

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Life Before Death"
Dr. J. Dent

March 23, 2008
(Easter Sunday)

Introduction

[Hold up an egg] The egg: A thing of beauty; Part of the wonders of God's creation; A symbol of hope and possibilities; A symbol of new life; And of wholeness—spheroid symmetry, white purity.

And as with all objects, as we reflect on the object itself, so do we reflect on ourselves. Hermeneutically, this is the merging of horizons, the symbolic self-projection onto the other. Simply put, using no philosophical language, the egg is something like our hopes, our dreams, our very selves.

Our personal expectations crushed

The egg is like the ideals of life and how these ideals unfold for us in life. They may start out whole and wonderful but as we gain in life experience, we see the cracks in the egg. [Examine egg] We experience pain and loss beyond our control. We experience the cuts and bruises of relationships and sometimes even the knock-out punch.

And even with what we can control, we also face ourselves in our own lack of integrity—i.e. not following through with what we said we would do or be. Lying, cheating, not measuring up even to our most basic standards. Our lives and attitudes do not turn out the way we expected them to. A personal crisis happens and the cracks in the egg can become crushing. [Crush egg] Just like a crushed egg. [Wipe hand, take up another egg]

Our expectations of others crushed

And others in whom we have placed our hope and our aspirations are like an egg, full of possibilities and life. But other people disappoint us as well (eventually); through their own moral/ethical/integrity lacks. Yes. But also because they too can be the source of pain and hurt, and it may not even be their fault. An automobile accident occurs and brain damage results in paralysis for a young man 28 years old, a young girl in elementary school gets incurable leukemia, a woman in her early senior years gets a tumour that is inoperable. It's not fair. A teenager decides to take his life. An adult loses her mental stability and has to be institutionalized. The death of a

loved one. And the cracks in the ideals of relationships become crushing.
[Crush second egg]

Our expectations of the Church crushed

Consider the Church, which is the symbol of what is right and good, the symbol of new community and new life. [Take up the third egg] The Church, which is to be the symbol of stability and the love and grace of God, becomes a place of bickering, of hurt, of politicking, even of abuse. I'm speaking about the Church Universal, about which the media loves to dig up dirt. The Church shows its cracks of sexual scandal and the cracks of hypocrisy (which is a normal problem in every community) and when we hear about these and even experience them first-hand, the crack turns into a crushing blow. [Crush third egg; Take up empty egg]

Expectations about Jesus crushed

And even Jesus who was the hope of His disciples, the One they thought for sure would deliver them from all their political oppression (which at the time was Roman military occupation), Jesus, the One who would let them experience good economic times again—this Deliverer would set all things straight with a might army to prove he was the King hailed the capital city on Palm Sunday. Right?

But suddenly, He was arrested, violently abused and finally tortured to death on a wooden cross. Crushed [Empty egg crushed]

But His death was different. On that Easter Sunday, some women found a strange thing—the tomb was empty. And they met a strange visitor—who said Jesus was alive! The visitor said that Jesus had promised this to you, but you didn't understand it when he told you. Later the disciples understood that Jesus' death was the beginning of the death of death itself. For Jesus did not stay dead, but rose from the dead to life.

The importance of the Resurrection

Jesus raising from the dead was to change world history forever. The calendar was recalibrated to Him. The question is: Has our personal history been changed by him? Have our lives been recalibrated around his? The direct question: Do you know Jesus Christ and His power in your life today?...

There was a scandal in the Corinthian church two decades after Jesus' death and resurrection. In fact, there were many scandals in the church at Corinth. That church was anything but dull: sexual scandals, leadership scandals, worship scandals, theological and doctrinal scandals—they had it all. But we have time to only look at one scandal—that is the question of the importance of the resurrection.

Did the resurrection really happen? And does it matter if it really happened or whether somebody just made it up?

How would you answer those questions? Do you think Christ rose from the dead? Does it really matter to you if He did or didn't? ...

