

Easter-B(2). The scripture text is taken from John 20:19-31

In the early 1920's, in Communist Russia, the great communist Nikolai Bukharin was sent from Moscow to Kiev, to address an anti-God rally.

For an hour, he abused and ridiculed the Christian faith until it seemed as if it were hopeless for anyone to believe in Christianity.

Then questions were invited. An Orthodox priest stood up and asked to speak. He walked up behind the podium, faced the people, and gave the Easter greeting, "He is risen!" instantly, the assembly of thousands rose to its feet, and shouted back, loud and clear, "He is risen indeed!"

The opposite happened on Easter evening. The disciple Thomas walked into the room, where the disciples were, and the disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord, He is risen!". And Thomas basically said, "No He is not, and I don't believe it."

A week later, Jesus took care of Thomas' skepticism, when Jesus allowed Thomas, to touch His hands and His side.

But that skepticism that Thomas expressed, has echoed down through the centuries. Today in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we live in a "No He's not!" culture.

The Christian Church says at Easter, "Christ is risen!" Not true, our culture says. The Bible says that because Jesus is risen from the dead, we also will rise from the dead.

Because Jesus has risen, we will live, even after we die. "Not true", our culture says. "This world is all that there is", our culture says, and our culture goes on to say, "You Only Live Once"! (YOLO)

We have all heard that worn out cliché used by younger people. "YOLO" was the acronym. The whole "YOLO" thing began to die out when the talk-show hosts started to use it, because they were trying to be hip, like the teenagers.

A person says, as he or she, is about to do something reckless or stupid, "YOLO", you only live once.

But if Jesus has risen from the dead, you don't live once. You only live, how many times? 3 times is the real truth. Did you realize that?

You live once, right now. You will live a second time at the moment of your death, when you close your eyes and open them in heaven. And you live a third time, when your physical body is raised from the dead on the last day, Judgment Day, or, the Day of the Lord, just as Jesus rose from the dead on that Sunday morning.

If Jesus did not rise, then yes, you only live once. But Jesus did rise, and so, you only live three times. That article of faith, that we hold to be true, that is one of the most important results of Jesus' resurrection.

Let's take a moment and see Jesus appear to His disciples on that Easter Sunday night, and let's ponder, what it means that Jesus has risen from the dead, and how that changes the way we look at life and our existence beyond this life.

There is a reason to hope, and today Jesus teaches us that reason. The Bible describes the disciples locked into a room on Easter night, and that they were afraid and hopeless.

For some time now, they had been following the Teacher, Jesus, they had thought, that He was the long awaited Messiah. The disciples watched Jesus perform miracles, they heard His promises, He said so many good things, and taught them about God in a way, that no one else had done.

And all the things that He had said and done, were dead with Him. How can you hope in someone who is dead?

For those disciples, the world had become a very cruel place. A place of broken promises, unfulfilled dreams, and big disappointments. You can sum up their attitude in word, "hopeless".

Have you ever had a moment like those disciples, a moment when you just want to lock yourself into a room and be by yourself?

Has the world ever seemed like a very cruel place to you, a place of broken promises, a place of unfulfilled dreams, and a place of big disappointments? You bet, we have all dealt with that.

The world can be a very difficult place to live, and the devil uses those difficult moments to make you feel hopeless and despairing. The devil wants you to say to yourself; "The God you believe in is dead. There is no hope."

Not only can the world cause us to feel that way. Our own history, our own choices in life, can cause us to feel that way.

Look into your past, the devil says, and consider all the mistakes you have made in life, all the words and actions you wish you could take back, but you can't.

You cannot help but feel a sense of hopelessness. At the time, you were just living for the moment, "You Only Live Once", you thought to yourself.

But now there is guilt. You hurt someone, and that bothers you. You offended God, and that bothers you. And you close the door and you feel hopeless, just like those disciples did on that Sunday evening.

The ultimate cause of hopelessness is death. Do you realize there are two kinds of people? People who are recovering from the death of a loved one, and people who are about to experience the death of a loved one.

Which one are you? Is death around the corner for you? Or, is death in your rear view mirror? For some, death is a time of hopelessness. To think that there is anything positive when a loved dies, how can you do that?

What is the cure for hopelessness? Our world tries to offer hope, but not too successfully. The world out there says, "Think positive" people say.

Can you imagine, walking up to those disciples locked in that room, and saying to them, "Everything will be fine, just think positive thoughts!" That is ridiculous. And yet, that is the best comfort our world is able to offer.

The disciples found the reason to be optimistic, when Jesus appeared to them. "Peace be with you", He said to them.

And the Bible says they were overjoyed. No more hopelessness. No more sadness. It is joy. But not for Thomas, he wasn't there, and he would not believe it.

Thomas was stuck in an attitude of hopelessness, until that next Sunday night, when Jesus appeared to him and said to him, "Stop doubting and believe."

And Thomas' doubt disappeared, as he worship Jesus and said, "My Lord and my God." (John 20:28)

What a turn-around for Thomas. One minute Jesus is dead, and there is no hope. But then Thomas sees that Jesus is alive, and now there is hope.

Thomas discovered that there is a reason to be joyful, to be hopeful, to be optimistic. And that reason is that Jesus is alive and well.

This moment that Thomas had with Jesus also belongs to you. When things look hopeless, remember, this is not a dead end.

There is no such thing as a dead end for Christians, because Jesus is alive. The story is told of a Muslim, who became a Christian in Africa.

Some of his friends asked him, "Why have you become a Christian?" He answered, "Well, it's like this. Suppose you were going down the road and suddenly the road forked in two directions, and you didn't know which way to go. And there in the road were two men, one dead, and one alive. Which one, would you ask which way to go?"

For every person in life, there is a fork in the road. To be a Christian, or not to be a Christian. To be hopeless, or to have hope.

One way is littered with nothing but death, unfulfilled dreams, broken promises, and empty optimism. But there is another way, and in that way, stands someone who is alive. Someone who does not break His promises, someone who knows what your dreams are and promises to fulfill them beyond what you could ever imagine, someone who gives you a real reason to be optimistic.

That someone is Christ Jesus, Son of the living God, who loves you more than you will ever know, who came into this world, lived for you and for me, who died for you and for me, so that our sins would be forgiven, and by His resurrection, He has opened the way to heaven for all who believe.

Christ Jesus comes to you, when all seems lost, and He says to you, "Stop doubting and believe." You only live 3 times, thanks to Christ Jesus.

After the crucifixion, the devil thought that he had won. The devil thought that he had last word. Then God raised Jesus from the dead, and hope was born.

In your life, the devil will never have the last word. There will always be a reason to hope, because Jesus is alive and well. His promises are alive and well. His assurance of eternal life for you are alive and well. Look to the risen Lord Jesus Christ and find your peace and your hope. Amen.

Let us pray:

Loving God, life at times, can be very confusing, producing skepticism and doubt. Help us in the midst of our skepticism and doubt, not to turn to the world for answers, but to turn to You for answers. Re-affirm our faith, strengthen us as we serve You, help us to be good and faithful witnesses as we go out into the world, in the name of Christ, to be good and faithful witnesses in the world. All these things we humbly pray in the name of the Father and of Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.