

I. Intro:

A. If I asked you, "Quick, where do you find the Easter story in Bible?" I bet many would reply "near end of Gospel of John" ... some of you might even say "John chapter 20"

1. Although Easter story can be found in all 4 Gospels, did you notice which version of it we did NOT hear in worship today?
2. Many of us are so used to hearing Jn. 20:1-18 on Easter Sunday that Easter w/out it would feel incomplete, much like telling Xmas story w/out Matthew Ch. 2 & the wise men

B. What is it that we love so much re. Easter story in John 20?

1. For one, there's action & contrast:
 - a) We have Peter & the other disciple racing to the tomb &
 - b) Their differing reactions when they find stone rolled away
2. There's also great drama:
 - a) Jesus himself appears, and Mary mistakes him for the gardener!
 - b) Then wants to hold on to him when she finally recognizes him
 - c) This version is dramatic, vivid & personal
3. We like it because it's upbeat ... it ends on a satisfying & triumphant note: *"I have seen the Lord!"*

II. So why did we only hear Easter story from Luke this year?

A. We need to remember that the Gospel writers each have their own perspectives & purpose for writing

1. No single account of Jesus' life, death or resurrection is perfectly complete all by itself
2. We are blessed to have 4 remarkably similar accounts ... yet we sometimes tend to remember just 1 Gospel version of a story & then to think that is the only way it should be told
3. John 20 is often that essential Easter story that we want to hear year after year

B. Causes me to ask, "What do we hear on Easter Sundays when we do NOT hear John 20?"

1. Here's one thing I noticed when reading resurrection story in Synoptic Gospels: there's more ambiguity & less explicit joy

- a) Gospel of Mark has the most reliable early manuscripts & it leaves the story open-ended & inconclusive ... simply describes women as "terrified, amazed" and "afraid"
- b) The ending in Matthew delays disciples' actually seeing Jesus until later in Galilee ... describes 2 women named Mary leaving the tomb "with fear & with great joy"
- c) Luke's Easter story is what we heard today:
 - (1) We don't know exactly what the women thought of their trip to the tomb ... We know they told the 11 & others ... but don't know IN WHAT WORDS or WITH WHAT TONE they told them
 - (2) Notice there's considerable doubt here among the men, who don't believe the women (John does not name this aspect)
 - (3) Ending in v. 12 w/ Peter is ambiguous
 - (a) He is not described as joyful, only as "amazed"
 - (b) Does NOT go out telling others re. what he saw (yet)

2. At least one common denominator from 3 Synoptics: Easter morning brings reactions of mixed emotions ... it was not all joy!

III. My point by not reading from John 20: Mixed emotions are normal at Easter!

A. Mixed emotions are part of the Easter package

1. Certainly appropriate to have joy and hope ... this is the most important celebration of the year for Xians ... For us, resurrection is the big kahuna
 - a) In a world where every technological innovation is called a "game changer", Easter is the original "game changer"
 - b) Joy & hope are absolutely fitting responses!
2. But in reality, not everyone feels pure joy & only joy @ Easter ... joy that is unmixed w/ any other emotions
 - a) It's OK to allow other emotions & attitudes that we sometimes bring within us on Easter ... maybe you felt some of these this very morning?
 - (1) Maybe you come with intellectual skepticism that Jesus really died & rose again
 - (2) Maybe you come w/ boredom due to familiarity ... Don't find anything of value because you've heard it so often

(3) Maybe loss of someone you love is overshadowing Easter joy

b) Easter does mean joy, but not necessarily "nothing but joy"

B. It's normal to feel a variety of emotions at Easter

1. Tragedy happens, grief lingers, depression hangs around & sometimes it's hard work to muster the joy we want to feel @ Easter
2. Some of us may have awakened this morning wondering, "How come I don't feel like Easter is supposed to feel?"
3. Expecting Easter to always lift us to an emotional high can be just as unrealistic as expecting Xmas to automatically be this wonderful glowing season w/ no down side
4. God does provide us w/ ample reason for rejoicing @ Xmas & Easter, but life does NOT provide us w/ a perpetual joyride ... That expectation is not realistic.

IV. What IS realistic: to understand that Easter is not fundamentally about emotions (repeat)

A. Easter is about a new cosmic reality we're living in ...

1. It's a fruit basket upset for what "life" & "death" used to mean
2. Easter is an underlying reality ... an assurance of hope that is deeper than mere joy
 - a) C.S. Lewis-- *"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."*
 - b) Easter = reality by which we view all other realities

B. Another way to say it -- Easter is not dependent on what's going on around us

1. Easter can still come even when our life circumstances stink:
 - a) Easter still comes even when the cancer is not miraculously cured ... I know many of you have painfully walked down that disappointing road
 - b) Easter doesn't erase the pain of grief and loss, but it helps us make meaning out of it and find our way through it ...
 - c) Easter still comes even when a strong will & a sunny attitude do not just make depression go away
 - (1) Many of you know exactly what depression feels like
 - (2) At some points in my life I too have known that unwelcome companion, even when things were going well here at church

2. The fact is, Easter is not defined or confined by whatever emotion we happen to be feeling inside ...

- a) it's about what God did for us once & for all out there in that big wide world, which includes us!
- b) So whether or not we feel like Easter does not therefore make Easter less real!

3. Easter means the world is different & better on this side of Jesus' empty tomb, which I hope lifts our spirits

4. But even if we feel emotions other than joy ... it doesn't change the fact that Jesus rose from the dead to make new life possible!

C. To help us remember Easter is about much more than emotions, I invite you to try an experiment with me today:

1. Try not greeting anyone w/ the words "Happy Easter!"

a) At the risk of offending someone this morning, I'm saying: that's not a uniquely Xian wish ...

(1) "Happy Easter" is polite, but I think it sounds as limp as "Happy Birthday!" or "Happy Valentine's Day"

(2) On this highest of Holy Days, as Christians don't we wish more than mere happiness for others?

b) "Happy Easter" implies that Easter is really about happiness ... all without conveying any core Christian beliefs

2. Instead, I invite you to greet people with some Easter phrase that doesn't wish an emotion on them ...

a) Greet them w/ words that say what God has already done at Easter, e.g. "Christ is risen! Hallelujah!"

b) Or greet them w/ what you wish God to do for them ... e.g. "God bless you this Easter!"

3. My friends, whether you want to shout "X is risen!" @ the top of your lungs, or whether all you can manage is mumbling a feeble "Hallelujah", *the fact remains that God broke the power of death through the resurrection of Jesus Christ!*

V. Conclusion

A. Easter has come whether you feel it or not! The feast God prepares is ready whether you're hungry for it or not!

B. And THAT is cause for the biggest Hallelujah of all!