Paul makes God's position very clear on this point. He minces no words. If there is no resurrection, our faith is in vain (v. 14). If Christ was not raised from the dead, our faith is futile (v. 17). And all this is a big joke. If there is no resurrection, then we are to be pitied as fools more than anybody else on this planet (v. 19).

But if Christ was raised, then all will face the resurrection of the dead. And there IS justice beyond the injustices of this life. There IS a settling of accounts. There IS an ultimate cost to the decisions we choose to make in this life.

What is your decision this morning? Where do you stand today? Will you say (with all that you are): "Yes, Jesus I want you at the centre of my life, not at the periphery. Yes, I want you to be my Lord and Saviour, forgiving my sins and leading me in the ways that please God most." Don't worry about that other person's spiritual state at this moment, God asks *you* to consider *your* own relationship with Christ.

Are *you* willing to stake *your* life on the reality of the resurrection? And remember what we're dealing with here is *not* taking a poll of religious belief to see what religious system has the best percentage points of credibility and then choosing along with the crowd who supports the resurrection as opposed to reincarnation, or whatever belief. We're *not* talking about what religious market share we hold, *nor* about how many believers it will take to win the public opinion poll.

We *are* talking about the ultimate reality based on the historical occurrence of Jesus' resurrection. Are you willing to stake your life on Jesus Christ? His own disciples fled, and even denied knowing him. But later, they saw Him risen and He made them the first church leaders in spite of their problems and shortcomings, in spite of their lack of faith.

We have not seen the nail prints and the scars of the wounds in Jesus' hands and side as Thomas did. (John 20) And yet we are called to follow Jesus no matter what the cost. Will you choose to day to commit yourself anew to Christ? Whether you have denied Christ in the past or just been apathetic or simply want to have a fresh experience of God, tell Him during our prayer time. Clarify your commitment to Christ today—by saying “yes” to Jesus, saying “Be my God, be my Master, be my Director, be my Teacher.”

It's a choice we face everyday, not just on Easter Sunday, but everyday, a choice to say “I trust you, Lord Jesus, forgive my sins, lead me in your way.” If you say this to God, say this as well to a friend or family member, and to me or one of your church leaders, because we need to know and want to encourage you in your faith and commitment.

God warns us that we can say “No” to Jesus. We can push Him to the periphery of our lives and shut out His Holy Spirit. It is possible to choose to go against the Author of Life, preferring to be deadly anesthetized to His spiritual call to believe the Good News.

As sad as it seems, we can prefer death in this life, spiritual death, and shut God out, and reject Jesus as the crowd did on Good Friday. So God tells us He will let us have our preference (even though it may not make any sense) to prefer death and ignore Him now, although He will continue to stretch out His arms as the Father of the two lost sons did in the parable.

We can in fact choose to go from death to death. But why not choose life? Choose spiritual life now by committing yourself to Christ. Then by God's grace, life will be yours in the life beyond physical death.

The question is not: is there existence or life after death? God has answered that question with a definitive “Yes” in the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ. The question is: Will you choose life before death?

It doesn't matter how many times you have heard this. It doesn't matter if you've been in church all your life, or whether this is the first time you've been in a church building, or anything in between. What matters is your desire and choice today, now.

And maybe at the Easter dinner or supper today, with whatever grace or thanks you offer over the food, perhaps you might consider say as well, "I (or we) trust you Lord Jesus. Be the centre of our lives/my life. Be the centre of our Easter celebration today, right now. Amen."

Remember when you see the beautiful Easter egg [Show Easter egg] or one of its chocolate descendents, don't think of that springtime Santa Claus called Peter Rabbit. Think of the new life in Christ and all its possibilities of love and justice, faithfulness and self-control. Think about the beauty Christ can bring into your life as you get to know Him more intimately and the fact that you will not only have life after death, but even more importantly, life before death.

Let us pray.