



Christ Risen!

by Mark Brunner

The Door of Your Heart! (John 10:10)

Why is it so hard to pray sometimes? Often we are left with an empty feeling, a sense of unbelief in what we have just asked for. Jesus tells us that our Heavenly Father knows what we need even before we ask for it. He tells us to pray as if we have already received that which we are praying for. Why would any prayer we say not be said with the fullest confidence and belief that if it is the Lord's will, it will be done, even without our asking? Could it be that the "hard knocks" of life have us convinced that nothing can ever really change for us?

"Poor Little Orphan Annie! It's 'a hard-knock life' for her and her friends. All the hard chores, the abuse, and the neglect only add insult to injury to these poor little girls already carrying the weight of abandonment. After being invited to spend the Christmas holiday with billionaire Oliver Warbucks, Annie learns that Mr. Warbucks would like to adopt her. When she learns that someone really cares, the brightness in Annie's eyes and the bounce in her step change dramatically. Why? Not only will she leave behind the hard-knock life of the orphanage, she will also live in incredible wealth, and with someone who has chosen her to be his. She realizes that she's living on another level.

God wants you to live on another level. He's well aware that some of our yesterdays are just plain awful. We have our moments where life is a bit hard-

knock. The abandonment of a loved one—an irresponsible parent, an unfaithful spouse, a rebellious teenage son or daughter—these things render us alone, empty, and in pain. But God never intends for us to be dominated by the hard knocks life deals us. He sent his Son to bring us to another level of life. He calls it abundant life. Jesus said, ‘I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.’ We need to believe it’s waiting for us.

Is the door of your heart open to the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Are you ready to live on a level of grace that not only promises us that God’s will is assured but that all of our worst fears are baseless when we focus on our Savior’s empty tomb? As Easter is about open tombs, it’s also about open hearts. Perhaps that’s Him knocking now.

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)

My Brothers! (John 20: 10-18)

What does it mean to have a brother? There is something special about a brother that sets them apart from all other people in the world. We strike many bonds in life, even those that bind us to a spouse, but the bond of brotherhood brings a type of strength and courage unsurpassed by any other bond in life. There is an old Japanese proverb that says it best. “Brothers quarrel like thieves inside a house, but outside their swords leap out in each other’s defense.” The bonds of brotherhood are among the strongest God has built into His creation.

When Jesus rose from the dead that Easter morn, he brought with Him a new concept of brotherhood that had never been expressed so keenly as it is now. The disciples had graduated from friends and followers to brothers. And with that, all things had changed. His resurrection had given birth to a new brotherhood, a new oneness that would now tie Jew to Gentile, Greek to Roman, Samaritan to Hebrew. And, with that brotherhood, He also brought with Him a new constitution, the Gospel, that would make that binding unique, enduring, and, unfortunately, subject to great testing. For, like genetic brothers, each of us sharing in that Gospel would now also share a common loyalty and

concern for one another despite our internal quarrels. Like brothers, we now owe each other our swords.

“My Father and your Father . . . My God and your God!” There is just no way of getting around it. Jesus is telling us that, with His resurrection, things have changed. We are His brother and He ours. We have the same Father and, therefore, share the same oneness with God and with those who are also sharing that bond of discipleship with us. That means we are to treat one another with the same love and respect that we would show to a brother or a sister—even our enemies. When we treat one another badly, in word or in deed, it would be as if we did it to our own flesh and blood. This is unacceptable in a family; it is unacceptable in the family of Christ. “Love one another as I have loved you!” This is our divine instruction. Brothers and sisters, take up the sword for one another—to defend and not tear down.

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All Bets Are Off! (Matthew 28:1-7)

Many years ago I worked at a summer camp as a dishwasher. My best friend, Marc, also worked with me and we were inseparable from June through August. At lunchtime, Marc and I would often play table tennis in one of the camp garages. Marc was an expert player and became a different person when on the other side of that table tennis net. All bets were off when he picked up a paddle. He was transformed into a competitive and aggressive opponent whose goal was to defeat me, not befriend me. He was transformed every time he got behind that net. As summer went on, I became accustomed to working with the two Marc’s. Both looked the same; but neither reflected the other in character.

When the women came to Jesus’ tomb early that Easter morn, their expectation was that they would see the man that they had loved. They were expecting to view his body, the hands and arms that had reached out to them; the face that had smiled upon them, always forgiving, always encouraging. They expected to see Jesus, their special teacher and friend. Instead, they found a strange man sitting on the rolled stone. There was no body, no Jesus, no teacher and friend.

