Easter Sunrise
Ap 15, 1979

(1)

Although we all surely would have liked it otherwise, we may well take this rainy weather as a sign from heaven. Not indeed, as I said to a friend yesterday, that God must be Jewish, after all, since he had the sun shine on the first day of Passover, but not on the first day of Easter.

No, maybe something more serious and more substantive. We had better admit it on this ornery day: in many of our churches there's a tendency to romanticize Easter and to prettify the Resurrection.

We get caught up in Easter^ just about the time that we get caught up in spring fever. And we bedeck our churches with many lilies, in keeping with both the season of Easter and the season of Spring.

I'm not saying now that the churches go so far as to bring that mindless excuse for an Easter idea, the Easter bunny, into the sanctuaries. For everybody knows that the Easter bunny is a plot by csssvEr^.interests to turn Easter into the kind of consummer ~~Eatrtflwr5T~~l that Christmas has become.

But we do have a tendency to mix-pp Spring with Easter and vice veesa. So much so, I think, that a few people may , know how to celebrate Easter in a time of bad weather. Come to think of it, if you don't have all the beautiful flowers and the sweet-smelling warm breezes and the cheerful songs of the birds on the fresh green lawns, what do you have?

Well, to begin with, you're in a position to understand the biblical story of Easter, since all the flowers and the warm breezes and the sentimental feelings are mostly noticeable in the New Testament by their absence.

How are we to understand Easter, then, on a rainy, onery day? To answer this question, I want to suggest three themes that I find delineated in the last few chapters of Luke, which narratej^the story of the resurrection and the appearances of Christ to his disciples.

I.

The first is <u>failure</u>. _____

The context of Easter is failure. Easter wouldn't make any sense at all, biblically speaking, had Jesus lived to a ripe old age, and died in bed.

Some of you can recall perhaps what it was like to be apart of the Movement in the late 1960's and early 1970's. It was a time of hope and enthusiasm. High school students and college students, and church people of all ages, found themselves called to the streets: to demonstrate in behalf of racial justice, to demonstrate in behalf of peace in Southeast Asia.

Then, suddenly, as you know, it all went sour, somehow. It seems that the gains of the sixties in terms of racial justice are being eroded, one by one. Ever more sobering, the quest for peace seems to have been set back enormously, not by the threat of some conflict here or there(there's even some good news from the Middle East, it seems), but more because of the

mounting arms race, and the prospect of ~~migigs~~r thermonuclear fire and brimstone raining down on us everywhere, through some accident or some Wk act of madness.

So the people 25® who were self-included members of the Movement in the sixties, have dow more or less fled from the scene. The sixties, it would seem, b®^_ended in failure.

The disciples had themselves been enthusiastically participating in the Jesus movement in the three glorious years of Jesus' ministry. They had watched it grow. They had stood back in admiration of their master. They had even entertained dreams of glory for themselves, fantasizing about the positions of honor they would occupy when Jesus, their leader, restored the good fortunes of the Jewish people.

But it all came to naught. Their glorious leader was executed like a common criminal. Their movement was more or less destoryed. Even they themselves, when the crunch came, deseeted their leader, in order to save their own skins.

No more vivid scene of failure can we readily imagine.fO""

I am not suggesting now that in order to understand the mysteiyof Christ's resurrection, you have to run out and do something that makes you a failure. But I do want to KEamin remind you that failure -- whether it be in terms of political success, or making the grade individually in a society that demands good grades, or being **Hs a .giaayrnr-t** success in personal relationships -- I am suggesting that if you and I are caught up in that hectic quest for success all the time. if we don't know how to come to terms with failure, we will be missing one of the key elements that helps us to know who the risen Christ actually is.

In worldly terms, Jesus Christ was a colossal failure. And so were his disciples^ **Tur' thin mnnl [iTiTFi.**

II.

Then a second theme, that I think can help us to understand Easter on a rainy ordery day: faithfulness.

There were some among the disciples — interestingly enough, it happened to be the women — who did not want to cancel the sunrise service because it was raining. This group of women had been following Jesus faithfully in Galilee, Luke tells us. They stood afar off on the day of the crucifixion and watched it resolutely; they did not MW run away.

