

EASTER: A TIME TO REJOICE

The Resurrection of Our Lord

Easter Day

March 23, 2008

Acts 10:34-43 or Jeremiah 31:1-6

Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24

Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43

Matthew 28:1-10 or John 20:1-18

Go and Tell

Alleluia! He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

With these words, many will greet one another in Christ on Easter Day! And for many, this expression of praise gets “resurrected” on Easter Day in celebration of the risen Christ. A practice in my congregation is to discontinue use of the word “Alleluia” throughout Lent, in keeping with the penitential mood of the season. We even hide the word – children write the word in bold letters on sheets of construction paper, which get rolled and tied with ribbon or string, and then hidden until they are found on Easter Day. And then “Alleluias” burst forth – in hymns, songs of praise, liturgical responses, expressions of greeting – as we proclaim that Christ is risen indeed!

In the Gospel text from Matthew, we learn that on that first Easter morning Mary Magdalene and the other Mary had come “to see the tomb” (28:1). Unlike the resurrection accounts according to Mark (16:1) and Luke (24:1), the women in Matthew’s Gospel do not come with spices to anoint Jesus’ body. What was it they had come to see? Two days earlier, they had witnessed Jesus’ death and burial and sat across from the tomb as the stone was rolled against the tomb’s entrance (27:55-61). Did they return in order to continue their vigil which had been interrupted by the Sabbath observance?

According to Matthew’s Gospel, what they saw and what they experienced was truly awesome! The stone had not yet been rolled away; but as they journeyed to the tomb, there was a violent earthquake, and an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled away the stone (28:2). Did they see the angel coming down from heaven? What must they have thought and felt? Did they remember Jesus’ words about his being raised to life on the third day (16:21; 20:19)?

These two Marys are the first to see the empty tomb, the first to hear the joyous news that Jesus has been raised to life, and the first to encounter the risen Lord! The angel’s message is succinct and direct (28:6,7); the women are told to come and see, to hurry, to tell, and finally, to go! They leave, frightened and happy; then comes that wonderful encounter! They see Jesus—their risen Savior! Jesus greets them and gives them further instructions to tell the disciples where they, too, will see him!

The message to go and tell is just as urgent for us today as it was 2,000 years ago. We are twenty-first century witnesses, and we, too, see Jesus through our eyes of faith. The angel told the women to “go and tell;” Jesus also told them to “go and tell;” and, in Jesus’ final instructions to his disciples, they were told to “go to the people of all nations” (28:19a) to make disciples, baptize, and teach.

To preach the gospel and to testify so that “all who have faith in Jesus will have their sins forgiven in his name” (Acts 10:43, *CEV*) is at the heart of the apostle Peter’s message and is now the Good News we are called to proclaim. Like those first witnesses on that very first Easter, we, too, are missionaries of the resurrection message. Go and tell!

Alleluia! He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Egypt – With thanks to God for the Bible Society’s 125th anniversary, for programs now being broadcast on satellite television, and for an expanding post-literacy program, and with prayers for the *Adopt-A-Bookshop* campaign to boost support for the Bible Society’s bookshops; **West Bank and Gaza Strip** – With thanks to God for the re-opening of the Gaza bookshop which was damaged by a bomb, and with prayers for new projects such as *Proclaim It*, and for the health of the General Secretary and for teams traveling into Palestinian villages in the West Bank; **Israel** – With thanks to God for improved political stability and for the opportunity to print a large quantity of Hebrew Scriptures, and with prayers for projects abroad, for sports outreach in Galilee, ministry at youth festivals, and funds to continue printing Hebrew New Testaments and Gospels for expanding outreach and distribution projects.

Activity Corner: “Go and Tell” Good News Posters

Supplies needed: Bible; 8-1/2” x 11” construction paper or poster board (assorted colors); markers; glue (squeeze bottle); glitter.

On sheets of construction paper or poster board, write the words “Alleluia” and “He is risen” (on 2 separate sheets) in large bold letters. Outline the letters in glue and then sprinkle them with glitter. Throughout the 50-day Easter season, display these posters where you gather for devotions or in your place of worship as reminders to “tell the good news” and to greet those you meet with the words: “Alleluia! He is risen!” Read Colossians 3:1-4 as a closing prayer and conclude by singing one of your favorite Easter hymns or praise songs.