

*The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia!*

### **The Sign of Complete Joy!**

*“We are writing these things so that our joy might be complete.”*

Dear Friends in Christ:

On a recent trip to spend a few days with friends at our favorite beach in Emerald Isle, I happened to notice along the way all of the little churches on Route 58, their road signs inviting people to attend Easter services. One sign, which caught our attention, said: *“It’s not about the bunny...but the Lamb!”* The message stayed with me, as do a lot of those catchy church signs, like:

*Honk and drive if you love Jesus; text and drive if you want to meet Him.*

*We’re not Baskins & Robbins, but we have great Sundays!*

*Come on in and send free knee-mail.*

*ATM inside: Acceptance, truth, mercy. No card needed!*

*Give Satan an inch; he will be your ruler.*

*If you’ve had Mondays all week, you need our Sundays.*

- <http://sayingsforchurchsigns.com>

Even at Hope, last week on Easter Sunday, guests and visitors received a special gift, a package of peeps with the greeting: *“No bunny loves you like Jesus!”*

Surely, there’s an ounce of truth in each of those saying, but you and I both know that one catchy phrase cannot capture the heart and core of life as a Christian. In fact, the Apostle John, a disciple of Jesus, an eye-witness to Easter’s empty tomb, makes it abundantly clear in today’s Scripture reading that a deep, strong, trusting and life-changing relationship with Jesus

*“the word of life”*- is shaped by the totality of what one has *“seen and heard, looked upon and touched!”* (1 John 1:1)

Easter faith is truly *“not about the bunny,”* but the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, revealed in the Bible as *“the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14) During Lent we focused on *“Our Redeemer’s Conflicts,”* the depths of the Savior’s love magnified as the Son of God made the journey from the Garden of Gethsemane to the Upper Room and to Calvary’s Cross, giving His life for our sins. And, on Easter Sunday, wow – sin and death could not defeat Him; the grave could not hold Him, the angel declaring, *“He is not here! He is risen, just as He said,”* (Matthew 28:6), affirming the promise of everlasting life to all who believe!

Indeed, there’s no one and done phrase, no pious or catchy saying and no single Bible verse which makes Easter meaningful unless we are drawn by God’s grace through faith into *“fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”* That’s why John declares: *“We are writing these things so that our joy [and your joy] might be complete.”* It is the very purpose of the written Word of God, the Gospel of John concluding: *“These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”* (John 20:30-31)

I get concerned sometimes that we Christians, and those who not, are always looking for some extra experiential, tangible, convincing sign and seal that will make faith real and more relevant to life. It’s kind of like we think, *“God must be holding something out on us, isn’t He?”* Just give me one more assurance, one more word, one more promise; just give me one more answered prayer, one more blessing, one more eased worry - just answer all my questions; get me through one more

struggle, take this one burden, problem, illness away from me, forgive me one more time, work this out for my good and give me just one more blessing...AND THEN *“my joy will be complete!”*

But, my friends, that’s making it all about us...when it’s all about Him! Jesus has already fulfilled everything that is necessary for *“our joy to be complete”* and for *“hope to never disappoint because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”* (Romans 5:5) Easter affirms *“the deed is done...the victory is won,”* thus every time we come into this church and *“hear”* the Word of God and *“see”* the Cross, we are called into a deeper, daily faith relationship with Jesus that trusts in His grace and mercy. *“Just as I am without one plea,”* I can come. *“Chief of sinners though I be;”* I can come! *“Denier, betrayer, doubter,”* I can come, cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, called into *“fellowship with the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ.”* (1 John 1:3)

Talk about something else we can *“see”* and *“touch”* and *“hear,”* then consider what happens when we are sprinkled or splashed with simple water in Holy Baptism, connected to the Word of God. When we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we are assured of being His chosen and beloved children, promised in Scripture that *“nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!”* Did you *“hear”* that: *“Nothing, nada, zippo, zilch, and zero”* because the Bible is very clear and specific: *“Who shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword...or whatever else it is that gets us all worked up? “No, NO!” “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”* (Romans 8:35-38)

Every time we come to this Holy Table, we get to “taste” and “see” and “touch,” receiving “*in, with and under the bread and wine*” the very “*body and blood of Jesus, given and shed for the remission of our sins!*” So, you messed up this week, did you; you blew it with your spouse and kids; whined like everything over the littlest, most insignificant things; got negative and discouraged; minimized the blessings, got overwhelmed by life’s challenges, sinned like crazy and failed to take the high road in attitude and actions? Yet, at this table, on bended knee we “hear” the Words of Jesus spoken, “*Go in peace!*” - knowing that “*God is not done with us yet!*”

So, you see, my friends, by the power of Holy Spirit working through the prophets, apostles and evangelists, God has “**written**” in this Book every inspired Word we need to hear and believe in order to have “*life in the name of Jesus!*” This is **the sign of complete joy** that we all must read and rely upon in our journey on this earth. This message of Law and Gospel shows us our sin and turns us in faith to the Savior who lived and died and rose again, promising life to all who believe. The question is do we trust in His promises and count on His presence, or are we just like those first disciples huddled behind locked doors of fear and doubt, Easter Sunday quickly becoming just another “*manic Monday?*” It’s the same post-Easter question and challenge posed year after year, a reminder to claim the promise that “*Jesus Christ didn’t die on a cross and rise from the grave so that we would go on living the same old, same old lives!*”

Sure, there are a lot of earthly “*joy robbers*” out there, noted by one pastor<sup>1</sup> as “**sins, circumstances and people!**” “*Sins, if we tolerate them*” and give in to them; “*circumstances,*” if we think we have total control and “*people,*” if we let them. The saying is true, “*just when your cup of joy is full, somebody [or something or Satan] always*

*comes along and bumps into your elbow.” Joy robbers like “worry” and “fear” and “stress” are all real, difficult, and intense; “sin” and “sorrow” and “the daily struggle of life,” often lead to tragic loss and wounded spirits; disappointment and despair quickly taking over, leading us to question whether God is “with us” or “for us!” And, that reality is why Jesus came into this world, dying and rising to give us faith and hope, not only for today but for eternity’s tomorrow!*

I’m not one of those simple-saying, pious-quoting, funny-church-sign kinds of Christians, and there’s a lot of them out there this time of year, like:

*Jesus paid the price. You get to keep the change  
God loves his PEEPS!  
The key to heaven was hung on a nail!  
Jesus changed a grave situation.  
Easter Aftermath – You can’t keep a good man down!*

An element of truth in them all, but I’m glad the only sign we have on Rogers Road features a **cross**, and the name **“HOPE.”** **The only sign of complete joy** that works for me is what is written in here – the Word of God which daily seeks to draw us into deeper trust and hope, faith and *“fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.”* How I pray you feel the pull and tug of the Holy Spirit in the Word today – **the sign of complete joy!** Amen.

*The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia!*



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<sup>1</sup> Portions adapted from a sermon contributed by Ralph Andrus, [www.sermoncentral.com](http://www.sermoncentral.com);  
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