Then they stayed, watching some more.

They witnessed Joseph of Arima thea laying Jesus' body in a new tomb.

Then, after they had rested on the Sabbath, they j®at to the tomb again, to care for the body with spices. There they were told to remember: £ remember how Jesus had instructedJwan that he must die, so that he could rise again.

"And they remembered his words," we're told, "and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest."

(3)

The women were faithful to their own commitment to follow Jesus, from the very beginning. They held on to their faith, even when they were faced with what for them was the greatest tragedy: the removal XSSK of that One person from their midefej, who had so affirmedyidrijwy them, so loved them, s so depended on them for his own strength.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, as it were, guess who has thrown in the towel? Guess who it is who has allowed^)— the experience of failure to overcome them so much, that it dissipated their faithfulness? It turns out to be the men.

I won't belabor the point, except to notice it. And except to note one striking finding from recent news reports * 4ns.ou»-*-vw«-dsey. In,the wake of the Harrisburn almost-dissaster, people were survey**about 3XK their views of nuclear power: most women, it turns out, <jfcre opposed to nuclear power; most men M&fe- in favor of it.

The masculine stereotype, in any case, is very much mixed up with the quest for power and domination, with the works of aggression and war.

Perhpps that's why the women found it more natural to remain faithful to their commitment to the Prince of Peace, even though he had apparently been vanquished by worldly powers.

In any case, an^^de^gf^nding of ttze>resu^xeckion pf Jesus Christ'would fra seem assume faitliTul»si&>i'oniTteachings,— to his proclamation of the coming of the kingdom of God and his suffering death, as a foundation for encountering him as our living Lord.

III.

My third theme is this. In the midst of failure the women were faithful to their commitment to Jesus, faithful to their memory of his presence, and out of this faithfulness then could grow a new kind of festivity.

The woman go and tell the med that Jesus is no longer in the tomb. They "dismiss the women's story, perhaps as one might expected men to have done, as some idle tale. BKXXXff But apparently, the women persist.

Bor, notlong afterward a couple of followers of Jesus are walking along to the road to Emmaus, and they have heard the women's story. But they still don't believe it, even when a mysterious stranger appears to them and begins to interpret the scriptures for them.

Then Jesus makes himself known to these men in the breaking of bread. And, after Disclosing himself to a number of others, he goes before them^/Lt seems, to Jerusalem. There, we are told in the last lines of the Gospel of Luke they went with great joy, continually in the temple blessing God.

They went to the temple, and said their prayerw. We also know that they met together in each other's homes to break bread and to sing songs of hope and joy.

They went tiroough the motions of hope, in a mood of festivity.

And this is why we are here XXL this morning, I am sure, on this rainy day. We have come here together to goJ^J:hrough the motions of hope, in a mood of festivity. For we know that it is in this context, paxxKXKEiiBHEE^more than any other that we can taste the presence of the risen Lord.

Robert Frost has some lines about going through the motions that commend themselves to me here:

> Our very life depends on everythings'
> Incurring till we answer from within.
> The thousandth time may prove the charm.

I am aware that most of us here this morning are at different points in the Christian life. Some are familiar with the depths, with the anguish and the ecstacy. Others may be at the other end of the spectrum of faith, perhaps just beginning, maybe even wondering whether to set out on the journey of faith at all. Still others may be as"various points along the way.

Wherever you are on your journey of faith, I invite you to renew your journey this morning, to go through the motions of hope, in this mood of festivity, so that this day can be the thousanth time for you and prove the charm.

Wherever you are in your understanding of the mystery of the resurrection, I invite you to ponder anew the failure of the Cross, to hear anew the faithful testimony of the women, and to join aaaw in these festive Easter^rites, so that the living Christ might reach out a&iw and call you by name, as you celebrate his Easter victory.

Wherever you are in your own pilgrimage this rainy, day, I invite you to say with me anew:

Christ is risen!

Will you repeat this after me?

Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed.
Praise the Lord. Amen.