

Life “*after*” or “*of*” Easter?

*“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have **life** in his name.”*

(John 20:30-31)

Dear Friends in Christ:

In recent years here at Hope, I have often referred to myself as the “*Sunday after Pastor.*” Most notably since retiring, I have preached on the Sunday after Christmas or the weekend after Easter, much like Pastor Lineberger did for me for many years. In preacher lingo we call these the “*low*” Sundays or the “*let-down*” weekends, as the crowds diminish greatly after festival services of worship. On Christmas Eve, for example, Hope welcomed 1,996 worshippers and on the Sunday after, when I preached, only 458! A year ago Easter weekend there were 1,752 worshippers and on the week following, when I preached, only 635! Now I realize most congregations would rejoice at those numbers on any weekend and we are blessed with faithful worshippers at Hope! Last weekend 1,594 worshippers celebrated the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and this weekend, when I’m preaching, probably a lot less!

But none of this, of course, has anything to do with me, or my preaching, at least I hope not! It simply means that life after a holiday weekend goes back to normal, the routines of the daily schedule taking priority. Surely, there’s something special about the message of Christmas and Easter that draws people in and

we're thankful for every person who experiences the presence of the Lord in this place. Yet the Word of God is relevant to every day and every season of time, as Scripture declares that "*Christ, the Son of God has come that we might have life in His name!*"

So my question today is this, "*How is life in these days **OF** Easter?*" Now note, I did not say, "*after Easter*," but "*of Easter*." The language of the liturgy is quite precise, the church year calendar referring to worship today, not as the "*First Sunday **AFTER** Easter*," but the "*Second Sunday **OF** Easter*." We have 40 days in this season to focus on the Risen Christ, affirming the Savior's great sacrifice for our sins on Calvary's cross, celebrating daily the Easter victory of the Lord's resurrection, claiming by faith forgiveness and hope, because Christ is not dead, but alive, promising "*everlasting life to all who believe!*"

Listen again to this life-giving theme in the language of today's lessons. The disciples are instructed in the Book of Acts: "*Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.*" (Acts 5:20) The Apostle John, privileged in the Book of Revelation to get a glimpse of heaven, the Lord God, the "*Alpha and the Omega*" proclaiming, "*Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one.*" (Revelation 1:8, 18) And the great summation and purpose of everything, penned by the Apostle John in the Gospel [read verses 30-31 with me from page 4 of your worship folder]: "*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*" (John 20:30-31)

My friends, Easter is all about **LIFE!** Jesus declared it unequivocally, "*I have come that you might have life, and have*

to the full, in abundance.” (John 10:10) It’s been my mantra for years, trying to convince you and me to claim by faith the fact that *“Jesus Christ did not die on a cross and rise from the grave so that we would go on living the same old, same old lives!”* Easter is about **LIFE – new life!** These are not the “let-down Sundays, or give up weekends, or go back to the routine, whatever will be, will be” days **“after Easter!”**

No, these are the days **“OF Easter,”** which is precisely why the early church chose Sunday as the new Sabbath day of festival worship, remembering and celebrating every week the victory of Christ, the Risen Lord! He is alive yet today, speaking just as clearly in the Word to us as He did to the **“after Easter disciples”** who were huddled in fear behind locked doors, struggling to believe, doubts abounding – the Risen Lord appearing and declaring *“Peace be with you!” “You want to see my nail scarred hands and touch my wounded side,”* Jesus said to Thomas? *“Here I am, here, right here, alive; blessing even those who have not seen, yet believe!”* (John 20:26-29)

These are the days **“of”** Easter, and it’s either real or it’s a fraud and a fake, just another charade like the Easter bunny that turns a holy, life-changing spiritual day into something mundane and meaningless! If that’s the case, then we’re in heap of trouble, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this **life** we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”* (1 Corinthians 15:17-19) Trust in Christ, the Risen Lord and Savior cannot simply be an **after-glow** or an **after-thought!** We are called to a daily awareness **“of”** the presence of the Risen Christ, believing each and every day, no matter what *“this life”* brings, that we have **“life in his name!”** In my mind, it’s an

important distinction and a challenging faith question, “*Are we living like it’s **‘after’** Easter, or **‘OF’** Easter?*”

Now, “**After** Easter,” we know what that scene looks like, don’t we? Locked doors, followers huddled in fear, uncertain of what to believe! “**After** Easter,” it’s wilted lilies, melted candy, stained finery; going back to same old job and financial struggles; prayer list a mile long with few praises and lots of challenges! “**After** Easter,” your husband still doesn’t get it and only if only she would really listen! Your parents are on your case all the time, and even if the case they make is for your own good, their tone makes it feel controlling and oppressive! “**After** Easter,” The world at times seems to be coming apart at the seams, the headlines of life permeated by sickness, struggle and sorrow, sin and death and terror and evil; drugs and divorce and disease; and well...you know! Take a moment and just listen to your own soul or go a little deeper in conversation with a friend, and somewhere lurking inside every person is a sin, a mistake, a hurt, a pain, a loss, a conflict, a doubt, a fear that just won’t subside! That’s life “**AFTER** Easter!”

But “*life OF* Easter,” well that’s something different because even though all that “*after*” stuff lurks and lingers, faith in the Risen Christ provides assurance and hope, peace and strength, knowing that we will make it “*through*” whatever comes our way because “*believing in Christ we have **life** in his name!*” It’s the Easter victory bellowed in the great hymn we just sang:

*God sent His son, they called Him, Jesus;
He came to love, heal and forgive;
He **lived** and died to buy my pardon,
An empty grave is there to prove my Savior **lives!***

*Because He **lives**, I can face tomorrow,
Because He **lives**, all fear is gone,
Because I know He holds the future,
And **life** is worth the living,
Just because **He lives!***

So here's the question, framed one more time: Will you be an “**after Easter**” doubter and pouter, whiner and complainer, negative and defeated - or will you be an “**OF Easter**” Christian, trusting and believing, assured and forgiven, positive and hopeful because “*the Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*”

By God's grace say it like you mean it, and believe it and then live it: “*The Lord is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!***”

*May God bless you in these days **OF Easter!** Amen.*