

**Jeremiah 31:1-6**

At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people. Thus says the Lord: The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the Lord appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit. For there shall be a day when sentinels will call in the hill country of Ephraim: 'Come, let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God.'

**John 20:11-18**

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' ' Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

**“The Reconciliation”**  
**Rev. Charles Schuster**  
**April 24, 2011**

The music is really good today, don't you think? It's fun to sit behind the bell choir and see how hard they work. It's more fun to sit there than right in front of them, which sometimes we've been.

What we have to bring together today is a bit intimidating, because we have to try to reconcile something that is a vital necessity. We have to reconcile what we know for sure about Easter, with what Easter has new for us to learn. The problem is that there is a tension between saying too much and saying too little. Speaking in detail what everybody already knows, and forgetting to say what some of us haven't yet heard, that's the problem. And it is a problem. To know what to say and to know what not to say. There's an art in that. For example, there are some things that have to be said.

A child visits his grandparents' farm. First stop is the barn. Looking over the livestock, he says to Grandpa, "That's a funny-looking cow there. It doesn't have any horns." The grandfather explains, "Some cows are born with horns, and some are born without horns, and some that have horns when they're born shed them, and sometimes we cut the horns

off so they don't hurt one another. And there are lots of reasons, therefore, why cows have horns and other cows don't have horns, but the reason that this particular cow does not have horns, it isn't a cow, it's a horse. And horses never have horns." See, that has to be explained. On the other hand, there are some things that truly could go without saying.

Dave Burchett wrote a pretty good book entitled *When Bad Christians Happen to Good People*. We ought to study that here some time. Anyway, he opens the chapters of the book with some instructions that manufacturers have put on items they think require explanations. Maybe there's too much clarity here. I mean, you'd think maybe it would go without saying, a warning label found on a baby stroller cautioning the user to remove the child before folding up. A household iron warning its users, "Never iron clothes while being worn." There's this electric router, which is a carpenters' tool, and the cautionary notice says "This product is not intended for use as a dental drill." Too much explanation.

So today what I'm going to try to do is to get some clarity and understanding of Easter, to say some things that you already know, but not so much, because you already know it, and try to bring some clarity, maybe a little deeper understanding, perhaps. I want to say some things about Easter, and I want to approach it on the basis of some of the things we say about Easter. Phrases, two of them, actually. The first one, and you've heard it, and you may see it on a bulletin some time on Easter Sunday - "Jesus is Lord." Jesus is Lord. I mean, that is said. Jesus is Lord. The church has been saying it for a long time, I mean way back, centuries. Jesus is Lord. What are we saying? Jeremiah looked for this, and the prophet told the people there will hopefully come a time when what is wrong is made right. A time when there will be justice and there will be mercy. A time when God would build, and the people would dance, tambourines, and there would be reconciliation. Religion can be empowerment or imprisonment, and "Jesus is Lord" empowers those in prison with love.

Last week, we remembered how Jesus came into Jerusalem on a rented donkey, and common people lined the streets with palm branches, and we didn't do this, but we could have, contrast this with another entry into the city of Jerusalem for Pontius Pilate, a military cortege coming in with swords, coming in with horses, (no horns on those horses,) coming into Jerusalem, riding hard with flags and the sun shining off of the swords, and there was power and armor and force. This week we think of Caesar, Julius Caesar and how he conquered the whole world and he was called the lord. He thought he was God, they called him God, and indeed he did provide peace. Pax Romana, that's what it's called. He made peace in the world and you could say "He is the lord of peace." So when Christians would say "Jesus is Lord," that didn't go over too well with the Roman officials. Like, that wouldn't have gone over too well if you had said it to an SS guard in Germany when the Nazis were in control, calling on their Fuhrer, Hitler. "Jesus is Lord" means Caesar isn't. Means, we changed the definition of power. We reconciled the power of love and we walk away from the idea of the love of power. It empowers those in prison.

And really, there's no doubt about it. There are some things that are obvious. "Jesus is Lord" is one of those things where "Jesus is right" is what we're saying. "Jesus is truth" is

what we're saying. It is clear, as clear as the IRS is clear. We've all done it this week, we've either turned in our estimates or written our checks, whatever position we're in, we've done it. The IRS, it's easy, what they want us to do. What you're supposed to do is write down how much you made in a year, then you subtract how much you spent in a year, and then they said, "Send the rest to us."

If we see acts of kindness, we witness a Christ event. That's clear. If we hear a word of forgiveness, we remember how important it is to forgive trespassers as we are forgiven for our trespasses. If we find a sense of humility in our hearts, we remember how Jesus said, "Happy are those who are humble," and if we suffer but we know we were right, then we remember how Jesus said, "Blessed are those who suffer for righteousness' sake." It's about motive and purity of heart, it's about doing good but not needing credit for it. It's right. We know it when we see it. We hear it when it's spoken. You can't use Jesus' name and make him something he never was, because the shadow that he cast from way back then reaches into our day. Jesus is Lord, Jesus is truth, it is right. It works, you know.

