

“HEY YOU! OVER HERE!”

I don't know if all of you here this morning truly believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. I'm not sure how many of you are here to actually celebrate that “Christ is risen!” and how many are here because you decided to make your annual pilgrimage to church on Easter Sunday whether you really wanted to be here or not!

Well, whatever reason has brought you here this morning, I welcome you and I'm glad you came. I'm going to give this Easter message with the presumption that most, if not all of you, believe in Jesus' resurrection—however you interpret and understand that event to have happened. Or else you're trying to believe in Jesus' resurrection. You're working at it, making an effort, giving it a try. Or, at the very least, you're hoping in your hearts that it's true.

With those three presumptions in mind, I want to throw out a question to you. And don't worry, it's only a hypothetical question. I don't actually expect you to answer it! My question is, assuming for the moment that Christ's resurrection is true, why did God raise Jesus from the dead?

What was God's point in accomplishing such an incredible, and dare I say pretty unbelievable event?

Some of you might respond that God did it so that we human beings could receive Eternal Life. So we could get into heaven and live with God forever.

That's a good response, as well as a very common one, and I don't disagree with it. But I also think that God could have just as successfully graced us human beings with Eternal Life without Christ's resurrection. After all, God is God, and God can do anything. God didn't need to raise Jesus from the dead in order to raise you and I from the dead, right?

But God did just that. And my question is, why?

My own personal answer to that question, for what it's worth, is that God raised Jesus from the dead to get our attention.

A number of years ago there was a commercial—maybe you'll remember it. I think it was for some kind of woman's perfume. The spokeswoman *slash* gorgeous model looked into the camera and said seductively, “If you want to get

someone's attention, whisper."

Well, it would seem that at some point in time, many, many years ago, God thought "I need to get humankind's attention; but how?" And God's answer to that question wasn't to whisper, but to resurrect.

You have to admit, raising someone from the dead is a real attention-getter! At least God sure thought so. So Jesus was raised immortal to get people to take notice.

The reason and purpose for the holy day of Easter is to celebrate Jesus resurrection! The conquering of death! The victory of life and light over death and darkness, accomplished by God on our behalf for all of our sakes, without any cost or obligation to us. And that's what makes Easter the most sacred and joyful day on the Christian Church calendar.

It sounds pretty cut and dried, doesn't it?

Easter celebrates that God raised Jesus from the dead, and you and I have been gifted with Eternal Life because of it. Because of Christ's resurrection, we will also be resurrected. Yes, the Good News of Easter is really quite simple. On the other hand, the good news of Easter can also be very challenging for us to receive.

I think Easter's good news is a challenge for us and for all human beings to receive for at least two reasons. The first reason, as we all know, is that it's hard to believe it's true. This difficulty in believing that Jesus' resurrection actually happened isn't a new thing for Christians. Heck, back in the time of the Apostle Paul, only a couple of decades after Jesus' resurrection happened, people were already beginning to doubt—even though some of the witnesses to the event were still alive!

So Paul found himself having to encourage and urge members of the church in Corinth to not give up faith in Christ's resurrection. Hang in there and keep believing, he wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians. In Paul's own words: "Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters. . ." You see, they were already beginning to forget, because only people who forget need to be reminded. The resurrection event was gradually fading from their memories.

Their faith, their trust, their belief in the risen Christ, seemed to be weakening and was possibly even in danger of dying altogether. That's why Paul reminded and encouraged the members of the church in Corinth to "hold firmly to the message I proclaimed to you—the message that Christ had been raised from the dead—unless you have come to believe in vain."

In other words, Paul was saying, remember my message about Jesus whom God raised from the dead, unless your faith in the Good News of his resurrection doesn't have any meaning or importance to you anymore.

Does the Good News of Jesus' resurrection from the dead have any meaning or importance to us today? Or do we need encouragement? Do we need someone like Paul to remind us of its significance? By the way, that's why I would encourage all of you attend church on a regular basis: because the church is in the reminder business! And all of Christ's followers need to be reminded of the good news of the risen Christ again and again, so they won't ever forget it.

Believing in the Good News that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead can be a challenge, and we need constant reminders to jolt us, to knock us on the side of the head and keep our minds fixed on the truth of Jesus' resurrection. It's easy to forget that Christ is risen because there's so much distraction and disruption in our world today. Our cell phones. The TV shows we don't want to miss. The kids' sporting events. Our favorite recreational activities, like skiing and golf and boating and fishing. And on and on I could go.

And that's the second reason that it's such a challenge to receive the good news of Christ's resurrection: there's so much in our world that can draw our attention away from the miraculous thing God has done, defeating death by raising Jesus from the dead. We're wagering our eternal lives on the truth of that Good News, so it's important to believe in and put our faith in it. But, as impossible as it sounds, it's surprisingly easy to be distracted from something as amazing as Jesus' resurrection. Or to forget it. Or to ignore it.

