

## 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 - Easter Sunday [4.4.2010]

*Jesus the Christ is risen!*

<sup>12</sup> But tell me this - since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. <sup>14</sup> And if Christ was not raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your trust in God is useless. <sup>15</sup> And we apostles would all be lying about God, for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave, but that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. <sup>16</sup> If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless, and you are still under condemnation for your sins. <sup>18</sup> In that case, all who have died believing in Christ have perished! <sup>19</sup> And if we have hope in Christ only for this life, we are the most miserable people in the world.

<sup>20</sup> But the fact is that Christ has been raised from the dead. He has become the first of a great harvest of those who will be raised to life again. [NLT]

Just a friendly warning before I start: Close the ears of all who are still very young, as you might have an age restriction on what I am about to say.

Does the Easter bunny really exist? It's quite astonishing how much time is spent furthering this myth. No one has ever seen it, yet children are encouraged to believe in its existence. [Of course the shops profit from this story - not long after Christmas you may find Easter bunnies and their eggs displayed for sale]

Yet Easter is about a much more important question: Is it true that Jesus of Nazareth, who had been crucified, was raised up from the dead?

That is not simply a question posed by modern man, but - as the Biblical reports show - there have been doubts about it since the beginning. Which is why Paul goes to great lengths to show that there are a great number of witnesses to the resurrection. This 15<sup>th</sup> chapter in 1 Corinthians has been referred to as **the** chapter concerning the resurrection. There is to be no doubt concerning the message that

*Jesus the Christ is risen!*

The question concerning the resurrection is not just a peripheral one - it is the

central aspect of our faith. It is the question on which everything depends for us. Paul writes, **For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ was not raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your trust in God is useless.**

Without the message of the resurrection we would not only miss such church festivals as Christmas, and of course Easter, Ascension and Pentecost - but everything we believed in would be totally useless. This is so, because everything we believe, teach and confess is tied in with the resurrection of our Lord.

That is why Paul takes great pains in answering the doubts which were raised concerning the resurrection. He is not concerned with the question whether a resurrection from the dead is possible, but with the fact that it is real! In the opening verses of this chapter Paul points to the many witnesses for the resurrection of Jesus - he names those who had seen Jesus raised from the dead. We know these stories - these reports - of the resurrection. They have their origin in the eyewitness accounts of those who saw Jesus after he had been raised from the dead.

These were not great heroes of faith, to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection. The reports of the first Easter day show just how incredible the news of Jesus having risen from the dead seemed to them. Perhaps we can write this down to their disappointment on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. They had experienced Jesus' might power - e.g. when he calmed the storm. But now he meekly allowed himself to be taken captive - and like a lamb to be nailed to the cross.

This was contrary to all their perceptions of what Jesus should do. So it is hardly surprising that when he was taken captive, they could not believe what they saw - and they all had run away. Now there were these women with the news that he had risen - and even though Jesus had repeatedly spoken about it - they could not believe the report that he had risen from the tomb.

Paul emphasis here, **But the fact is that Christ has been raised from the dead.** The

resurrection is a historical fact, attested to by a great number of witnesses, who saw the risen Lord, who spoke with him, who ate with him. Our faith is based on what these eyewitness saw - of their interaction with the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

That is why these stories of the happenings of Easter are so important - that is what we need to talk to our children about - not some half-baked stuff about an Easter bunny. It is about Jesus being raised from the dead - but then also about your and my resurrection. Paul stresses here that Christ **has become the first of a great harvest of those who will be raised to life again**. He has broken through the barrier death was - and still is. As people who have received life from him, we now know that there is life beyond this barrier - a life that awaits us.

Yet, the message of Easter does not mean - as has sometimes been said - that we simply point to a future life, while we ignore the present pain and suffering so many people experience. It is because of this life which we have already, that we are to be changed people here and now. The break-through to new and eternal life, is to break into our lives right now. We may know that even though we may be subjected to pain and suffering - they do not have the final say any more! Even though our bodies grow weak, and are subject to illness - in Christ we have the promise of life through the barrier of death!

The firm conviction that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead has given many suffering from cancer or some other incurable disease, hope and a sense of being at peace. I have mentioned this before (so perhaps you are hearing it again), but it bears repeating. Many years ago, when I visited a cancer-sufferer, who knew that he did not have long to live any more, he took his leave of me with the words, "I am waiting for my great day". The day of being free of suffering, and in the presence of our living Lord.

Faith in the risen Lord, shows itself in the peace which is to be found at a death bed, when the Word of resurrection - and the presence of the resurrected Lord - give us fresh courage and strength to face what lies ahead. This life

shows itself in the new light of that Easter morning, which lights up our lives. A light which is to remain with you, because it is really true: He lives! And you also have this life.

Please remember: Your children would not miss anything, if they never heard of the Easter bunny. But we would be withholding the most important message from them, if we did not share the wonderful news with them over and over: Jesus Christ is risen! He is truly risen.

So let's not just give away Easter eggs - but also the joy of knowing: He lives! And we also have life!