

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, April 12, 2009
Rev. John Tapscott

"THE RESURRECTION CHANGES EVERYTHING"

Mark 16:1-8

The world has certainly changed from a year ago. In April 2008 markets were flying high - stocks, housing, commodities, jobs. Then last fall certain large banks collapsed, credit was tightened and look where we are today - markets and house values down, businesses stressed and some bankrupt. When President Obama spoke about the auto industry two weeks ago, he was saying in essence, "The world has changed. It's a different place, and we all must adjust to the new reality."

There have been significant moments in history which have changed the world forever. The flood in Noah's time changed human life and the face of the earth forever. More recently, the discovery of nuclear energy changed the world forever, for good and for bad. The events of 9/11 dramatically changed the course of history.

But the one event which changed the world forever was the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Mark 16:1,2 - "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb." Mark's play on words was perhaps unintended, but still meaningful. "Very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen." By the time the sun had risen in the eastern sky, the Son of God had already risen from the dead. The women didn't know it yet, but they were living in world that had been changed forever. When they entered the empty tomb, a young man dressed in white said to them, "Do not be alarmed, you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised." Now the woman knew it and we know it, too. We live in a world in which Jesus Christ is risen and alive, a world that has been changed forever. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything.

First, the resurrection of Jesus changes our view of God.

"I believe in God the Father Almighty," we say in the Apostles Creed. But sometimes we wonder if God really is almighty, all powerful. Of course he is, for he created heaven and earth out of nothing. But we don't often see or

experience God in a powerful way. Indeed, we may sometimes experience God's absence from our world and our lives. But Easter shows us that God is almighty. On Good Friday, the powers of evil and sin and death concentrated all their might at the Cross. They celebrated as God's perfect and beloved Son was buried in the tomb, gone forever. But on Easter morning God had one more move to make and that move was resurrection. God's love loosed his Son from the deadly trap of sin and death and decisively defeated those powers. "He has been raised. He is not here."

Yes, God often keeps a low profile in the world because if his full power were unleashed we couldn't bear it, and also because there is much that he expects us to do and empowers us to do. But when God intervenes and acts, he is powerful indeed. The escaping Hebrew slaves saw it when they were trapped between the pursuing Egyptian army and the waters of the Red Sea. Going forward or backward would result in certain death. But God acted with power and provided the Hebrews with a way out of the trap. For the Hebrews, God was forever the Lord God Almighty who intervened with power to save them. And this same God is the Almighty Father who loosed his Son from the bonds of death.

Or consider the women. They faithfully kept the Sabbath, then went early Sunday morning to give their beloved Master a proper burial. They went obediently, though they had no idea who would roll the large stone away from the tomb. But when they arrived, they saw that the stone had already been rolled away. It was God's mighty act, and then they heard of God's even mightier act, that "He has been raised." When the faithful women could do no more, God intervened and did a great and unexpected thing.

The resurrection of Jesus changes forever our view of God. It means that we must never underestimate God or leave him out of our calculations. God is always a factor in our world and our lives. We are not alone and it's not all up to us. God rolls away stones that we can't move ourselves. When we act faithfully and can do no more, then we see what God can do. What God promises, God can do and will do. And one day every eye will see the acts of Almighty God.

Secondly, the resurrection of Jesus Christ forever changes our view of Jesus himself.

The young man said to the women, "You are looking for Jesus, who was crucified." Now if Jesus had not been raised by God, he would have been just a footnote in an ancient history book, written off as a pretender to the throne, a

misguided blasphemer who got himself crucified. But by raising Jesus from the dead, God made a decisive statement about who Jesus is.