Last church I was in, on an Easter Sunday, one of these precious children, like what we saw up here, though none of them would do this, pulled the fire alarm, setting off a chain reaction which involved sirens and flashing lights and two fire trucks and police cars, two of them, and an ambulance and paramedics and a disembodied prerecorded voice that told us to leave the building immediately, and as we were vacating, the firefighters were coming in with their hoses and axes, and finally when we got sort of settled down and that kid told us what he had done, and I asked him, "Why did you do it?" He looked at me and in all seriousness said, "I didn't think it worked." It did. It does.

And when we say "Jesus is Lord," what we are saying is for us, Jesus is right. That gets hold of you. What does that mean? When we talk about imitation of Christ, the objective of the Christian life, we are not suggesting that we are to reject who we are to become something we are not. Jesus cannot be mimicked, but can be manifested. Need not be replicated, but can be represented. Henri Nouwen said it best, he said "The imitation of Christ does not mean we leave what we know, become what we're not, and live like Jesus lived. No, that's not what it means. It means, you live your life as authentically as he lived his life." That gives us all kinds of freedom to be ourselves. Jesus never called for clones. He asked for followers. He did not demand blind obedience, but open-minded reverence. People who know the difference between what it means to survive life's burdens and what it means to thrive on the challenges life gives, who understand that it is more blessed to give than to receive, because we have come to understand how we have been blessed, and therefore how much we have to share.

And for each of us, there comes a day when we realize why we're Christian, and it's not because we were told we had to be, and it's not because we just eased into it gradually working up to it, kind of being surrounded by the osmosis of what the faith is, not because the miracle of resurrection or the fear that God will judge us when we die, and not because of the promise of heaven or the hope for eternal life. No, there's another way of thinking. Rob Bell is right when he says there is a massive shift coming in what it

means to be Christian. Something new is in the air. He calls it a re-thinking about the here and now, and a re-claiming about the hereafter, so that we understand it's about where we are, not what we anticipate in the future after we're dead. It's a rewording of the old ideas, and a re-doing of the thought that we are better than other people, because we're not better than other people who believe differently than we, but a concluding that Christianity works for us. We look at stumbling blocks and we find stepping stones. We see the enemy as a friend and a problem as an opportunity, and we do not settle for simple solutions when the issues are complicated. We search out through the complexity the greatest good for the greatest number, trying to follow that path that love calls us to, even though that may be the most difficult of all. And we may not do everything like we should do it, but we do what we can, the best we can, and we do even better when we do it together and become what we are, which is the body of Christ. Easter is a reminder about the Gospel. Jesus is Lord. Jesus was right, and we rethink it and reclaim it, because it works.

The second phrase I'd like to explore. You hear it on Easter. We say it - Christ is risen. You heard it in the text this morning. Mary Magdalene said it, "I've seen the Lord." Before that, Jesus is there, she didn't recognize him, thought maybe he was a gardener. He said to her, "Why are you weeping?" She said, in effect, "Who are you?" He said, "Mary...". She said, "Rabbouni!" He said, "Do not cling to me." Christ is risen. The Jewish historian Josephus, four volume set, about two thousand pages or more on the history of the Jewish people. An early Jewish historian. He wrote about the time a little after Jesus' death, but he wrote about that period of time, and in the four volumes, two thousand pages plus, there's one paragraph about Jesus. He writes, "He was Christ, and when Pilate at the suggestion of principled men had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him first did not forsake him, but he appeared to them alive again the third day." That's all, that's it, one paragraph in four volumes of Jewish history. Those of us this week who got to hear Condoleeza Rice, she said it, "Today's headlines may not be the same as history's judgment." That's true here. Christ is risen. Do not hold onto me. Mary did not recognize him. Later on she looked.

This past Friday before the Requiem performance here, about four o'clock in the afternoon I got a call. The director James Kim was ill, and would not be able to explain the Durufle' Requiem to the people who would be coming at six o'clock before the performance. People who would show up at six o'clock wanting to hear about the Requiem, what to do? Well, I did some research. Could we get some musicians to talk about singing it? What it's like to sing it? And Joe and David and James got these six CSU students who are in the choir, they came. Sitting behind me while I tried to explain to a hundred and fifty people who showed up at six o'clock about the Requiem, which I had just learned in research about an hour before. And I started it all by saying, "My name is James Kim." and they laughed. And then I said, "Actually, James is ill, and I'm going to direct the choir and the orchestra tonight." And there was a look on their faces that you do not see in the sanctuary, ever. Behind me, I could hear the six students talking to each other, one of them saying, "I have no idea what I'm going to say," and another one saying, "I'm nervous about speaking in front of crowds," and I realized, "I need to keep talking." So I said, As an added part of the Requiem there is going to be put into it a

solo piece. It's instrumental. I'm going to play the trombone." Now, there was a look on their faces similar to what you see at Hughes Stadium after a really bad football season. I proceeded to give a little history, pointed out how the bulletin that you would see the words "written by the French composer" and the English translation beside the French. Here's what the composer wrote in French, here's the English translation. I don't know how much later it was, I think I was in the balcony when I looked at that. I've had both French and Latin. Didn't do well in either, but I did recognize that what they were singing was not French, it was Latin.

