

“The Key Ingredient”

In the name of our risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Happy Easter everyone! I have to tell you, celebrating Easter often makes me think of my grandmother, my mother’s mother, who had many talents except one. She was a master gardener, a knitter, crocheter, a sewer. But she couldn’t cook. But she tried and the one thing I especially remember her trying to make was biscuits. Except she was just not a big believer in things like baking soda or baking powder. On those ominous days when she would decide to bake biscuits, she would open the door of the oven and pull out what looked like a tray of toasty hot brown, hard as a rock hockey pucks. My grandfather used to joke that if you dropped those biscuits on the floor, they would wake the dead. Thus their nickname: Easter biscuits.

So, this being Easter Sunday, I think about Grandma and those little sad Easter biscuits. But, you know, I think those biscuits offer us an important Easter message. Without baking powder that key ingredient, those biscuits become heavy and flat. So, too, life without the resurrection, life without Christ, can be heavy and flat. We tend to think of the Easter message as a message for the end of life. But frankly, I think we need the Easter message right now, because as many of us know, death can come long before the end of life.

How many people do we know who are walking this earth physically alive but dead of spirit? And maybe you are one of them. How easily life can beat us down. It’s like the story of the little boy with his head in his hands staring at his school book saying, “I wish my arithmetic was done and that I was married and dead.”

Friends, it’s easy to celebrate the resurrection of the body on this glorious Easter Sunday. But what about the resurrection of the spirit? What about tomorrow morning, when the alarm clock goes off at 6 AM and our spirits sink.

Where is the resurrection then?

Where is the resurrection when we work night and day in a thankless job and yet find ourselves deeper in debt? Where is the resurrection when our child gets caught in an ugly cycle of drugs and alcohol and we watch them slip away? Where is the resurrection when after working thirty years we realize we are about to lose our home? Where is the resurrection when at the end of life our family and friends are all gone and we are left alone to negotiate in a world that does not honour its old ones?

Where is the resurrection then?

It’s not just resurrection after death we are talking about, it is resurrection during life. Like biscuits without baking powder, life without the resurrection can be heavy and flat. But today, Easter Sunday, I say we bring that missing ingredient back.

The Easter story I read, this morning, from John is a familiar one. Mary goes to the tomb while it is still dark. She finds the stone rolled away and Jesus’ body gone. Weeping, she looks inside the tomb and see two angels. “Woman, why are you weeping?” they ask. “They have taken my Lord away,” Mary said, “and I don’t know where they have laid him.”

Just then, she turned around and Jesus was standing there. But she didn’t recognize him. “Woman, why are you crying?” “Sir,” Mary said, “if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” “Mary,” Jesus said. And the second he says her name, Mary realizes that this

stranger standing before her was the risen Christ. “Rabbouni,” she says to Jesus.

Mary recognized the living Christ. She recognized that life force in her midst. And it’s exactly the same for us. We have the risen Christ right in front of us. We have a life force in our midst. And that’s the missing ingredient we must reclaim. That ingredient is Jesus.

The Saturday before my very first Easter sermon, 1985, I was walking around the village of New Dundee, pushing Mark in his stroller, I know I was trying to walk off some nerves. Towards the end of that walk, I stopped by the little local library to get something, a book I suppose. “Are you ready for the big service?” asked the librarian, a cheerful Baptist she was. I nodded tentatively and said, “I guess. I’m pretty nervous though. My first, Easter service.” She looked at me with a surprised expression and said, “Oh, you’ll be fine. Just get out of the way and let Jesus do his work.”

I’ve never forgotten those words, for they are not only great advice for a sermon, they are great advice for life.

The best thing we can do in life is to get out of the way and let Jesus do his work. Oh, we can put up a whole lot of blocks to the spirit. Things like anger, negativity, fear, doubt, things that shut us down, weigh us down, things that keep that key ingredient of life and spirit from working in our hearts. It’s like the author Ann Lamont said, “God can’t clean the house of you with you in it.”

You know, life has many great truths. My grandfather, the same one who teased my grandmother over her biscuits, used to say a great truth, “Never slap a man chewing tobacco.” Another great truth is this. Deep down, the human spirit yearns for joy, yearns to soar. Kind of like my niece and nephews favourite movie Mary Poppins, a movie they made me watch over and over and over when they were little.

Even after watching it, many, many times, I still love the scene where Uncle Albert starts laughing, in the lifeless, sterile bank vault. As he laughed with joy, he began to float up to the ceiling. The laughter and life and passion he felt brought him a lightness that made him float. And everyone around him began to laugh and float up as well.

That scene, I believe, taps a deep human truth. That we will have a spirit that yearns for joy and lightness – a spirit that yearns to soar. And then life gets in the way – key ingredients go missing – and over time our spirits sink and become flat and heavy and bleak.

My brothers and sisters in Christ. For everyone of us here – and out there – who feels that their dreams have been destroyed, their hopes dashed, their spirits crushed, here is the good news of Easter morning. The risen Christ can take our flat, heavy hearts and put back that key ingredient. So that our spirits are not stuck on the ground. So that our spirits are not dictated by human pain or loss or disappointment. So that our spirits are not mired in a tomb. Easter brings each of us a second chance. A chance to see the life force in our midst. A chance to recognize the risen Christ right in front of us. A chance to start again. And that is why I love to say, “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!”

Let us pray:

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for bringing us to another glorious Easter morning. We arrive here from many varied places, some of us from a place of rejoicing, some of us from a place of hopelessness. Whatever our situation, this morning, Lord, give us the power to reclaim that missing ingredient in our lives, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. AMEN.