

An Easter Heart

John 20 : 19-31

Easter is all about a four letter word — and Christians are full of it. Or at least we're supposed to be full of it.

The four letter word is LIFE.

New life. Whole life. Abundant Life. Redeemed life. Resurrected life.

The purpose of life is not death, Easter says. The purpose of life is life . . . a life that triumphs over death forever.

Celebrating Easter is the best thing that the church can do because it is a celebration of all that is good, all that is true, and all that is beautiful.

In fact, I would make the case that celebrating Easter is the greatest public service the church can perform for the world. Why? Because it is the reality of Easter that makes everything else we would do possible.

Remember Jesus' final words on the cross? "It is finished."

When the soldiers taking Jesus' body down from the cross stabbed him with a spear point, "blood and water came out" (John 19:34). That rush of fluids revealed what was the actual final cause of death for Jesus — a burst aorta. Jesus died of a broken heart. The breaking of Jesus' heart was what "finished" Jesus' sacrifice. On Easter morning the great surprise is that sacrifice was not the end of Jesus' mission. Out of Jesus' broken heart there emerged a new heart, a resurrected heart, an unbreakable, unstoppable heart. Out of the Last Adam's split side a new Eve was conceived, the bride of Christ, the church, whose life revolves around the water of baptism and the blood of communion.

On Easter "It is finished" becomes "Now it begins."

Life begins anew with the resurrected rhythms of that Easter heart. It is an Easter heart that the resurrected Jesus offered to all who believed in him, all who read the signs and symbols of new life God had left at the empty tomb.

The "beloved disciple" looked in at the abandoned grave clothes and "believed" that Jesus had risen. At that instant his Easter heart started beating.

Mary Magdalene heard her name called with her beloved Teacher's own voice, and she saw and believed that the risen Lord stood before her. It was at that moment Mary's Easter heart started beating.

When Jesus walked and talked along the Emmaus road with two of his disciples Jesus was practicing heart massage. His disciples later recalled "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road" (Luke 24:32). But only after Jesus blessed and broke the bread did those disciples suddenly see and believe. It was like a final jolt that jump-started their Easter hearts.

When Thomas touched Jesus and saw with his soul, his Easter Heart awakes with a gasp-like heart arrhythmia driven expression: My Lord and My God!

And so, the question arises for us- At this covid time....Is the church populated with people gathered with hearts full of Easter? Do you have an Easter heart? Here are some ways we can tell.

1) An Easter heart is full of **new life**. And, an Easter heart is full of a new mission. An Easter heart is full of new possibilities. An Easter church that is filled with Easter hearts continues to offer signs of new life to the world.

2) An Easter heart church **throws off the old grave clothes**. Have we shed our shrouds? Death shrouds separate the dead from the living. Death shrouds wrap a corpse in fine linens and sweet spices — but they cannot stop the inner decay.

Instead of wrapping ourselves in costly, starchy grave clothes, "church people" full of Easter hearts wear blue jeans. -Now this is allegorical- I don't really expect you to literally wear blue jeans at this moment, but you can appreciate ...how an Easter heart church is a blue jeans church. It lives its faith in everyday, working day clothes: clothes that are tough and sturdy and made to get dirty. In fact, jeans get softer and better the more they are worn and washed by years of use.

3) An Easter heart church is full of **rock-rollers**. Notice I didn't say rock-and-rollers . . . I did say Rock-Rollers. The first sign of the resurrection, as noted by a *distraught Mary Magdalene*, was that the rock had been rolled away from the tomb's entrance. Every body, even Jesus' resurrected body, needs to be offered a way out.

Rock-rollers offer ways "out" to all sorts of people, trapped in all kinds of tombs.

Strengthened by an Easter heart we can:

- roll away despair, and reveal a path to hope.

- We can roll away delusions — delusions for our loved ones like “If I was rich I’d be happy;” delusions like “All I need is one more drink, or smoke, . . .;” delusions like “Nobody loves me, why does it.” And you can pray for this... for your neighbours and your family, ourselves...
- We can pray that despair will be rolled away and a path to hope revealed.
- We can roll away fear — and entice tomb-dwellers to step out into the light.

Rock-rolling isn’t a one-person job. It takes a community of Easter hearts to get those rocks rolling the right direction.

4) An Easter heart church is **always in a state of arrhythmia**, always experiencing adrenaline surges, always skipping beats, and always a racing pulse. An Easter heart is an arrhythmic heart because in an Easter heart church the unexpected is always happening. Resurrection happens. Miracles happen. Truth happens. Goodness happens. Beauty happens. Jesus happens.

