanding, vs. 9 tells us, of what joy and delight could come about because of that empty tomb. They believed, we believe, but what impact does that have on our lives as we face a crisis, as we celebrate a new birth, as we struggle with our anger or whatever our life situations may be. As we struggle financially and the debt keeps piling up. They did not understand the Scripture that he would rise from the dead, so they went home.

If we understood what happened at the resurrection and I am the first witness to the empty tomb, I’m not going home. I’m posting this on facebook, twitter if I tweeted, I’d send all of you an email saying Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Those are our words that would be on our lips.

If you want some homework for today and this week that will provide an even deeper understanding of the resurrection read I Corinthians 15:3-7 which is the earliest statement of faith of the resurrection. Read also Hebrews 9 and get a full understanding of what it means to be people who not only believe the resurrection but understand it and live in that reality which Isaiah points to. If I were to ask do you believe in Jesus most all of us would say yes, absolutely. If I were to ask do we understand what Jesus did for us in the resurrection, I’m thinking that some of us might have a bit more of an ambivalent answer.

But as in Scripture, understanding sometimes comes later when Jesus is actually in the midst of his disciples on the road to Emmaues, or as they are locked in their homes. So also with us, my prayer is that each one of us with each subsequent appearance of the Lord in our lives, the resurrection and the person of Christ will provide us with a deeper understanding. I hope our Lenten journey has taken us part of the journey from belief to understanding.

Our challenge as Christians who live in a society programmed to accept the superficial is that we are told that it is enough to believe, that’s all we need. All we need when we come to worship is to feel God, and that’s enough. We rely on our hearts to dictate reality when Jesus actually tells us that we shall love with our heart, soul, and mind. We have to move beyond emotion while not being afraid to be emotional. We need to be okay to display a love for Jesus that is worn on our sleeve and yet realize that there is more to it than that.

But the key to understanding the resurrection lies in an embrace of our Savior that comes from a simple belief which then through daily surrendering ourselves and being willing to die to ourselves, will lead to an understanding that makes us resurrected disciples full of joy and delight. I pray that for all of us. Amen.