

Easter Sunday – Year A – April 24, 2011 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

Based on Matthew 28:1-10 written by Pastor Paul Horn

“With Jesus there are No Broken Promises”

WANTED: MEN FOR HAZARDOUS JOURNEY. LOW WAGES, BITTER COLD, LONG HOURS OF COMPLETE DARKNESS. SAFE RETURN DOUBTFUL. HONOUR AND RECOGNITION IN EVENT OF SUCCESS. Not a very enticing ad, is it? But in the year 1900, a man by the name of Sir Ernest Shackleton published that advertisement in the newspaper. Shackleton was an experienced polar explorer. He had previously come within just a few miles of being the first man to reach the South Pole. Now, he wanted to cross the continent of Antarctica from coast to coast.

By 1900 there were not many places that men had not explored. And Antarctica was one of the few places left. There are good reasons that Antarctica was unexplored! It is surrounded by the South Sea which is known for its treacherous storms and ice. It is murderously cold. It is desolate and barren. It is at the very bottom of the world. It is as isolated from civilization as you can get on our planet.

But explorers always go where no one else will, and so in 1914 Shackleton had found his men, as terrible as the ad was, and they loaded up in the ship named Endurance and set sail for Antarctica. As they approached Antarctica, their ship, the Endurance, began to sail through the ice pack...an ocean of ice floes and freezing water. Then one day, the ship got caught in the ice. Frozen into the ocean. Imagine this – all they could do was wait there through the whole winter, and hope that the ice would melt in the spring without crushing the ship! They waited, but when spring came, the worst happened: the melting ice crushed the Endurance, and the ship sank, leaving the sailors stranded on the ice at the bottom of the world.

They did the only thing they could; they walked across the ice, dragging their supplies and three lifeboats behind them. Finally, they came to the desolate rocky outcrop called Elephant Island. When they stepped on shore, it was the first time they had been on solid ground in over 400 days. But they were still in terrible danger. Elephant Island is one of the most remotest places on earth. They were 800 miles from anywhere, and their supplies were running low. There was no chance of anyone finding them.

Shackleton decided there was only one possibility for them to survive. He would go and get help, and then he promised to come back and get them. OK, that sounds great and all, but think about what that meant! Shackleton was going to get into a life boat — an open-topped life boat! and travel across 800 miles of ocean. Not just open ocean, but the South Seas, the most treacherous waters on earth. No GPS, no radar, he would use the stars to navigate and he planned to find a tiny island whaling station in the middle of the vast sea. That could only be called the best choice because it was most certainly the only choice.

When Shackleton’s crew saw his little boat disappear over the horizon, hope must have been a hard thing to hold on to. As the darkness and cold descended, their commander was gone, over the horizon, on a mission that almost certainly would end in his death. Then what would happen to them? How could he possibly keep his promise?

One dark morning in Jerusalem, there was another lonely group of survivors who felt abandoned by their leader, who had gone away, over the horizon. The man who had led them for three years was now gone, and they were left behind.

I’m sure the ladies didn’t really want to go to that tomb that morning. Their purpose was to anoint the lifeless corpse of their Teacher with aloes, spices and perfume. Like the men on Elephant Island, their leader was gone. They didn’t want to go to a place of broken promises. Those women weren’t hoping for much, were

they? All they hoped to do was to go and anoint a dead body—and so the biggest question on their mind was, “Who’s going to roll the stone away from the mouth of the tomb?”

When they got to the tomb, something was wrong—there were no guards there anymore... and stone, was rolled away... the grave stood open... and when they looked in, they didn’t see a dead body, they saw angels who said...”**Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen – just as he said.**”

The women came looking for the man Jesus, from Nazareth, who died. But the angel told them to hope for more out of Jesus... The angel told them to hope for that which Jesus had promised them. He had promised that he would be betrayed, arrested, false accused, tortured and crucified and then he would die. He kept those promises. But, he also promised that three days later, and this was the third day, that he would come back to them. So the angel lifted their heads and their hearts and pointed them to the place where the head of Jesus would be, but was not. “He is not here. He has risen!” Their leader had come back. They had seen Christ’s body on Friday turn pale and begin to stiffen from rigor mortis. On that morning, that same body had blood flowing through it, oxygen pumping through its lungs. Jesus’ legs straightened out, he stood up and walked out. Expect more from your Savior!

