

Try and Stop Easter – Matthew 28:1-10

“Churches cancel Easter services!” read the headlines in the major newsfeeds. Can I hear you respond, “NO WAY!”

Louder “NO WAY!”

We might be doing things differently, we may not be able to have the wonderful Easter rallies we look forward to every year, but we will NEVER cancel Easter services. Even if we have to do them in our homes with just our families – **we will celebrate Easter.**

Why?

Because this is the heart of the Christian faith. Listen to what the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15: 13-14:

¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

The Christian faith hinges on this one fact: did Jesus rise again from the dead? If he did not..

- **he was a liar** – for he told the disciples he would rise again on the third day (Mark 9:31)

- **he was defeated:** sin and death were more powerful

- **all Jesus’ other claims would be doubted** – like his insistence he and the Father were one, that he was the Son of God and that before Abraham lived, he existed...

- **the price would not be paid for our salvation.** We would still be in our sins because that meant the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross of Calvary was not sufficient, was not accepted as the full payment for our sin.

So Satan has tried many ways to try and cancel Easter. From day one, Satan knew that if Jesus was raised from the dead he was defeated. Satan laughed with glee when he saw them put Jesus in the tomb. No one escaped the grip of death. They may be resuscitated for a time, like Lazarus and the widow’s son, but they would soon be back in the grip of death. Even God’s own Word says, **“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment”**

Satan was quite sure he was the winner this time. He had taken so many beatings from God, but now he was on the winning side. But just to be sure... he would get some helpers to secure that grave...

So In Matthew 27 we read that the Pharisees went to Pilate and said,

⁶³ “Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ ⁶⁴ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.” ¹

One has to appreciate Pilate’s response when he says, ⁶⁵ **“Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.”²**

So a huge stone was put over the tomb, and a seal from Pilate, which meant if anyone broke the seal they would be killed, and a guard was posted to watch over the dead body. They made it as secure as they knew how – making sure that Easter would not happen, that Jesus would not be coming out of that tomb. This was Satan’s feeble way to say, “We are cancelling Easter. Sorry! (not really!)”

Did it work????

Read with me **Matthew 28:1-10:**

28 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” ³

Satan tried his hardest to cancel Easter. The Pharisees tried to cancel Easter. Pilate tried to cancel Easter. But they all failed! Halleluia!

God sent an angel to roll back the stone. He wasn’t afraid to break the seal. When the angel got the rock out of the way, we read he sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, so bright because he came from the presence of God. I can imagine him looking down on those pathetic

¹ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Mt 27:63–64). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

² [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Mt 27:65). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Mt 28:1–10). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

guards and going, “Boo!” They were so frightened already they might have screamed! “They shook and became like dead men.” They were overwhelmed by the appearance of the angel, and he wasn’t even the main attraction! Jesus was!

Give the women credit; they are still on their feet. The angel tells them that despite all Satan and the Pharisees and Pilate had done, Easter had come anyway! Jesus was not in the tomb – he was alive! You can look in the tomb and see for yourself – he is not there. In fact, he wants to spend some time with the disciples in Galilee – so go meet him there.

Easter is not about bunnies and chocolate and colored eggs. Easter is the celebration of the fact that the grave could not hold Jesus. On that third day he was raised to life, never to die again. Everything he taught, everything he promised, all he came to accomplish was verified that morning when he walked out of the tomb.

Then Jesus did something incredibly kind – he appeared to the women as they were hurrying back to tell the disciples the good news. Now they were the first eyewitnesses to the **fact of the resurrection** – they were the first people ever to celebrate Easter – the risen Christ!

No, there was no way Satan could cancel that first Easter. From before creation the Father had this all planned – that he would give his Son, His only Son, whom he loved – to be the sacrifice for our sins. But he would not abandon his Son and leave him in the ground. No, on the third day he released him not only from the grip of death, and from the earthen tomb, but also from his mortal body. Yes, Jesus now has a resurrection body that moves through time and space unlike our mortal bodies. He walks through locked doors, disappears from a dinner table and appears miles away. He is no longer confined to the flesh and blood body he gained at the incarnation – he was now resurrected!

Not only was Easter not cancelled, Jesus’ resurrection guarantees something else: our resurrection from the dead and a new resurrection body. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:

⁴² It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. ⁴³ Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. ⁴⁴ They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies.

So Satan learned the hard way that God would not allow Easter to be cancelled.