The angel's words were stunning. *“Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.”* The Teacher has risen? Suddenly the image of Jesus was transformed. He who had been their teacher, in flesh and blood, was no longer the same man. Jesus, the teacher who was dead, is Jesus, the risen one! As the women raced to tell the disciples, they knew that now, “all bets were off!” Something had happened to change everything and somehow they knew it would never be the same again.

Jesus is alive and well and all bets are off! What had been is no longer; what we knew is no more. He is perfectly transformed and now stands on the other side of life's sorrows transformed, holding out the promise that as He has overcome death. He has become the “NOT HERE” Christ, the one who is not dead but alive. And, because we share in that resurrection, we share in that condition. Did you know you are “NOT HERE” either? We are no longer of this world but merely in it. Heaven, where He reigns, is now our true home as well. Hallelujah! Christ is arisen. He is arisen indeed!

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The Ugliest Sinner Ever! (1 Corinthians 15:12-28)

History has been a long trail of blood and terror right up to the present time. Since Adam's fall and Cain's violence against his brother, history has been filled with villains. Yet, if you had to pick one and only one from this procession of sin, who would it be? What if God were in on the balloting? Since He has observed all from Adam through you and I, knowing each person He created from before time, He not only observed the worst in behavior; He knew it before it was ever accomplished. Who would He rank the guiltiest in God's Hall of Shame? You might be surprised by His answer.

In James Packer's book, *Your Father Loves You*, the author sheds some light on the answer: “Our most merciful Father . . . sent his only Son into the world and laid upon him . . . the sins of all men saying: ‘You are Peter that denier; Paul that persecutor, blasphemer and cruel oppressor; David that adulterer; that

sinner which ate the apple in Paradise; that thief which hung upon the cross; and briefly you have become the person which has committed the sins of all men; therefore see that you pay and satisfy for them . . . therefore let him die upon the cross.’ And so He set upon him and killed Him.” (Your Father Loves You by James Packer, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986, Page October 20.)

In all of history there has been no one more worthy of God’s scorn than His own Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus surpassed all in the Great Hall of Shame when it came to sinfulness. Why? It is because He became the substitute for the sins of the Hitlers and the Ben Ladens. He bore the sins of all evil men since the time of Cain until you and I. His guilt goes forward even beyond our day to the very last breath of the very last sinner who will someday be removed from this earth into eternity. Based on the evidence, Jesus was the greatest sinner that ever lived. Jesus became like us, deserving of death. We became like Him, righteous in God’s sight. That exchange accomplished, our righteousness despite our sin was confirmed eternally. Christ’s willingness to become the ugliest sinner that ever lived assures us that we shall never find ourselves in sin’s Hall of Shame. We see our sin no more because they have been consumed in that one perfect sacrifice.

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Fear Of The Unknown! (Romans 4:18-25)

Did you ever fear something so intently, so sincerely, that it literally became a reality despite the fact that you never actually experienced it in the first place? But, there is another kind of fear; one not quite so imagined because although it is still a product of imagination, it is based partially on an experience not totally played through.

I recall the first time that I played golf. I was invited by a friend who really wanted me to learn the game because it was his passion and he wanted me to share in that love he had for the game. There were many things that had kept me off of the links prior to that. First, there was a lack of time. That seemed real enough. Then there was the lack of funds. That was very real. But, when

all was said and done, the real thing that had kept me away from the game was the fear of tackling something I knew little or nothing about. This fear was real for I imagined myself making a total fool out of myself.

But, there was another fear connected with the sport. Once I had actually did venture out, I now had to deal with the projected fear that every swing would be like my first swing, resulting in a slice or a hook that would put my ball off the fairway into the less than negotiable rough where a rookie has an even better opportunity to make a fool of himself. This second fear was even more insidious since it was based on a little knowledge coupled with imagination. In most instances imagination can be overcome with conviction. However, a little baseless knowledge, can be like a cancer, growing rapidly, forcing the possible to become the probable. Opportunity can often become the servant of fear.

Our knowledge of sin can often make us slaves to our imagination. Worse yet, a little sin experienced and the conscience pricked, can turn a faithful heart into a fearful heart. Thank God that Christ did not fear to discover the might and power of sin. He took it on for us, made the passage through sins storms, and took away the dread. He is risen and our consciences may rest assured that there is no risk or fear for those who trust Him. Because of His willingness to take on our worst fear, the fear of what we don't know, makes being a rookie okay after all.

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