And then those kids, those college kids, so eloquent and bright. Where do you get young people like that? They talked about singing in the choir, what a privilege it is to sing with Dr. Kim. One of them said, "My voice teacher has died this past year. I'm dedicating this to him." Another one said, "You watch the violins, because they're going to go back and forth real fast and it's going to sound like water rippling," and another one said, "You've got to watch for the Gregorian chant, that's the key to the whole thing." And another one said, "We don't have an oboe in the orchestra, and Karen Stoody, and she is wonderful, by the way, she can make the sound of an oboe on that instrument that she's playing." They go on and on, these college students, so many of them in our church.

One of the choir members, not one of the ones who spoke, but one who is also in the choir, as the choir came in, began to realize she didn't have to be there, because Thursday, the day before, her family's home burned to the ground. She came and she sang. These kids, they do so much for us. They have taught in our children's Sunday School classes. One of them directs our children's choir. They plan music for the contemporary service, Crosswalk. They go on mission trips with us. And you say to yourself, "Christ is risen, I've seen Jesus in them." And I think Jesus would have been pleased with that. He said to Mary, "Don't hold onto me." Easter is about the risen Christ, and we see him if we look. And the stranger on the road to Emmaus. At the water's edge as he broke the bread and served them.

Robert Brown Taylor said, "Encountering God in other people is saving my life now. I do not look for angels any more. The clerk at the grocery store is messenger enough for me." Is Jesus enough for her, for us? Bass Mitchell heard about a man who had been captured in the Second World War in Japan, was in a prison camp, and they had found out that he was a barber, and so they forced him to cut the other prisoners' hair. He was glad to do it, but that's what he did, and they instructed him that he was under no circumstances to say anything subversive to the prisoners, just cut their hair. And in fact, if he had violated that, they would have killed him. They would have shot him right there. And they watched him very carefully, and he did speak to the prisoners. He made eye contact with every one of them, eye contact, and he would look them straight in the eye, and he would say to them, "Keep your head up. Hold your head up." And they thought he was giving instruction for cutting their hair. What they didn't know was, he was giving inspiration, and that saved lives. As you can imagine it would. They have seen the Christ. Who tells you to keep your head up? That's the Christ.

Bob Butler lost his legs in Vietnam, returned home as a hero. And then it happened. It was a few years ago, he was working in his garage in Arizona. A child fell into a pool at the neighbor's house next door. He saw it happen, and he rolled his wheelchair as far as it would go, but it wouldn't go clear to where it needed to go, so he got out of the wheelchair and crawled through the dirt and the bushes and dove into the pool. A three-year old had been born without arms, and she had fallen into the water and couldn't swim. Her face was blue and she had no pulse, and she wasn't breathing. He pulled her out and began CPR. Her mother then realized what happened, came down hysterical, called 911. He continued with CPR calmly reassuring the child's mother, "Don't worry, I was her arms to get her out of the pool. I'm not her lungs, but together we can do this," he said. As the paramedics arrived, little Stephanie coughed and regained consciousness and began to cry, and it was all right.

Later, Stephanie's mother asked him, "How did you know it would be okay?" and that's when he told her the story. "When my legs were blown off in the war, I was alone in a field. There was no one else around. All of a sudden, this little Vietnamese girl came and she struggled very hard to drag me to her village, and said, to me in broken English, "It okay. You can live. I be your legs. Together we make it." Bob Butler finished telling that story softly and said, "This was my chance to return the favor." Christ is risen. I have seen Jesus. Not in the Galilean preacher who walked on water, and who healed the sick. He said, "Don't hold onto me." But in the Fort Collins mother who takes three jobs to get her son through college, or in the smoke-jumpers who put out the fire on the mountain. Or the high school teacher who stays late in order to give those kids a chance who really don't have a chance, because they've gotten so far behind. Or in the director of the Requiem, who in a gentle manner makes learning music possible and singing it fun. Or in the friend who, when we're down and almost out, says, "Keep your head up." Barbara Brown Taylor was right. She said, "We catch glimpses of him here and there." Christ has risen. I have seen Jesus, and Jesus said, "Don't hold on to me."

I hope I've said enough, but not too much, spelling out something maybe a little new, but also in touch with what you would have expected when you came. I hope it is not for you like it was for the friends of Michael Graves who said in his book *Sermon as Symphony*, friends who went to the Kansas City Symphony the orchestra chorus performing Mozart's Requiem (I think we've done that here) and the conductor taps his baton. The orchestra strikes up a majestic sound, followed by the chorus. After the first piece the chorus exits, and the conductor exits, for the second piece is orchestra alone, it's six minutes into the performance and this man turns to his wife and says in a voice that lots of people can hear, "You mean it's over? I gave up football for this?" I don't know what you gave up to come today. Maybe it was golf, or a buffet brunch. What I know is, Jesus is Lord, Jesus was right, what he said works for us. And Christ is risen. If we let go of him and don't hold onto him, we can see him here in each other. And that is reconciliation. It was once, it isn't over, and it continues to be. Christ the Lord is risen today. I can say it, you can sing it. Would you stand, and let's do it.