



*April 27, 2014*

## Thought For The Week

The resurrection transformed Jesus' disciples. They were devastated when they saw him condemned and crucified. They saw the body of the One who was so full of life, and who brought blessings to so many, hanging lifeless on the cross. They were broken-hearted.

The hopes Jesus had kindled in them died when he died, but when they saw their risen Lord their hopes returned with new reality and power. Jesus sent them out to proclaim to all people the good news that he had died for our sins and been raised again to give us a living hope. The lives of countless people, from all nations, have been transformed, as they have believed in the risen Jesus.

I heard of a service that was held for the life of a young lady who had died from cancer. She had found Jesus as a teenager and she trusted Him as her Savior. For most of her short life she had been a bright witness for Jesus to her family and friends.

One of her friends identified that she had given him a book, "Heaven is for Real!" As she drew near to the end of her life, the reality of heaven, and Jesus' love for her, sustained her. She knew that, after she died, she was going to be in heaven with Jesus, her risen Savior and Lord.

*His promise to all who trust in him is "Because I live, you also will live."*

Let Jesus be your personal Savior. Witness for Him in everything that you do. Commit yourself to be a Good Christian. It's true, to be a Good Christian, you don't have to go to church. But consider this, in everything that you do in life, a good support group, makes it easier to succeed and the outcome is usually better than it would be without the added support.

Church is Jesus' support group. Mixing with others that are like-minded and supportive to your personal Savior has a "built-in" positive effect. Don't wait until everything is just right. It will never be perfect. There will always be challenges, obstacles and less than perfect conditions. So what. Get started now. With each step you take, you will grow stronger and stronger, more and more skilled, more and more self-confident and more and more successful.

Consider the life of Jesus. He was someone who loved his religion and tradition but was not afraid to challenge it. Against the expectations of his culture he treated women as equals (this comes out clearly in Luke's gospel) and had high regard for children. He reached out to the stranger, the disabled and the enemy, the Roman invader. Unemployed, a vagrant, possibly an asylum seeker (in Egypt and Lebanon) he attacked the tyranny of wealth, religion and government. He encouraged his followers to copy him: 'Trust me for the sake of the work', he is reported as saying. 'The things I do you will do, and bigger things too...' He spoke his truth fearlessly to the highest authorities in the country. He knew he was running risks and accepted them. He was sometimes afraid, but he didn't turn back.

What was his message? 'Review your values; are they compassionate? Live adventurously; don't let yourself be governed by anxieties and ambitions. Treat everyone as you hope they will treat you – even when they don't. Become a community of equals. Serve others; this is the essence of leadership. Build a community of equals. Act nonviolently. Love your enemies. Forgiveness is always on offer. The power that fills the universe is generous to you; become aware of it.'

He is a supreme example of the basic Christian claim that action springs from faith and faith is nourished by action. The early Christians believed that 'Christ is come to teach his people himself' and spoke of the Light of Christ in our hearts. We don't need to think of this as some supernatural operation, any more than when someone invokes 'the spirit of Gandhi'. It refers to our search for our own deepest truth. Paul's injunction 'Let the same spirit be in you which was also in Christ Jesus' is not about beliefs, it is about the power to discern and act.

Do you remember seeing the story of a 39-year-old woman, who through the miracle of modern science was able to hear for the first time with the aid of cochlear implants?

She said it was the most emotional and overwhelming experience of her life. She burst into tears as she heard a nurse simply reading out the days of the week. '*Hearing things for the first time is so, so emotional, from the ping of a light switch to running water. I can't stop crying,*' she said.

I wonder if this is what it felt like for Mary as the realization dawned on her that this was not the gardener standing before her by the empty tomb but Jesus, her Lord. As she hears him call her name her life changes forever. It will never be the same again. Jesus is alive. He is risen and he is speaking with her now. Perhaps for the first time she recognizes the treasure deep within; that she is deeply loved

by someone who will go to hell and back again for her.

We have journeyed through Lent and have been encouraged to seek the treasure that God longs to give us. Today we have found the treasure. And it is overwhelming, like hearing sounds for the first time.

Today is the first day of the week, a new beginning, a new day. We turn from the empty tomb to the brightness and beauty of the garden. It is time for us to experience the resurrection with all of our senses; to hear, see, taste, sense, touch. To enjoy the treasure so that we also can say:

*I have seen the Lord! I have heard the Lord call my name!*

## Stewardship Thought For The Week

### Giving Generously

*“Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver”*  
2 Corinthians 9:6-7.

In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 the Apostle Paul instructs believers in the principles of giving. Paul is soliciting funds from the Gentile churches to support impoverished saints in the persecuted church in Israel. He covers the purposes for charitable giving. Also, there is helpful information as to how funds should be collected and other information as well. I would like to consider some of the principles from the passage above and some of the verses that follow that address how we are to give and the benefits of giving.

We are to give generously. Using an agricultural figure of speech that can be understood today as well as in New Testament times, we are to be generous with money and possessions. “Sowing bountifully” means in this context giving our money generously to those in need. The word for bountiful is the same word that is usually translated blessing. Like a farmer we sow with the hope of a blessed return. It is a reminder of a universal principle. We invest in something that we cannot have immediately in order that we may enjoy a future blessing. Sowing bountifully requires faith. It is an expression of the grace of God to the one to whom the gift is given and it makes the giver dependent upon the grace and character of God while hoping for a return on his investment. The obvious is stated here. In order to reap an abundant harvest you must sow liberally. The seed that is planted reproduces in number and the more you plant the more you will reap in the future. Paul also discusses this principle of sowing and reaping in *Galatians 6:7-10*.

We should not give under compulsion. It is a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord when we give a generous determined amount with joyful abandon. We are not under the compulsion of any misguided desire to please men or win their approval but free to express our love for the Lord. We acknowledge by faith that we are dependent upon Him and we trust that He will provide for us. The only compulsion is the desire that we have for others to experience His compassionate provision through the bounty of His goodness to us. We have the privilege of becoming His instrument of grace to others.