So what about today? We are not gathered at the church – our service was cancelled in the church building. Didn’t Satan win?

Two years ago as we were celebrating Easter, our dear friend and brother in Christ, Granville MacLellan was in the hospital fighting cancer. He did not want to miss Easter service, so we attempted to do a livestream through Facebook to the hospital. We didn’t have much success, but it prompted us to try and do a livestream of our service each week. When the Lord called

Granville to his heavenly home, the family thought a fitting memorial for him would be a decent video camera so that more people could be impacted by the Gospel through our worship services. We have been so grateful as our shut ins, or people away from the church on the weekend, even friends across the country and beyond join with us each week for worship.

Then came COVID-19. While many churches were scrambling to try their first attempt at livestreaming services, we had a system in place. Satan thought he could cancel Easter on us, but here we are today worshipping together separately. From your home you sing, pray, read the scripture and hear the message that will never get old: Jesus is alive! Satan lost again....

In fact, we have never touched more families than we are right now during this crisis. The counter on our Facebook page says 1019 people viewed our Good Friday Service. Our highest service is 1300 views, and we have people from Texas and Idaho, Edmonton and Calgary, even had someone from Cambodia. All we can say is, Satan cannot cancel Easter!

Now Easter has always been, for Nazarenes, a time to remember our missionaries, and our brothers and sisters around the world. We are a global church, with over 2.5 million members around the world in 163 world areas. We generally take up a special offering at Easter to help our missionary work. This offering is over and above our missions budget, and it goes to help open new mission areas.

But this year we have COVID-19, and many people are unemployed, businesses are shut down, money is scarce. It would be very easy to say, hold on to your money: when this passes then we will give. Maybe we should be extra careful at the church and not give any money away. Wouldn't Satan love that?

But he cannot cancel Easter! Just over a week ago I received a sad letter from Enoch Tee, missionary in the Philippines. He helps out some churches ministering in the poorest sections of Manila, a city of over 13 million people. The churches he is helping minister to up to 5000 families. During this crisis they have been able to help over 2300 families with food needs. Isolation has taken what little work there was away, and food supplies have dried up, and the children in the area who are already malnourished, are now dying of starvation. COVID-19 is not their greatest enemy – starvation is.

Enoch was told Nazarene Compassionate Ministries had no more money left as there had been so many disasters and crisis recently. But Enoch was given permission to contact his home District, Canada Pacific District, and the churches he visited, to see if there was any help out there. That is how I got his letter.

I took the letter to your church Board, and though they understood finances are uncertain right now, they voted without hesitation to send \$2000 to help these families. The next day the Work & Witness team met (via Zoom) and when they heard about the need, they agreed to send the \$2000 they had raised for their next project. What good was money in the bank when children are starving? Then Board members contributed their own money and I am so proud to

say that our church family sent \$5200 before Easter to help these churches feeding these families. At \$15 per family – yes, money goes a lot further there – 345 families have been helped. But we are not done yet – as another \$500 has already come in, and I suspect that now you know about this there may be more.

You cannot cancel Easter – or the generosity of God’s people that has always been a part of our Easter celebrations.

Jesus’ victory is the source of life and victory for all God’s people. We are people of the resurrection. **We know that the Spirit of God that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us,** according to Romans 8:11.

No wonder Paul would write in Philippians 3:10:

I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead.

This morning I want to remind us all that we live on this side of the resurrection! Jesus is alive, victorious over sin, Satan and death. And that victory is meant to be a part of our lives too. As we call upon Jesus, as we make Him Lord of our lives, he brings resurrection life to our world.

This morning, who is Jesus to you? A historical figure? Someone who lived long ago but who is no longer relevant today? Have you met the resurrected Jesus through faith? Or is he still buried in a tomb?

This Resurrection Sunday may you know the living Christ, meet Him for yourself, and celebrate that he truly is alive! May you be able to declare with Christians around the world today,

He is Risen! He is risen indeed!

May that be the cry of your heart not because the pastor said it should be, or because the church is saying this and you want to join in... but because you know it is true, for you have met him for yourself! As you confess your sin, repent of that old way of life without Christ and seek God’s forgiveness and love, you will meet Jesus!

Satan wants to cancel Easter in your heart this morning. But we know he cannot. Jesus is always victorious. So open your heart to Jesus and with the saints today and throughout the ages sing:

Christ the Lord is Risen today! Halleluiah!

Amen!