

Psalms 16:8-11

Dear Friends in Christ,

Easter makes our hearts glad. The hearts of some are glad today because they have lots of candy from the Easter Bunny. Others are glad because they have a few days of vacation. But candy can be eaten pretty quickly and then it's gone. Vacations come to an end and you have to go back to work. Those things don't make us glad for very long.

Those of us who are here today have better reasons than candy or vacation for having hearts that are glad. We are here today because Jesus has risen from the dead. That makes our hearts glad because it means that he is with us, and that we too will one day rise from the dead just as he did.

There are lots of things that can happen and do happen on this earth that don't make our hearts glad. They make our hearts shake with worry and fear.

Take the recent example of the earthquake in Japan. I've never experienced an earth quake, but watching some of the video of what happened in Japan helps you realize how scary it must be. Suddenly, without warning, everything around you starts shaking. Dishes come flying out of the cupboards. Pieces of ceiling start falling on the floor. Windows crack or shatter. Outside, chunks of concrete fall from tall buildings and smash cars below. Giant holes open in the ground and bridges collapse. Your body is shaking with everything around you, but not as much as your heart is shaking as you fear for your life and your loved ones.

There are other things that can shake us. I think of our niece's family, rushing her husband to the hospital in the middle of the night and then having the doctor tell you—there's a brain tumor and it's cancer. That will shake you. Or think of those who invested all they had with someone like Bernie Madoff; imagine finding out it was a scam and your life savings, everything you had is gone. Imagine being on one of the planes on September 11 and realizing that your plane is the bomb the terrorists are planning to use and there is no escape.

Jesus faced some things that would make anyone shake. We can't even really picture what it would be like to be flogged or to be nailed to a cross and left to die while being mocked and jeered by all who pass by. But, as Peter reminds us when he quotes this Psalm in his Pentecost sermon, it is Jesus who is speaking the words of this Psalm. As he faced things that would make even the bravest of men shake with fear he says, **I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand I will not be shaken.** He was able to endure all that he suffered because he always kept God and his promises before his eyes.

It's certainly true that God has always promised to be with his people. You know the Old Testament passages that talk about God sending his angels to watch over us, and that encourage us to call upon him in trouble and he will deliver us. But Easter makes it even more clear to us that God is with us. After Jesus rose from the dead he promised that **he would be with us always to the very end of the age.** He, the one who took on flesh and blood, the one who was tempted just as we are, the one who knows from first-hand experience what it is like to face things that can shake you, the one who shows us that God is for us and not against us, the one who paid for all our sins, he is the one who is with us. Therefore we need not be shaken. If it's temptation we face, our risen Lord is there to provide a way out. If it's persecution or sickness or disease, he enables us to bear it, to trust that he is turning everything into good for us as he promises he will. Because Jesus is risen, even when our

circumstances aren't happy our heart is glad knowing that he is with us and because he is we will not be shaken.

As we heard the Scripture readings this morning we were reminded that Easter is all about an empty tomb. The women who went to the tomb early Easter morning didn't find his body. Peter and John raced to the tomb and they didn't find his body. The angels told them that Jesus had risen from the dead but that seemed too good to be true. Later in the morning Jesus appeared to the women and that evening he appeared to Peter and John and the other disciples in the upper room. There was no doubt that his body had risen from the dead. His body that had been buried on Friday had not been moved or stolen. It was not decaying in a grave somewhere. Jesus invited them to touch him, to look at the marks of the nails in his hands and feet, and the mark of the spear in his side. He ate food in front of them. They weren't seeing a ghost. It was really him, his body risen and glorified. It seems like an understatement to say that their hearts were glad. They were filled to overflowing with inexpressibly great joy.

Fifty days later, Peter was preaching to the crowds on Pentecost and he used the words of this Psalm to talk about Jesus' resurrection. He pointed out that David was not talking about himself in this Psalm. David died and was buried and his body was still in the tomb. But, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Messiah spoke through David about himself. He said, **my body will rest secure because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.** He and the other Apostles had witnessed the resurrection and Jesus' ascension into heaven. There Jesus was experiencing **joy and eternal pleasures at the right hand of the Father.**

What's important about this is that Paul calls Jesus the first fruits of those who sleep. Jesus says that because he lives, we too will live. He has made known to us the path of life. He is that path. **He is the way, the truth and the life. He is the resurrection and the life.** Because he is, what he knew would happen to him, and what did happen to him, will also happen to us. God will not abandon us to the grave. As Jesus said, the time is coming when **all who are in their graves will come out.** Every person, every physical body that has been laid to rest, no matter what has happened to that body, will be put back together by God. All the dead will be raised.

That means, of course, that everyone, whether they believed in God or not, and no matter how hard they might have tried to deny or escape the resurrection of the body—everyone will stand before God. For those who reject him and refuse to trust God and his word, there will be no joy, only fear and trembling. But for those like us who, by grace, see Jesus as the way, who see that the path to life is through him, it seems like an understatement to say that our hearts will be glad. We know we deserve God's punishment as much as anyone, but we will hear the Father declare, "you are not guilty because of Jesus." We will be filled with joy as we experience what God has promised to us. We will be in the presence of God where there is no evil, where the old order of things has passed away. We will be invited to stand with Jesus at God's right hand and to enter the kingdom that God has prepared for us, a place where joy and pleasure that is beyond our imagination lasts for ever and ever.

Easter makes our hearts glad. Because Jesus rose from the dead just as he said we can trust his promise to be with us always. With him at our side nothing, no sickness or disease, no earthquake or tornado, not even death itself can shake us. Because Jesus rose from the dead

we know that he will come again and raise our bodies and we will enjoy something much better than candy and a few days of vacation. He will give us joy pleasure that last forever.