



The Christian Connection™



A Quarterly Newsletter from Christian Resource Network, Inc.

SOARING COMMUNICATION FOR CHRIST

DENY YOURSELF AND FOLLOW CHRIST

By: Joan M. Blake



Did you have a great Easter? I certainly did. Several members of my immediate family accompanied me to Church on Easter Sunday, to hear a powerful, life-changing resurrection message given by Reverend Francis Balla. We are honored to publish his message in this Edition of *The Christian Connection*.

We celebrated Easter to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Jesus Christ denied Himself and obeyed God, His Father, by willingly going through the pain of the cross where He was severely beaten and bruised before dying on the cross for all humanity. His death paid our sin debts in full and provided eternal life for those of us who would dare to believe and accept Him into our lives as Savior (Romans 5:8). But Jesus was victorious over death; He rose from the dead. His resurrection meant that Jesus Christ lives and reigns supreme and will forever intercede for us (Hebrews 7:25).

Because Jesus is alive, we can go boldly before the throne of grace regardless of how we feel or what we are experiencing. The writer of Hebrews assures us that we will receive "mercy and grace in the time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). Just as Jesus denied himself for all and had victory over death, through the help and power of the Holy Spirit, we too, can deny ourselves by obeying God and living according to His will and purpose. When we do so, God breaks the chains that easily hold us captive, transforms us, and enables us to be willing vessels impacting others and bringing them to a saving knowledge of His Son, Jesus Christ.

We deny ourselves and follow Christ because all power is given to Him (Mathew 28:18 KJV). In Him is life and life is the light of men (John 1:4). Through the power and knowledge of God, we "obtain all things for life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus Christ is our high Priest (Hebrews 6:20), our Provider (Philippians 4:19), our Sustainer (Hebrews 1:3), our Strength in the time of need (Philippians 4:13), our Deliverer (Psalm 91:15), and a Restorer of the broken hearted (1 Peter 5:10). He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the Ending (Revelation 21:6). He is and was and is to come (Revelation 4:8).

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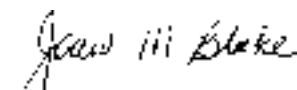
Leah M Blake

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Both the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is profound and central to our lives as Christian believers. The Bible states: "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Romans 6:5 NIV). Additionally, God has given us "new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). We crucify our fleshly habits in recognition of the death of Christ and we obey Him knowing that one day we will also be raised with him.

May you consider Jesus Christ today as the only One who can truly love you unconditionally, carry you through the stresses of life, and in the end, give you eternal life.

In Christ,


Editor/Publisher

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If you were blessed by the articles published in this edition or previous editions, we want to hear from you.
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PASTOR'S CORNER

REVEREND FRANCIS BALLA'S EASTER MESSAGE

A DAY OF INEXPRESSIBLE JOY

The sadness of Good Friday cannot be compared to the inexpressible joy that Easter brings to our hearts. The Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus are the two central pillars of the Christian faith and the only hope for the world. Christianity does not exist without these two core beliefs. From the first day of Christ's resurrection, Satan has tried his best to distort this amazing truth and is still trying to discredit it today. In the midst of age-old controversies and skeptics who reject the resurrection of Jesus Christ, what compelling evidence do we have? Is it Jesus' empty tomb or is it lives that He has transformed? Although the tomb where Jesus was buried was empty, that was not the only proof of his resurrection. We must not forget that Jesus' presence with the disciples proved that the resurrection was a historical reality. We do not point to a hole in the side of a garden wall as proof that Jesus rose from the dead. Rather, we point to those who were transformed by His presence, both then and now.

The Apostle Paul's life was transformed. What did he have to say about the resurrection of Christ? "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith"(I Cor. 15:14). Our lives are witnesses to the truth that Christ was indeed raised from the dead. In John 20:20 we read, "As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord!" Nelson's Annual Preacher's Sourcebook suggests that this verse serves as the perfect "vision" test for the believer. The Christian who "sees life clearly, is the one who sees life in light of the Resurrection of Christ"and will live a life overflowing with joy. When we "see" life in light of the resurrection, all else pales in comparison; we can face all circumstances. Resurrection Sunday is a day of inexpressible joy.

Let's look at the lives of those whose lives were transformed and hearts were filled with that inexpressible joy when they saw the risen Lord. We read of this incident in John 20:1-29. This passage can be divided into three sections:

1. A deeper look (John 20:1-9)
2. An earnest look (John 20:10-18)
3. Jesus' appearance (John 20:19-23)

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I. A DEEPER LOOK: (John 20:1-9)

It was the first day of the week; while it was still dark Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone was rolled away. She assumed that someone must have taken the body of Jesus away, so she ran and told Simon Peter and John the disciple whom Jesus loved the most. They both ran to the tomb. John outran Peter and came to the tomb but didn't go inside; he only stooped and saw the linen, but Peter jumped right in and beheld the linen wrappings. The word *beheld* is much deeper than just *seeing*; it means to gaze like a spectator, to look with interest and for a purpose, usually indicating the careful observation of details. When Peter had a deeper look he saw a few more details than his counter-part did. He saw the face cloth, rolled up.