We also have different excuses that can prevent us from believing in or caring about Christ's resurrection. Things such as logic (no one rises from the dead; when you die, you stay dead). Or apathy (Ho hum. Maybe I'll believe it later, when I'm older and nearer to death. But right now I have other things on my plate, other fish to fry that are more important to me than investing my time believing in Jesus' resurrection). Or skepticism (people back in Jesus' day were simplistic and very ignorant, which is why they could believe in such nonsense; but not me).

So yes, there are challenges to overcome if we want to not just celebrate Easter on some superficial level, but to actually experience the risen Christ in our lives in such a way that we genuinely believe the good news of the resurrection and have our lives transformed by it.

Now, I'm not going to kid you or sugarcoat anything: such belief takes a significant investment of our time in things such as prayer, church participation and exploring the Scriptures so we can come to know Christ. It takes an open and observant mind that doesn't immediately dismiss as too unbelievable the Good News of Jesus' resurrection and God's power over death. And it takes a spiritually perceptive and receptive heart that can sense God's presence and

activity in and around us in such a way that we come to believe deep within that, yes, it's true. God did raise Jesus Christ from the dead.

So, to summarize: belief is the first Easter challenge. And the second challenge is to not be distracted when God is trying like mad to get our attention.

It sounds strange that anything can be a distraction and take our attention away from a dead man rising. You would think Jesus' resurrection is such amazing, joyous news that nothing could possibly draw our thoughts away from it. But that's not the case at all.

An unknown author once wrote, "When God speaks, some people say it's only thunder." Well, when God shattered death by raising Jesus from the dead, some people say, "Oh, that's a nice old story. Now, when's the preacher going to stop talking so we can go have our Easter dinner?" Meanwhile, the God who raised Jesus from the dead is waving His arms like crazy and trying to get us to look His way. "Over here! Excuse me! Can I have your attention, please?"

If you were forced to respond honestly to the question, "Where is your attention now, right this very moment?" what would your answer be? Are your thoughts focused on the incredible thing God did by raising Jesus from the dead, or are they on something else?

Are you thinking about what the Good News of Easter means to you, and the remarkable implications that God's act of resurrection has for you, your loved ones and all humankind? Or maybe you're thinking about what a beautiful day it is, and how you can't wait to get out of here so you can go out and enjoy it; or some issue going on at work; or a family situation or personal issue that's distracting you and preventing God from getting your attention?

I recently came across a meditative writing about Easter by Lois Cheney in her book, *God is No Fool*. It's entitled, simply, *Once Upon a Time*. I'd like to share it with you now.

Once upon a time  
 There was a God  
 Who so loved the world  
 That he gave his son  
 His only son.  
 And they took that son  
 And they hung him on a cross.  
 And that son died.  
 And they buried the son—  
 Sealed him up tight.  
 But God said,

“Oh no you don’t.”  
And he rolled back the rock,  
He unsealed his son.  
And his son came out,  
Came out walking and  
breathing.  
And he was alive.  
And he’s alive today  
And he walks around  
And he stalks around  
Breathing life and life.  
Every morning, just before dawn  
For thousands of years  
Little grim people—  
Preachers and bankers and  
Storekeepers and  
students—Sneak up to the grave and  
Roll the stone back  
To seal it up tight.  
And every morning  
God roars  
“Oh no you don’t!”  
And he flings back the stone.  
And out walks Jesus  
All over again;  
Out stalks the  
Grinning, striding Jesus.  
Tight-lipped  
Little people  
Hover all day  
Around the tomb  
And cover it with incense  
And bow before it  
And walk before it  
And sigh before it;  
And pray to it  
And sing to it  
And weep to it  
And lean on it.

And weep to it some more  
 And no one notices;  
 Or at least  
 They pretend not  
 To notice  
 The living  
 Breathing  
 Walking  
 Talking  
 Jesus  
 Out on the  
 Edge calling  
 “Hey!”  
 “Hey you!”  
 “Over here!”

My friends, today is Easter Sunday—the holiest, most joyous day on the Christian church’s calendar: the day of resurrection. That’s why we’re here this morning. Or at least it’s supposed to be why we’re here today. If that’s not why we’re here, then it’s likely that we’re not paying close enough attention to what God did and what happened to Jesus. You see, Easter is the most joyous and holy day only if we’re paying attention; only if we’re aware of the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and who is present in the world even now, and who will one day raise us up from death to Eternal Life, as God raised up Jesus.

That God of Eternal Life is in our midst, today and always, and if we listen we can hear God calling to us. “Hey you! Yes, you! Over here!”

This Easter morning, may we turn our heads toward God and pay attention to what God is saying: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Thanks be to God. Amen.