What do you expect out of Jesus? I think too many people in this world hope for far too little out of Jesus. Oh, they might hope for him to be inspirational to them. They might hope for him to teach them how to live. They might hope even hope that he might affect their lives in some way. Those would be fine things to hope for — if Jesus were merely what so many consider him: a man who lived a long time ago, and then died. But Jesus is more than that, isn’t he? He is your sin-bearer. He is your living hope. He is your Risen Savior.

What do you expect out of Jesus? Do you sometimes expect more from Jesus, more than what he promised? Do you expect Jesus to fix all your financial problems, even though some of them maybe your own fault? Do you expect Jesus to fix all your relationship problems... maybe you have an estranged relationship with a member in your family, maybe your marriage is not where you know it should be, maybe a strained relationship with one of your brothers or sisters in Christ here this morning. But you expect Jesus to snap his fingers and make all things good again. Do you sometimes expect Jesus to deliver from sickness and death, especially when you’ve been praying so hard for them?

What has Jesus promised? Jesus did promise that he would bless us with all that we need, but he also promised that there would be hard times that would test our trust in his promise to provide. Jesus promised that he would bless the Christian household, but he also promised that there would be strife in the home. Jesus promises health and long life, but he also promised that death would come to all people. Why would he promise such things?

As I look out on you this morning, I see a handsome group of people. You’ve all come today dressed in your Easter best. But within each of you lives a sinful self that is totally warped and wicked and depraved. It’s quite ugly. Within each of us lives this sin, and God promised that problems would come if we possess this sinful nature, which we all do. The sinful nature causes us to make poor choices with our money. It causes us to be unkind and unforgiving to the people in our family. The sinful self causes us not to trust in God. What is more, God promises that those who sin will die. And not just a physical death where our hearts stop pumping and the brain waves stop flowing, but something far worse. He means a spiritual death, an eternal separation from our God. It’s what he promised for those who sin. He’s holy and he demands nothing less from his creatures. God promises to punish sin. If God makes a promise, will he not carry it out?

But listen... listen to what he says, at the same God promises to forgive all sin. He promises not to punish you with death. How can he do make both promises and carry them out? Because the Son of God embarked on a

rescue mission for you. He would take all of our sin, and all of our guilt over the horizon of death with him. Jesus went to the cross and took all of my sins in himself, all of your guilt, and there God punished Jesus with all of his wrath. For your sins of expecting Jesus to do things he hasn't promised, for my sins of not trusting Jesus' promises, he suffered in your place. Jesus endured the pains of hell and abandonment by his Father. And then Jesus, the Son of God, died. And there your sins died with him. His death was our only possibility to survive. And it was all riding on one man, all alone, fighting our battle, going beyond the horizon of death in our place, but leaving a promise -- I will come back.

Why did you come here today? To eat a wonderful Lutheran potluck Easter breakfast? To get all dressed up and show off your new Easter outfit? No. You came here today to hear the message of Christ crucified. To look at the cross, and to see the Son of God die there, and to see your sins die with him. You came here today to hear the message of the resurrection and to stare into the empty tomb. And there at the empty tomb you hear God's promise fulfilled, "He is not here. He is risen, just as he said." There in the empty tomb you see your resurrection, because He came back, just as he said he would! Jesus has burst forth from his grave!

What does the empty tomb mean for you? It means there are no broken promises with God. If he kept this promise, that he would rise again, he most certainly will keep the thousand other promises he has made to you.

The promise and reality of the empty tomb changes everything. It defines who you are. For you who believe in Christ's death and resurrection, through faith you live in an era where sin no longer convicts you; where Satan no longer controls you; where death no longer contains you; where Christ's promises strengthen you. Jesus promises you, "I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die." Do you see what that means? Not even death can rob us of the love God has for us! Easter means no broken promises -- your captain has come back!

For the men stranded on Elephant Island, days of waiting turned into weeks. Weeks turned into months. But then one day, the man on lookout spied a boat across the water. He cried "Ship - ho!", but the men were so not expecting rescue, that they thought he was just calling them to lunch. But no. He was here—Shackleton had come back! He had done the impossible... He had crossed the southern seas, braved a hurricane and made the most impossible journey, for one reason only: So he could save his men. And as Shackleton brought the rescue ship up, he loaded his men on board, every single one. Not a man was lost. Because their captain had come back.

Your captain has come back. And he has made one more promise: he will come again, in the flesh, and every eye will behold. He promises that on that day he will raise your dead body from the grave and change it, make it new; holy, perfect and sinless, just as he is. He promises that his Father will welcome us with open arms. Because we believe that Christ has won the victory for us. That is why we shout today, "Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen!"