



# St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

Easter Day, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2008

✠ **In The Name of The Father and of The Son  
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.** ✠

**(Ephesians 1:15-2:10)** What we call the epistle to the Ephesians was a circular letter written to a number of churches of which Ephesus was one. Like all of Scripture it is rich and multi-leveled. In chapter 1:3 the Apostle Paul spoke of the blessings of God the Father which are found in heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. He prays that God would give the Holy Spirit to the believers in Asia in such a way that they might know, verse 17, *all the Father did for them when he raised Jesus Christ from the dead*. This is the event we celebrate today. Paul speaks of it in verse 19 of chapter 1 when he talks of the power that was exerted upon the body of Jesus when he was raised on that first day of the week after the Passover.

By his resurrection Jesus was shown to be the Messianic Son of God with power. He said that whoever had seen him had seen the Father. None of this would be credible if his body had decomposed beneath the eastern sun. But dying in dishonor he was raised in glory. Dying in weakness he was raised in power. His body was not just resuscitated. There was a metamorphosis. The body of his mortality was transformed by the Holy Spirit into a body of glory animated by the power of an endless life.

Terrible wickedness marked the world in which this epistle was written. Paganism had left the world reeling beneath a load of political, social, cultural and spiritual oppression. Signs of the demoniac were plentiful. We see them in our own time. We know of the efforts to banish crime and improve the human condition. But we are running out of prison space. Every theory of human improvement has fallen flat on its face. The reason, as Paul says in chapter 2 verse 1 of Ephesians, is that men and women are spiritually dead. That is the human condition. And he's not describing really bad people either. It is the condition of everyone in a state of nature, be it the

butcher, the baker, or the candle-stick maker. By nature we are all dead to the reality of God in our lives, dead to the influences of his Spirit, dead to the reality of Christ and his Word.

God must provide a way out of the darkness, and it is the first business of the church to convince men and women that there is no other solution to the pathologies of our times. Nothing less than resurrection will do. Consider what Paul says in verse 4, *But God, who is rich in mercy, gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead*, raising us along with Him.

We need something to happen to us that is no less real, no less miraculous than the resurrection of the dead body of Jesus. That's what we need, and nothing less will suffice. He does it through the activity of his Spirit in what we call the new birth. Jesus referred to it in John 3. You cannot see the kingdom of God, he said, unless and until you are born again from above.

This is not the result of anything we do. This is something only God can do. He does it by uniting us with Christ, and the result is a new heart and a new mind. He gives us faith to believe. No-one believes apart from this. If you believe in Jesus as the risen Lord it's because this has happened to you. You have been joined with Christ. His life has become your life. The Holy Spirit has done a resurrection job on you. My friends, his greatest work is not when he heals the body or manifests himself in spiritual gifts. There is nothing more radical, nothing more impressive, and nothing more inexplicable than when he breaks into people's lives, whether as adults or as little children, and reveals Jesus to them and makes them live. This is his greatest work, and he is doing it today. Oh that he would do it here this Easter

morning. Oh that in a powerful, dynamic, supernatural and direct way he would raise someone from spiritual death in sin and make them alive to the reality of Christ and of God, giving them a spiritual transition from the realm of death into the sphere of life.

This is the meaning of resurrection for us. This is how the power of the resurrection is released into our lives. It's one thing to affirm that the tomb is empty, it's another thing to experience the power of the resurrection for ourselves. That's the difference between a mere intellectual assent to a set of propositions, and true, authentic, life-transforming faith. In his book, *The Psychology of Redemption* Oswald Chambers wrote, "Our beliefs will mock us unless something comes into us from God."

The Holy Spirit takes the life of Christ and gives us new life with new priorities and new ways of thinking as well as living. He gives us a new heart and mind, a new will is created. For some of us, this has been a reality since childhood. This is one of the reasons we baptize infants. God is sovereign in this. Jesus means more to you than life itself. You love his word, the Bible; you love his people, the Church; you love the fellowship of the saints; you love to worship; you are aware of your sin and your need of a Savior; you desire more than anything in life to glorify God.

There is another aspect of this I must emphasize. Paul says in verse 6, *He raised us from the dead along with Christ*. Literally it's *in Christ*, or *in union with Christ*. We participate in his resurrection by the power of the Holy Spirit in union with Jesus Christ, or *in Christ*. Paul goes as far as to say, *We are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms*. This is how the New Testament describes Christians. A Christian is someone who is in union with Christ.

We are not just made new, we are made new in union with Christ. We were *chosen in Christ* Paul says in this epistle, *before the foundation of the world*. There is a dimension to our existence that transcends time and space. It stretches back into the plan and purpose of God in eternity. When the Father looked at the Son he saw us in union with Him.

St. Augustine wrote of what he called *totus Christus*, or "the whole Christ." Christ and his people are so inseparably joined together that you can't have the one without the other. We are in Christ, so that when he rose from the dead we arose in Him. This is why we insist that the new birth is not something we choose. It's not the result of anything we do. It rests on what God has done in Christ.

The Bible says that to be in Christ is to share in all he did and accomplished. We died in union with him, we were buried in union with him, and when he rose from the dead we arose in him. That is what is sealed up to us in baptism. Everything that is His is ours. We are his body, his temple. The same Spirit that indwelt him indwells us. Indeed, the Spirit is the one who makes this union possible. He is no member of Christ who is not the temple of his Spirit.

We are the habitation of God, my friends. When a person becomes a Christian the Spirit unites them to Christ vitally and organically. All spiritual light and life, nourishment, growth, every spiritual grace we enjoy in the life of faith flows from him. There is no benefit to be enjoyed from Christ without this union. There is no life without this union.

It's like the branches of a vine. That's another image used to describe this. We must be one with the roots to bear fruit. No union no life. And the Gospel is about life, new life. All of this is grounded in the historic fact of Jesus' rising from the dead. And *because he lives we shall live also*, eternally, in heaven. Because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead we will be raised physically as well as spiritually. This is our blessed hope. Just as the Father raised his Son he will raise his adopted children too. My friends, this Easter morning we repeat the most controversial, incendiary words ever spoken, *He is risen; He is risen indeed!*

*Now let the heavens be joyful, Let earth her song begin; Let the round world keep triumphs, And all that is therein; Let all things seen and unseen. Their notes in gladness blend, For Christ the Lord hath risen, Our joy that hath no end. Soli Deo Gloria*

***To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.***