

The Resurrection of Our Lord – Easter Sunday
April 12, 2009
John 20:1-18

“Soaring”

A little over two months ago, my family had the wonderful privilege of traveling to Florida and spending a week at Disney World. If you've ever been to Disney World, please raise your hand. We did all the things that people do when they travel to this tourist destination: Magic Kingdom, Hollywood Studios (formerly MGM), Animal Kingdom, and Epcot. It's a lot of walking, but also a lot of fun. For me, by far the best experience was on a particular ride at Epcot called "Soaring." How many of you know what I'm talking about here? It's phenomenal! At its most basic level, "Soaring" is a motion simulator type ride, but it's much more than that. After being strapped into your seat, you are lifted forward and up toward a huge theater screen in front of you, and then you begin to fly – to soar over spectacular scenery of mountains and deserts, forests and oceans. It is an incredible feeling that brings to life those dreams that we have when we are literally flying. The individual seats move and turn as the landscape on the screen changes, angling up and down and synchronized with the angling of the camera angle on the screen. There is also the sensation of wind blowing in your face as you fly, and even different smells that are piped in – the ocean, pine forests, and others. Riding on this was one of the most freeing feelings I can remember. For me, this ride alone was worth the whole trip to Disney World – and no, I am not being paid for this endorsement.

My friends, today we soar, and you don't have to go to Disney to do it. We soar in triumph and victory with Jesus as he rises from the dead. Today, we soar above the grief and sorrow of Good Friday. That mourning and sadness have been transformed into songs of celebration and joy. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

We weren't there on that first Easter morning. Unlike Peter and John, we didn't see the empty tomb or the grave clothes lying there. Unlike Mary, we have not had a face-to-face encounter with the risen Savior. And because we have not does this mean that Jesus' resurrection is less real for us? Because we haven't had this first-hand experience of being present on that first Easter morning, does this mean that perhaps Jesus didn't really rise from the dead? Many today – even many so-called Christians – don't believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Oh, they believe in resurrection – just not a bodily one. They believe that Jesus' spirit lives on in some metaphorical kind of way, but the real resurrection, the raising of the physical body, is scoffed at and ridiculed. The resurrection is seen by many as a hold-over from the ancient world which didn't have modern medicine, technology and information that we have today. Where do you stand on this? Can we soar above our modern arrogance and superiority, and claim the reality and truth of a crucified and resurrected Jesus – not some metaphorical abstraction, but a living Lord and Savior?

We live in very uncertain times. The economic crisis continues to loom over our nation and world with more job layoffs, downsizing and unemployment; the housing market remains stagnant; savings and retirement are a fraction of their worth a year ago. Global security concerns continue to challenge us: Iraq, Afghanistan, and now piracy off the horn of Africa with an American shipping captain held captive. And the current *Newsweek* lead article, "The End of Christian America" (just in time for Holy Week and Easter! Don't you love the timing of this?) confirms what we already know: the landscape around us is shifting as our culture becomes not only more post-modern, but post-Christian. I encourage you to read this article. In the face of such concerns and problems, we may be tempted to bury our head in the sand, and say, "Ignore it and it will go away." But it is exactly here, in the nitty gritty of life, that faith in the crucified and risen Jesus must speak to life. Can we soar above it all in the midst of it all? On our own, we

can do nothing, but with the presence, the power, and the peace of that risen Jesus at work in our lives, then all things are possible.

As many of you know, my family recently lost two loved ones: a dear aunt of mine and my wife's grandmother, both of whom died within the same week. I want to thank you all for the kind expressions of sympathy, the cards and caring notes, the assurance of prayer, as you point us to the empty tomb and the risen Savior. For some of you here today, you also know the sting of death and the loss of loved ones. This is your first Easter without that loved one, and so the message of resurrection and new life takes on a much deeper meaning. If our faith in this Jesus who himself died and was raised from the dead does not speak to us at the deathbed and the graveside, then it is of no use to us. The poem by Henry H. Barstow sums it up well:

*If Easter be not true,
'Twere foolishness the cross to bear;
He died in vain who suffered there;
What matter though we laugh or cry,
Be good or evil, live or die,
If Easter be not true?*

*If Easter be not true –
But it is true, and Christ is risen!
And mortal spirit from its prison
Of sin and death with him may rise!
Worthwhile the struggle, sure the prize,
Since Easter, aye, is true!*

My friends, since "Easter, aye, is true" life for us is changed. We are not helpless victims who are in an endless downward spiral in life. We belong to Christ, who is risen from the dead and who lives and reigns to all eternity! His resurrection over sin, death, and hell shine through us, his Easter people. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.