

“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Have you been downstairs to the Fireside Room yet? We recently replaced the flooring in the basement corridor and in the Fireside room. We’ve also done the main floor washrooms, too. We knew it needed to be done. The floors had seen better days. There were many tiles that were broken, lifted and even a few that were missing. I’ve heard many comments on the flooring. People like it. It is new, clean and more colourful. The comments I’ve heard the most are things like, “Wow! That looks really great!” More than a few people have also made the observation that the new flooring makes a world of difference in the look of the basement.

If a new decor or new flooring can make a difference in our building, then surely the greatest event in all of human history must have an even greater impact on our world. In these spring days (yes, it is spring, even if the weather tells you otherwise) we continue to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter morning. Actually, every Sunday is a little Easter, and we, as the children of God, die to sin every day through our Baptism, to rise into the newness of life we have through Christ’s resurrection from the dead. St. Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declares: *“if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.” . . . “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”* (1 Corinthians 15:17, ESV). Our lives needed much more than a “facelift”. We needed to be saved from sin and death. We need the forgiveness and life that Christ brings because He died for us, and because He rose again from the dead. Without that wonderful truth, life in this world is futile, empty and meaningless. Without this wonderful hope, we live and then we die, and that is all that can be said—except for the fact that without Christ, death includes the eternal death of hell.

But the resurrection of Christ turns everything upside down! To say that there is a world of difference through the resurrection is the greatest of all understatements. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Where there was death and emptiness, there is now life and joy and hope. Every fear and worry; every loss and disappointment; every heartache and sorrow; even death itself loses its power when we understand the great blessing that comes to us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everything that seems to make *this* world and *this* life so important simply pales in comparison to knowing that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, and that through faith in Him, we too rise to the wonderful, glorious and blessed life that is ours because He has redeemed us as His own; because He has paid the price for our sins; because He has given us His Spirit that we may know and believe in Him. Our existence is no longer a matter of living and dying. It is no longer the inevitability of hell. It is living in Christ, knowing that we will also live with Christ in the glory of eternal life.

Our text today tells us that *with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all*. They preached this message, because it had such a great impact on them! Even in our Gospel lesson today, they are still gathered in a locked room *“for fear of the Jews”* (John 20:19, ESV) Thomas is the one disciple who missed that first Easter evening, and who still wasn’t sure that the resurrection had taken place. Poor Thomas is so confused that he said, *“Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”* (John 20:25, ESV) But all that changes when he sees the living Lord. The doubting Thomas gives way to the confessing Thomas, who declares: *“My Lord and my God!”* (John 20:28, ESV) Everything changed for Thomas in that moment. Tradition will say that Thomas travelled to

India, spreading the Gospel of the resurrected Christ. He is often called the patron saint of India. He boldly proclaimed the resurrected Christ, and was martyred for his faith, far from his homeland.

All the disciples will suffer for their faith in Christ. Peter, who denied even knowing Christ, will face the anger and hatred of the Jewish leaders to keep on speaking of Him. In the verses before our text, we are told that Peter and John were arrested and brought before the Jewish council, and warned not to speak any more in the name of Jesus. In response, they declare: ***“we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”*** (Acts 4:20, ESV) In fact, the church gathered together in prayer and with one voice asked: ***“And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.”*** (Acts 4:29, ESV)

The resurrection also made a world of difference for the people who believe through the witness of the apostles. We see that in the wonderful description of the believing church in our text: ***“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common... There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”***

An example of this comes in the very next verses after our text: ***“Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”*** (Acts 4:36–37, ESV) For Joseph—who is given that wonderful nickname Barnabas—literally, ‘son of encouragement’—the resurrection of Jesus made a world of difference. In the living Lord, there were things more important than his earthly possessions. Many felt the same way. They wanted to care for each other and to make sure that the needs of those around them were met, even to the point of selling their homes for the sake of others.

Now, before you think that I am saying we have to do this, please realize that this isn’t a command that means we all have to sell our homes and bring in all the proceeds. If you want to do that, I’ll be glad to help you! No, what this tells us is that the resurrection was a game-changer. Suddenly people weren’t worried about their homes and their personal wealth. They saw the needs of others as more important than their own. Things that once made such a difference for their earthly lives gave way to a greater hope and confidence, all tied to the life they knew they had in Jesus Christ.

There are many ways we can do this, too. We are preparing to host several dinners at the Mustard Seed. We’ve been blessed with a wonderful response from people who want to help serve the meal, but we can only take so many. Yet you can contribute to the cost of this, for we provide the food, too. We are hoping to do several of these meals—and they cost about \$1,000.00 each. Your gift to the Mustard Seed meal will be used for those in need.

Or think of our Refugee Sponsorship efforts. Quite honestly, we got off to a very slow start with this, but the time is drawing near when we will have a family among our congregations here in Calgary. There will be other needs in the days ahead. There may be opportunities to help with transportation or with English classes or any number of needs. We care, knowing the life we have in Jesus is also to be shared with the stranger and alien among.

We have the sick among us—people who may need a Barnabas—a “son of encouragement”, who provides a meal or spends time at a bed-side. Our Board for Human Care Ministry is staffed with wonderful Barnabases, or Barnabi, whatever the plural is. The joy is in caring, sharing and being a blessing to one another. It isn’t giving everything we have; it is giving of ourselves, because of the joyous life we have in the Living Christ.

The point is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ makes a world of difference for us, too. The resurrection changes us. Are you struggling with a sin? Jesus is risen from the dead! Your life is changed because whatever that sin is, you are forgiven. Are you doubting God’s love? Jesus is risen from the dead! Jesus died because He loves you, and the resurrection proves God’s love for you. Are you too easily angered? Jesus is risen from the dead! Relax and be calm in his peace, because he lives to take care of whatever upsets you. Are you afraid of getting sick, losing your job, losing someone you love? Jesus is risen from the dead! He is with you always, no matter what. Are you weak and heavy

laden? Jesus is risen from the dead! He listens to the prayers you take to him. Are you complaining and jealous of what others have and you don't? Jesus is risen from the dead! Contentment comes from the Lord, who lives to grant you rich supply. Are you crabby and negative? Jesus is risen from the dead! He can change you to be a Barnabas.

Where the good news of the risen Saviour lives in the hearts and lives of people, there will be a world of difference. The glory of the resurrection may be manifest as it was in the early church, or in the life of Barnabas. It will show in our hearts and lives, too. As we prayed earlier in our worship, so we pray again: Almighty God, we have celebrated with joy the festival of our Lord's resurrection. Graciously help us to show the power of the resurrection in all that we say or do; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.