

Easter Sunday... Relentless Hope

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,

God's healing and compassion,

God's justice and love for the poor.

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 hide 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 of Jesus holed up in their hiding place in Jerusalem,

that the tomb where Jesus had been buried was empty...

No Jesus.

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 death 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?

Refrain... Alleluia

Conclusion...

The Easter Story is for all of us...
It's 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.
To realize that Jesus was victorious over the Powers of Death.

From the Desk of Donald Ware, C.P.

And to remember once more that we share in Jesus' victory.

Refrain... Alleluia