Thomas doubted all the stories. He defied anyone to produce Jesus with his all his wounds. Thomas then said he would only believe if he could put his fingers into the nail holes and spear wound. Then, suddenly, Jesus stood before him in that locked upper room, offering himself to be poked and prodded. Knocking upside down Thomas’ whole concept of reality, Thomas could only exclaim “My Lord, and my God!”

If you have an Easter heart, you learn to expect the unexpected. To relish the ridiculous. To savor the sensational.

5) An Easter heart people comprise a church that is **filled with laughter**.

I wonder if the resurrection is a testimony to the adage, “he who laughs last laughs best.” The Sanhedrin thought they had the last laugh. The Roman authorities thought they had the last laugh. The cruel crowds and sadistic soldiers thought they had the last laugh. We think we have the last laugh.

But the resurrection proved God has the last laugh. Those who thought they had triumphed over Jesus were soundly trumped by his triumph over death itself.

Proving this point of laughter is the custom that exists among no less than the stern, solemn historic churches of many denominations down to the Reformation and even to this day, there is at Easter something called “the Easter laughter or Holy Humour.” Holy Hilarity is a wanting for the heart of the church, to “ring with laughter at Eastertime, and to enjoy fully the divine sense of humor.

6) Finally, and this is, of all the ways of an Easter heart- the most important "sign" of an *Easter heart church*: an Easter heart will be a **broken heart**.

There is a story about a man and his 12-year-old daughter. As one of their joys of life, they have a heart ritual. It grew out of the Dad's work requiring him to be on the road, away from home, quite a bit. Therefore, he makes it a practice to bring home to his young daughter- a heart from the place(s) he's visited. He tells her that she "has his heart," and to symbolize that, he brings home to her hearts made of every material imaginable in every form imaginable to convey to her the unimaginable love that he really has in his heart for her. Since the barn-owl has the face of a heart, sometimes these love-icons are in the form of owl figurines. His "heart hunts" are one of the favorite things this Father does when he's "on the road." Over the years, his daughter has amassed a major heart collection, and often takes one or more of these "hearts" with her places she goes to remind her of the hold she has on her father's heart.

One day, when this man was distributing his heart stash to his daughter after a lengthy time away, she made him close his eyes. "I have a surprise for you," she said. "I made you some heart art." When he opened his eyes to see the canvas she had pressed in his open hands, she proclaimed with delight: "Here's my heart, Dad."

He looked at her picture, and, at first, his heart sank. In the middle of the picture was a giant pastel heart, not blood red, but yellow-ish pink. He was struck by the fact that the heart had a sickly look, and to add to the disturbing colour of the heart- it jolted his disposition to observe that the heart was breaking in two, torn and jagged from ripping apart. (PAUSE)

But ~ rising out of the broken heart like a dawning sun, there was a whole new heart - a throbbing, beet-red, strong heart being birthed from the pain of a broken heart.

This Christian man wrote about this afterwards saying - "That one image is the best icon of the gospel he has ever seen." The promise of Easter Sunday is not that your heart won't break. In fact, the promise of Easter Sunday is that if you love, your heart WILL break. Thomas was heart broken. - - God so loved the world, God's heart broke. The cross is a symbol of God's broken heart. A broken heart is the price of love. We know this from our children and our parents and our spouses- our best friends- we know this from our most meaningful relationships.... The price of love is suffering. The price of love is a broken heart.

Easter is not the symbol of a heart that will never break, it is the symbol of this: that out of that broken heart, God will birth a new heart, a whole heart, a beet-red blood rich heart.

Is your heart breaking this Easter Season? Is our Church's heart breaking this Easter Season? If so, are we sure it's breaking for the same things that break God's heart? We know from The Bible, that David was a "man after God's own heart" . . . a person with a heart that beats for the least, the last, and the lost. Do you have a heart after God's own heart? Is your heart beating for the lowest and the least? For someone or (more than one "someones") - outside of yourself....As an Easter people with Easter hearts ... functioning from a broken heart Can be a God-given gift - better than functioning from a stone cold -hardened heart thanks be to God that from broken hearts emerge newness, wholeness and richness...

It's part of the absurd thing about being Christian- by having an Easter heart, is knowing its ok to have a broken heart.

May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and grant you peace in your heart... - for as our Father has sent Jesus, so he speaks to us (through the power of the Holy Spirit and the scripture)- saying "Just as my father sent me, I send you. We know he sends us forth from our wallow -(what ever it is) with an Easter heart - one of. . .newness and with a beat-skipping, blue-jeans-wearing, laughing, rock-rolling, though, broken heart.