

## “I Now Realize”

(Easter Sunday 2021)

### Acts 10: 34- 43: 13- 22 (NIV)

<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism <sup>35</sup> but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. <sup>36</sup> You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup> You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.



<sup>39</sup> “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, <sup>40</sup> but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. <sup>41</sup> He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

#### ***Reflection on the Word:***

1. Why is Peter speaking? What is the situation? Who is his audience?
2. What was the message that God sent to the people of Israel?
3. Why did they reject God’s message?
4. Why was the resurrected Jesus not seen by all the people according to Peter? Why is this important?
5. What has Peter come to understand through the testimony of the prophets and the reality of the resurrection?

#### ***Family Time or Small Group (Better Together) Discussion:***

1. Begin by sharing some of your Easter memories. What do your memories have in common? What do your memories have in common with the group?
2. Does God play favorites? If “yes” then who are these favorites? If “no” then why do some believe that God does?
3. Are there any groups of people being excluded by the Church today? Why is this so?
4. What is the core of Christianity?
5. How can I pray for you?

**The Sermon:**

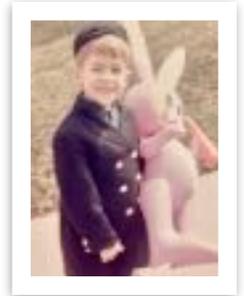
I now realize ...

Say it with me- *I now realize.*

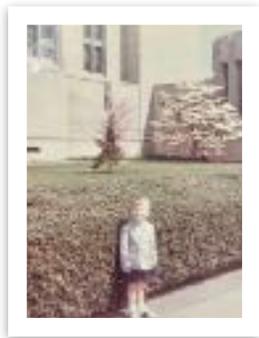
I now realize that for myself, Easter has been and become many things over my 56 years.

Easter baskets filled with chocolate from the strangest of creatures ... *an Easter Bunny* ... a cottontail named *Peter* ... who left hollowed chocolate images of himself as the centerpiece.

One year I received not only a chocolate bunny; I was given a life- sized blow-up Easter bunny to take with me to church. I didn't realize at the time that it was all a ploy or maybe a bribe to wear a matching coat and hat as my mom enjoyed dressing me for Easter. I'll never forget that experience as later I quickly found out that blow up Easter bunnies were not allowed in church.



And speaking of church ...



As I said, my mom enjoyed dressing me up for Easter Sunday. And to make matters even worse, my mom loved her disposable cameras and so I had to be ready to say "cheese" with a grin as mom snapped picture after picture: picture at the church ...



grin

by the new Monte Carlo,



and the steps of the apartment we called home ... What can I say ... the seventies.

I now realize for myself, that Easter has been and become many things. Things that I have passed on to my children like coloring Easter eggs ...



and Easter egg hunts ...



and chocolate bunnies ....



I now realize for myself that I have preached Easter as the time when women were the first to proclaim the risen Christ and John and Peter ran back to tell the others...



a time when Jesus walked up to grief-stricken disciples and travelers on a road to Emmaus ... he explained the scriptures to them and their eyes were open when he broke the bread in their presence

... a time when Thomas insisted on touching the wounds of a resurrected Christ ...



a time when Jesus met the disciples at the shore and reinstated Peter ...

Peter who had denied him three times ...

Do you love me? Feed and take care of my lambs and sheep.

I now realize for myself that maybe I haven't fully understood everything about Easter and have lived behind a mask of what Easter has been and become over my life.

But what if I allowed Easter to become something that has not just been over my life but rather something in my life? Do you see the difference?

Yes, there will always be the chocolate bunnies, the clothes, the going to church, the Easter flowers, and the Easter Sunday dinner, and the pictures to help us remember the day ... but what if Easter was more than a day?

Do you see what I am getting at?

Because shouldn't Easter be more than a single day?

More than a memory?

More than a matching hat and coat or a piece of chocolate ...

More than the obligatory going to church ...

All the things that Easter has been and become because we didn't fully grasp the fullness of God's being a part of Easter. To set the record straight that God does not play favorites ... that the reality of Easter is ... Easter is for everyone.

Everyone ... not some, but everyone. Not just the believer.

Everyone.

This is where Easter begins and where we can have a resurrection of heart and mind. This is how Easter has a future and is the future in that we, as God's people, would understand that Easter is for all. Those who believe. Those who don't ... and everyone in between.

And if you are now thinking, "Oh Tim is going toward universalism" ... let me assure you that I am not! But let me also assure you that I am convinced that Jesus Christ rose for everyone and our witness for today's world needs to proclaim such!!

Because honestly, we have a checkered past. A past of playing favorites. A past of excluding others. A past of defining people as republicans and democrats, progressives and conservatives, gay and straight, rich and poor, ethnic, alien, and as we have experienced during these days leading up to Easter ... the season known as Lent ... the division over the color of one's skin.

A division so deep that it took the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968 ... just 53 years ago. A division so deep that we divide over lives that matter.

But what really matters for all of life is that Christ rose on the third day for everyone ... and that you and I are called to be witnesses to such first and that really is it. We are called to heal divisions, alleviate suffering, speak up for those whose voices are oppressed, heal the sick, comfort the afflicted, and proclaim the good news using his name. That is doing so, others may come to believe in Jesus and receive forgiveness of sin through his holy name.

"I now realize" said Peter in today's passage. The same Peter that denied knowing Jesus three times. The same Peter who drew a sword in the garden during Jesus' arrest. The same Peter who tried to tell Jesus what a Messiah should be. The same Peter who said for us in God's holy word, "I now realize that God doesn't show favoritism and that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

What do you now realize so that Easter is more than a day?

What will do so that Easter is for everyone?

Whatever it is ... make it so and amen!

***Thought for the Week Ahead:***

*“Early evening April 4  
A shot rings out in the Memphis sky  
Free at last, they took your life  
They could not take your pride  
In the name of love, what more in the name of love”*

- Lyrics from *Pride: In the Name of Love* by U2