Think about this - of all the world's great religious figures, God raised Jesus and Jesus alone to be alive and seen by many witnesses. During the 2008 Presidential campaign, Oprah Winfrey dramatically introduced Barak Obama by saying, "He is the one!" In a far more profound sense God said that about Jesus when he raised him from the dead. "He is the One! He is my beloved Son, listen to him." In Romans Paul speaks of "Jesus Christ our Lord (was) designated Son of God in power...by his resurrection from the dead." By raising him from the dead, God put the seal of approval on all that Jesus said and did. He accepted Jesus' death as the final sacrifice for our sins. God designated him as the source of forgiveness and eternal salvation for all who obey him. God singled out Jesus as Lord and judge of the world, who will come again to destroy every rule and every authority and every power, and complete God's Kingdom.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ forever changes our view of Jesus himself. It is simply inadequate to speak of Jesus as a good man or a great teacher or an example of courage and righteous living. All this is true but the resurrection of Jesus means that he was and is much, much more. He is the everlasting Son of God, the Saviour of the world and its coming judge. Because Jesus was raised no one can remain neutral to him or be indifferent. The eternal fate of each human person will be decided by our response to Jesus. He is the One each of us has to come to terms with. There is no escaping Jesus and his claim on our lives.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ forever changes our view of God, of Jesus, and also of death.

In the Broadway musical, "A Little Night Music" the grandmother proposes a toast, "To life"! she says, and everyone at the party cheerfully joins in. Then she proposes a second toast, "And now to the only other reality, death!" There is silence. The others can't join in the toast. They're embarrassed, fearful. The party is over.

Death, says the Bible, is the final enemy, the enemy of all we hold dear. It destroys our bodies, our dreams, it separates us from our loved ones; it often takes people in the prime of life with much potential yet unfulfilled. And it comes to 100% of us.

A doctor misdiagnosed a patient and declared her dead. Her husband was informed and was grief-stricken. Imagine the surprise of a nurse when she found that the woman was not dead, but alive! "You better tell the family," she urged

the doctor. The embarrassed doctor phoned the husband and said, "I must talk to you about your wife's condition." "My wife's condition," he said, "she's dead." "Well," the doctor mumbled, "there's been a slight improvement."

Some people say that Jesus didn't really die, but just swooned on the Cross and revived in the tomb, in other words, showed a slight improvement. But the Bible emphasises that Jesus was really dead. No one survived a Roman crucifixion. The Romans were ruthlessly efficient at it. But then in a mighty act, God raised Jesus from the dead and made him to be seen, before taking him back to heaven forty days later. And the resurrection of Jesus Christ changes our view of death forever. Death is still our enemy, but it is a defeated enemy. Paul cries, "O death, where is thy victory, O death, where is thy sting. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." It is not death, but Almighty God who reigns in this world. And God gives Christ's victory to all of us who believe in His Son. God's power will raise us from death to share God's own life, eternal life in heaven. Death may separate us from our loved ones for a time, but only for a time, not forever. In the Father's house all God's children will be gathered together and the promise of our lives will be fulfilled. We will be changed from glory into glory until we bear the very likeness and image of Christ himself. The resurrection of Jesus Christ changes our view of death forever.

Finally, Jesus' resurrection changes our view of the future.

The messenger said to the woman, "Go and tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you. So they went and fled from the tomb; for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." The ending of Mark is truncated, but we know from the other gospels that before long the women broke their silence and told the disciples. Soon they all saw the risen Christ. But you can understand their initial fear. Their world and their expectations had been turned upside down. What would the future hold now with Jesus alive and let loose in the world?

Our initial reaction to change is often fear. We sometimes find it easier to stick with the bad situation we know, rather than move forward into something new and better. The thought of the future and often makes us afraid. But the Resurrection of Jesus Christ changes our view of the future. For we now live in a world, God's world, in which Jesus Christ is alive and active by power of the Holy Spirit. And if we trust Christ and expect to meet him, we will. We will experience his power and presence in the familiar places, the Galilees, and even in the unfamiliar places, the wilderness places.

Yes, the future may hold unknown pitfalls, but even more, it holds the presence of the Risen Christ. We are moving into a future in which Jesus Christ is Lord, a future in which, as the Psalmist puts it, "God in his loving kindness will meet us at every corner." So we face the future, not with fear, but with confidence, because it is God's future. The future belongs to the Risen Lord and we belong to him. That's why Paul tells us that nothing the future holds can henceforth separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything!