

Easter Sunday... Easter Stories

Introduction...

What a glorious time of year... Spring.

The time of new life, when mother earth begins to shed her winter appearance,

with trees budding and flowers beginning to bloom...

yellow forsythia, multi-colored azaleas and tulips and beautifully scented hyacinths,

New Life - the perfect image for our Easter Celebration...

For Easter is about new life.

We have passed thru the six weeks of Lent,

following Jesus' time of struggle with the Powers of Death.

Now we celebrate eight weeks of Easter celebration...

celebrating Jesus' victory.

Easter is about Jesus' victory over the Powers of Death.

Refrain... Alleluia

I The Powers of Death

What were these Powers of Death which seemed victorious over Jesus?

Immediately following Jesus' death his disciples were dumbfounded.

How did it go so wrong, so fast?

And how could their Jesus be dead?

Wasn't this the one who raised the dead?

Now he was dead, and by a most brutal and violent death at that. The powers of death seemed to overwhelm them.

Where was God in all of this?

Surely God should have done something to save Jesus.

Was God that weak in the face of the powers of death?

What were these Powers of Death?

hatred triumphed over love;

vengeance and vindictiveness trumped forgiveness;

sadness and despair overwhelmed joy and hope;

cruelty crushed care;

truth and integrity were derided;

and faithfulness fled.

Fear, resentment and anger reigned.

Ah yes, the powers of death reared their ugly head and declared victory over this upstart Jesus –

the preacher of God's love and forgiveness,

the healer who brought God's compassion,

and love for the poor and outcast.

Where was this God now?

The disciples were sorely tempted to despair.

Had they themselves not fled Jesus' side in their cowardice?

One of them betrayed Jesus.

Another, the leader, denied Jesus.

And only one of them, young John, had enough courage to witness Jesus' bitter death on Calvary.

Where were the others who the night before Calvary promised to follow Jesus even to his death?

Now the disciples hid in the upper room,
behind locked doors,
paralyzed by fear and doubt,
full of guilt and shame.

Refrain... Alleluia

II Jesus Victorious

Two Days after Jesus' terrible death –

a death given vivid visual depiction in Mel Gibson's film **Passion of the Christ** –

something strange happened...

stories started to filter back to the disciples holed up in their hiding place in Jerusalem...

stories about the tomb where Jesus had been buried being empty...

No Jesus. No body.

What was going on? What was happening?

Some asked in dismay,

"Now what... has someone even stolen the body?

Can't they even let him rest in peace?"

Then Jesus comes into their midst...

Suddenly he's right there in the room with them.

Do you think the apostles were surprised? Shocked?
This Jesus who had died a most brutal death *is now alive*,
standing there before them,
talking to them,
and blessing them with Peace...
no recrimination,
no chewing them out because of their cowardice,
no angry denunciation of their faithlessness and fearful flight.
Jesus just seems happy to be with them and to share with them his Good
News –
the powers of death were not victorious.
Have no fear.
Have peace.
Our God's love and graciousness still reigns.

Refrain... Alleluia

III We Need Easter and Its Message

Don't we all need to hear that message
when so much BAD NEWS seems to surround us and even engulf us each
day,
in our Newspapers, on the Radio, and on our TV?
Bad News seems to press on us from all sides,
just as it did the disciples of Jesus.
And we get fearful and doubtful, just like them.
We are tempted to wonder if the forces of darkness and hatred and
demonizing are not more powerful than God.
Where is God, we wonder at times?

And when others tell us about God's love and care,
or when we hear stories about God in other people's lives,
are we like doubting Thomas who demands proof?
Do we wonder why we haven't experienced God?
Or have we just forgotten how God has touched us in the past,
too caught up with our own present worries and struggles and doubts...
or our own present successes and busi-ness and self-sufficiency?

A wonderful story... An Easter story.

The Sick Young Woman

A few months ago a young, beautiful, healthy college student, suddenly and without warning, lost control of her body and was paralyzed from the neck down. Her friends sent prayer requests to everyone they knew and fortunately a few months later, the girl recovered.

When she returned to school, her friends noticed that her smile was brighter than before; it was almost as if she had seen Heaven.

There was a visible change of attitude; she was kinder, happier, and paid attention to people more than ever.

She started sending emails to her friends and family expressing her love and gratitude for all they have done for her.

She sent emails to her parents, thanking them for all the sacrifices they made for her since she was born.

Although everyone loved the change in her, they had to ask her what caused this change in her?

She explained that when she had been immobile in the hospital and thought she would never walk again or would maybe even die, that the most painful thing was the regret she was feeling that she had not lived her life fully.

Now that it seemed to be too late, it all seemed so clear that she had not loved enough, used all opportunities to serve.

She suddenly knew that all the grudges she held, and all the time lost thinking about those who had wronged her and how to avoid those she didn't like, had been a waste of her precious life.

She thought about how much time she spent being mad and miserable for all that went wrong, and how little time she spent rejoicing for what went right!

In her remorse, she begged God in prayer to give her a chance to live again so that she could make things right, and God heard her prayers.

You could say that this young woman rose from her darkness, now totally aware of God's power and love in her life... and she gave thanks.

Have you ever been aware of God's saving presence in your life? Do you have any Easter stories?

I might suggest you share them with your family as you gather around your Easter dinner this day...

Don't get caught up all of the darkness.

Refrain... Alleluia

Conclusion...

The Easter Story of Jesus and our own Easter stories remind us of God's gracious presence in our lives...

something we are tempted to forget about.

Easter is the story of the victory of Jesus over the Powers of Death.

It's an invitation to us to share in that story and in that victory.

What Powers of Death threaten us today?

Worries about our future?

Worries about our kids or grandkids?

Fear about illness or diminishment?

Wonder at our own stubborn sinfulness?

Anger and frustration at how things are going in our world today?

Troubles with sarcasm or bitterness?

All of these Powers of Death seem to sap our lives of joy and serenity.

And so many people today seemed burdened and depressed by these

Powers of Death

which seem to be overwhelming goodness and virtue.

These Powers of Death make it so hard for us to live the kind of lives we know God wants us to live.

That's why it's so important to celebrate the Easter Story and to share our own Easter stories.

We realize that Jesus is victorious over the Powers of Death.

We remember once more that we share in Jesus' victory.

Refrain... Alleluia