

New Life in Christ

Scripture 1 Corinthians 15:20 – 22 and John 20:1 - 10

Easter Sunday 2024

Have you ever heard of Harry Bliss? (Pause)

Surely no one has ever heard of him, but you should! Harry had no clue that in 1899 in NYC, he would become the first to do this. What is the 'this'? One morning in 1899, Harry was the first person to be killed in an automobile accident!

Since Harry Bliss' death, more than 3.5 million people have died from car crashes in the USA alone! Few could have imagined that Harry would be the first of millions of casualties from car crashes.

On Good Friday, the religious leaders of Jesus' day probably thought they were done with Jesus. He was crucified and dead. Their problem was killed. They probably smacked their hands together and patted themselves on their backs – Jesus is dead – no more trouble from him.

The King probably thought the same thing, in fact, he was so worried about Jesus' supporters stealing his body from the tomb that he sent out some guards to stop anyone from coming outside into the tomb. They did not believe that something from inside would come out!

Harry Bliss did not know that he would be the first person killed in an automobile accident, but Jesus knew he had to sacrifice his life for us. Jesus struggled with this idea in the Garden of the Olive press. It was not until he prayed that God's will be done that he let the events of his arrest, his beatings, and crucifixion take place.

We live in a world full of pain, suffering, and death. In fact, there is no place you can go to avoid pain, suffering and death.

The word EASTER comes from a word meaning 'To Rise'. The word EASTER is used this day because the sun rises in the east and today we celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. We celebrate that Jesus Christ offers us new and eternal life.

Why would a bunny bring pretty colored eggs and candy in a basket full of green plastic grass? Where did the Easter Bunny come from?

The only story I have ever heard that involves a bunny and the tomb of Jesus is this one which a minister shared with me at LTS as his funniest thing he ever did for a Children's message. He shared this story – When the guards had put the rock in front of the tomb, a bunny had hopped over and hide itself between the rock and the tomb. When the power of God moved the rock way and frightened the guards, the little bunny came out and hopped away. The first thing to come out of the tomb on Easter was a bunny!

Well, the real story is this – the eggs, grass, and bunny are symbols of new life. All around us on this day are signs of new life that will come out of death. Eggs will produce a new life of a chick. Buried seeds die and then produce green sprouts of grass and new flowers will bloom. The barren trees of winter will pop tiny flowers, buds, and leaves in the spring time. The sun that sinks in the western sky each night rises in the east every morning. Even on dark and cloudy days when we cannot see the sun, it still rose in the east. All these flowers here today show us new life through the fragrance in the air and beauty seen by our eyes.

All around us on this day are signs of new life that will come out of death. A large crowd gathers to celebrate new life. Buried faith comes forth today and then produces new sprouts of faith and new blooms of love. Our barren lives of winter pop in to flowers of hope, buds of service, and leaves of glory. God's Son does not sink in this world but rise in us every morning. Even on dark and cloudy days of stress, despair, and loss; we can still see the Son of God in the smile of a friend. Even when we cannot see any hope, Christ is still there waiting for us to call upon him. All these flowers here today should show us new life through the fragrance in the air and beauty seen by our eyes.

After what might have been the three darkest days in history, the Light of the World threw off his grave clothes and rose from the dead to newness of life. Jesus has promised that those who believe in him will do the same. Even in our darkest days, the Light of the World will help us throw off our gloom and rise above to a newness and eternal life in Christ.

Jesus is life. Jesus gives life to those who believe in him. So my friends embrace him today!

That is why Jesus came. This is why Jesus died. That is why Jesus rose from the dead!

Now that does not mean we escape all the results of sin, but we do look forward to the day when sin will be no more; when death will be no more; when sickness will be no more; and when sadness will be no more!

All of this will be a distant memory when we look at the empty tomb!

Oh my friends, the guard of Jesus' tomb were looking away from the tomb. They were looking down the path to the tomb. If trouble was coming their way, it would come from the outside, not from the inside.

If trouble comes to us, it will probably come from the outside too! May we on this Easter pray that trouble only comes from the outside and if trouble comes our way, may we have the strength of faith in our Risen Savior to survive such trouble. May our faith which comes from the inside out be visible to all around us.

We thank God for this truth and we trust in Him to overcome death. And let us shout – Our Lord has risen today!

Let us pray:

O God, let us continually look to the Christ and the empty tomb to set us free from the curse of sin and let us inherit eternal life.

AMEN.