These two disciples represent two types of Christians. John represents shallow and hesitant followers. They have no desire to know God better and follow him closely, for some reason they remain on the outside. They may attend Church regularly but never really get involved with the ministry of the Church. What hinders them from having a deeper walk with God? It could be the fear of man; they may be afraid of what others may think of them if they follow Christ. It could also be the fear of letting go of certain sinful habits that make them secure. Peter represents those who are not just satisfied by fringe benefits; instead, they want all of God. They are not afraid to take risks for God. They get their hands dirty when it comes to serving God and others. They dig deeper into God's word in order to know him more.

II. AN EARNEST LOOK:(John 20:10-18)

Mary Magdalene refused to leave the tomb; she was determined to find out what happened to the body of Jesus, so she stood outside the tomb weeping. She was one of those faithful followers of Jesus when He was alive. Do you remember that Jesus drove seven demons out of her once? You might also remember the woman who poured the most expensive alabaster oil on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her tears. Many scholars think that it was the same Mary Magdalene. What did Jesus say of her? "Her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much. At the tomb Jesus appeared to her and said, "Woman why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She thought it was the gardener. "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away." Her inquiry and compassion show how earnestly she loved Jesus. Finally, Jesus called her "Mary" and she turned and said, "Teacher." After that encounter with Jesus, she returned to the disciples and said, "I have seen the Lord." Mary represents a person who was indebted for the many sins of which he or she was forgiven; therefore, he or she loves Jesus much more than those of us who think we have it all together.

Jesus never turns anyone away who earnestly seeks him. One of such earnest followers of our time was Keith Green who at age 15 ran away from home. He was searching for musical adventure and spiritual truth. Keith had a Jewish background, but he grew up reading the New Testament. His journey led him to drugs, eastern mysticism, and free-love. When Keith was

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19, he met a fellow seeker/musician named Melody. They were married a year later -- but his spiritual quest continued. When he had nearly given up hope, Keith found the truth he was searching for. When he found the truth he proudly said, "I am a Jewish Christian." He was 21 years old and he never looked back. The radical commitment Keith preached was also a desire of his own heart. He said of Jesus, "Loving Him is to be our cause. He can take care of a lot of other causes without us, but He can't make us love Him with all our heart. That's the work we must do... Anything else is an imitation."¹

When I gave my life to the Lord Jesus Christ at age 17, though I was not as radical as Keith was, I gave Him my all, my rights, and my future to follow Him. I have had no regrets in following my Savior today and I hope to continue to follow him the rest of my life. Jesus is looking for earnest followers. He is not happy with lukewarm Christians. Are you an earnest follower of Jesus Christ or are you a casual follower?

III. JESUS' APPEARANCE: (John 20:19-23)

On the same evening, Jesus made a surprise visit to a group of fearful disciples. They were afraid of the Jews so they hid themselves in a room with doors tightly shut. Jesus came straight into their midst. How was that possible while the doors were closed? With a glorified body Jesus could pass through closed doors. The first words he uttered to those petrified disciples were "Peace be with you." He went one step further and showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Men have pursued joy in every avenue imaginable. Some have successfully found it while others have not. Perhaps it would be easier to describe where joy cannot be found:

Not in Unbelief -- Voltaire was an infidel of the most pronounced type. He wrote: "I wish I had never been born."

Not in Pleasure -- Lord Byron lived a life of pleasure. He wrote: "The worm, the canker, and grief are mine alone."

Not in Money -- Jay Gould, the American millionaire, while he was dying, said: "I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth."

Not in Position and Fame -- Lord Beaconsfield enjoyed more than his share of both. He wrote: "Youth is a mistake; manhood a struggle; old age a regret."

Not in Military Glory -- Alexander the Great conquered the known world in his day. Having done so, he wept in his tent and said, "There are no more worlds to conquer." Where then is real joy found? -- The answer is simple, in Christ alone.

¹<http://www.sing365.com/music/lyric.nsf/keith-green-biography/1953a79738c2f64748256aa2002c5ac7>

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The dejected disciples, when they saw the risen Lord, were filled with Joy. We all know that life can be difficult and overwhelming at times. When we face such situations we wonder whether God has abandoned us. Have you felt that way before? I've been in similar situations. All I needed then was a word from the Lord and he has graciously met my needs over and over again. Regardless of your situation, Jesus can walk right into it and say to you, "Peace be with you."

The resurrection of Jesus Christ secures for us new birth and the hope that we too will be resurrected one day with a glorified body just as he did. The Good News of the gospel is that you can completely put your trust in Christ whose death has made you right with God. Even if the whole world turns an accusing finger at you saying that you don't match up, remember God is for you and not against you. On this Easter Sunday morning though you have not seen Him you love Him and even though you do not see him now you believe in him and are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Amen.

Rev. Francis Balla, is the senior pastor of Evangelical Congregational Church of Atlantic in North Quincy MA. He served with Youth With A Mission in Hyderabad, India for twenty years. He holds a M.Div in Urban Ministry from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Please checkout the Church Website. www.eccquincy.com. The Church is located at 65 Newbury Ave, Quincy, MA 02171. Sunday service is at 10:30a.m.



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