

“Resurrection Matters”

I Thessalonians 4:13-18 and Matthew 25:1-13

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+thessalonians+4:13-18

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+25:1-13

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Chilson Hills Church, Brighton, Michigan

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Remembrance Sunday

“We do not grieve as people who have no hope!”

Does a relationship with the Risen Christ make a difference? You bet it does! When we face the hard and difficult times of life we have a Christ who has been through it. When the uncontrollable tragedies of life strike us down, there is Christ Jesus who will lift us up. When the pain of misunderstanding, rejection, and even persecution threatens to overwhelm us, Christ will stand by us no matter what. When life comes to an end and we look into the deep dark abyss of death, Christ has been there before and the Risen Christ will be our guide through death into eternal life.

Do Christians grieve differently than other people? Absolutely! Because Jesus Christ lives in the center of your life, you have hope that carries you through grief into the light of life eternal.

In the Scripture just read the Apostle Paul assures the Christians in the Northern Greek city of Thessalonika that their relationship with Jesus makes a difference in their living. As young Christians, they decided that Jesus was coming soon and they would just stop working and wait. Paul wrote to encourage them to a greater spiritual maturity. Christ will come and the world as we know it will end. However, Paul tells them, your job is to continue to live faithfully following Jesus until he comes. Be prepared at all times, Paul urges. Encourage each other with the hope of Jesus' resurrection.

But, these new Christians asked Paul, what happens to our friends and relatives who die before Jesus comes? Paul assures them that the dead in Christ will rise and be with Christ. Then, they ask, “What should we do?”

Grieve, Paul says, because Jesus blesses the expression of grief. But, do not grieve as the pagan population does. Rather, in your grief continue to hold the hope of the Risen Jesus Christ within your heart and soul. You are indeed separated from your loved one, but through Christ you will be together again! Paul urges them to do three things: face death, live with hope, and encourage each other with resurrection joy.

Face the pain, the tragedy, and the struggle of death!

Several years ago we were blessed by Nancy Gray's artistic talents shared within Worship. At that time most of us knew that Nancy was living with ALS, better known as Lou Gehrig's disease. She was a courageous person who faced her death with a commitment to continue living right up to the last. Nancy and Ed, her husband could face this real tragedy with hope because they each knew the power of the Risen Christ unfolding in their lives.

For the last year after Nancy's death, Ed has been working through the grief of the loss of his beloved Nancy. A major part of Ed's grief is expressed in his poetry. Ed's new book, “Essence of Grieving” captures the depth of pain, the breadth of struggle, and the power of hope when a person actually faces death. I have asked Ed to share with you some of his numerous poems this morning.

Our hope is in the Risen Christ!

In and through his relationship with the Risen Christ, Paul learned that facing death with hope enables him to live a full and grace filled life. The question is not how we live before we die. The question is how we are prepared to die so that we may live with gusto and grace.

The now deceased William Stringfellow, New York attorney and Christian author wrote, "In the face of death, live humanly. In the middle of chaos, celebrate the Word. Amidst babble, speak truth. Confront noise and verbiage and falsehood of death with the truth and potency and efficacy of the Word of God. Know the Word, teach the Word, nurture the Word, preach the Word, defend the Word, incarnate the Word, do the Word, live the Word." (from An Ethic for Christians & Other Aliens In A Strange Land)

In John's gospel we read the profound statement of truth about death, life, and life eternal. "*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God....And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*" (John 1:1&14NRSV) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+1:1:14) The Word of God is alive within our planet, within our country, within our state, within our county, within our neighborhoods, within our homes, and within our lives. Our invitation is to choose to allow the resurrection hope and power of the living Word of God to be within the center of our living. When the Word lives within us, then we live with hope, we grieve with hope, we die with hope. And, hope makes all the difference.

A Pastor writes in the Christian Century magazine of a request on the part of one of his church members to visit a distant cousin who was in the hospital under the recent diagnosis of terminal cancer. The pastor went to visit and shares these comments.

I poked my head in the door. Theda was flat on her back. Her husband, George, was propped up beside her in a chair. What struck me about them was they were doing nothing. They were not talking, watching TV or reading the newspaper. They were just sitting and looking. I figured they were actually quite busy. Every ounce of them, every neuron and muscle, was working to get their minds and emotions around the diagnosis that had been dealt them. I introduced myself. The first thing out of Theda's mouth was, "We don't go to church. We wouldn't live any differently if we did, so we don't" She looked at her husband for confirmation, which he gave with a slight nod. He made scant eye contact with me, his eyes glancing off mine to gaze at nothing across the room. What I almost said to them--- what I so wanted to say but didn't and haven't yet figured out if it was pastoral sensitivity or cowardice on my part---was, "So it wouldn't make any difference in how you live. Would it make any difference in how you die?"

Encourage each other with Resurrection hope!

Jesus invites you live with God's grace and joy even in the face of death itself. We do not grieve as those who have no hope! As we gather around the table of our Risen Lord, we once again receive the invitation to life now and eternal life through Christ. Here around His table

- ◆ the distance between heaven and earth thins out,
- ◆ the great dividing wall grows porous,
- ◆ the Jordan River narrows.

Hope in Christ Jesus makes the difference. When you come face to face with someone in grief, encourage them with Resurrection hope! We live and we die with resurrection hope. And because we are prepared to suffer and to die with Christ, we will live with Christ building up God's joyful New Community for all eternity.

The life difference of resurrection hope in Jesus Christ is found in the words Bill and Gloria Gather gave to the world.

**Because He lives, I can face tomorrow,
Because He lives, all fear is gone.
Because I know He holds the future,
And life is worth the living, just because He lives.**