

Easter Day 2023

“Cast off the old self with its evil deeds, and put on the new, which is being refashioned unto knowledge according to the image of its Creator.” (Colossians 3.9-10)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

On October 23, 1958, the town of Springhill, Nova Scotia experienced its third mine disaster, and the second in two years. The ‘bump’ as it came to be called was the result of underground earthquake comprised of three distinct shock waves. The result was such that the floor of the mine slammed into the ceiling. People on the surface were quickly aware that the disaster covered a wide area underground, and literally dropped what they were doing and ran to the mine. In that closely-knit small town, people knew each other, including the men that were underground – all 174 of them.

The disaster made an unusually deep impact on the general public, because it was the first major international story in Canada to be covered by live television broadcasts — a new service then being developed by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Media interest was also heightened on October 30 by an unexpected visit to the disaster site by HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, accompanied by the premier of Nova Scotia, Robert L. Stanfield.

Ken Pepperdine, the last survivor of the disaster (who died in 2018) had just two hours left in his shift when it all happened. He was four kilometres underground, when a big crash rang in his ears and he was thrown down. “There was a bang in me ears. It threw me back quite a ways, my face blew up like a balloon; and you couldn't see nothing for stone dust, your light shone through just like a fog.” Then it was darkness and the groans of nearby injured miners.

Pepperdine and the others sat in the dark for more than eight days without food or water, with the stench of corpses hanging in the air. “I thought we all had the biscuit, but I was laying there and I think the eighth day or so I seen this bright light in my eyes one of the rescue men.” At first he thought it was an angel coming for him, but it was the rescuers.

As a kid visiting the Springhill mine site, I remember the darkness when our lights were turned off underground. It would have been in the 70s, and tourists went to

Springhill to experience the darkness of the miners, even if was just for a minute or so. I remember not being able to see my hand in front of my face. That, of course, was simply a physical darkness – the kind of darkness we call ‘the middle of the night’ – one that goes away. A thick, deep darkness that mysteriously lifts every morning.

On Good Friday, however, something else happened: the darkness settled. There was a darkness over all the land from the sixth hour until the ninth hour, the sun’s light failing. The sixth hour was the same as noon hour for us. When the sun should have been at its highest point, it became completely dark while the Lord JESUS was dying. Something was terribly wrong – the only begotten Son of God was dying; His tortured Body hung on the Cross -- and the natural world cried out.

Whereas we ended with darkness on Good Friday, we begin with it this morning. As the Gospel says, “The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre.” She arrived there and saw that the stone had been moved from the entrance to Jesus’ tomb. In the dark of night, something had happened – what exactly, she was not really sure. So, she ran to get Simon Peter. Eventually, as we know, Mary discovered the truth of the matter: her Lord’s body had not been stolen – He had risen from the dead, and she met Him face to face.

Something happened in the darkness. When everything seemed to be lost, the Lord God Almighty was at work raising up His Son from the depths of Hades, the territory of death, referred to by the Jews as ‘prison’, ‘the lowest pit’, the place of ‘darkness’ and ‘destruction’. (Psalm 88) The darkness was no problem for God; afterall, in the beginning, when the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, His Spirit moved upon the face of the water. And God said, “Let there be light”.

And the same was true on Good Friday: as people became more and more uncomfortable – uneasy about what that noon-hour darkness meant, and wondering if it was the wrath of God and the end of the world – the veil of the temple tore down the middle from the top to the bottom, and the Lord Jesus breathed His last breath.

This tearing of the temple veil was hugely significant. First it tore from the top to the bottom, not from the bottom to the top. In other words, God Himself tore it.

And, by tearing it, He opened up what had been hidden. He opened the way into the Holy of Holies – the most sacred place where only the high priest entered once a year. In other words, now the way to Heaven was available to all. Now, a relationship with the Holy One Himself was possible for each and every person.

In each of these cases where there was darkness, God was present. When it looked like He had abandoned the scene, He was actually at work bringing new life: in the creation of the first Day; in the opening of the Holy of Holies; and in the raising up of His Son from death.

Of all that there is to talk about on Easter Day, this is the central point of the Gospel: the power of God. The Almighty power of God. And so we are given the facts of what happened: there had been a death, and the dead body of Jesus had been wrapped in linen cloths and buried in the tomb. Then, on that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene and the other brave women went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body – except they did not know how they were going to access it because of the large stone that sealed the entrance. Nevertheless, when they got there, the stone had been rolled away – not by some of the disciples or a secret group of Jesus' friends, but by the power of God.

Article IV on page 699 summarizes this Good News in these words (please follow with me):

“Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of Man's nature; wherewith he ascended into Heaven, and there sitteth, until he return to judge all Men at the last day.”

It is absolutely critical that we believe in this almighty, death-defying, life-giving, resurrection-power of God. Why? Because if we do not, we will live without hope and our life will lack purpose. But in addition to our own personal benefits, it is critical for the salvation of souls. All around us there is a culture of despair – one that that has been and is being carefully cultivated by the Prince of Darkness, the Devil. Each and every day, he seeks to increase this state of hopelessness in the world. Very subtly, he seeks to bring darkness – isolating people from their families; casting doubt on the love and the power of the God the Holy Trinity to deliver, to forgive, to heal and to save. All around us we see people who have been caught in this net of deception – people deep in the throes of spiritual

darkness: anxious, afraid, angry, addicted – and those are just the words that begin with the letter 'A'.

As those who have experienced the hope of the living Christ; as those who have found our true identity and our place of belonging in Him; as those who have been grafted into the very Body of Christ, the Church, we are called to confront the darkness, and to let His light shine. Jesus said, *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."* (St. Matthew 5.14-16)

The world may not know it, but it needs the Church. We are needed in this neighbourhood to bear witness to the almighty, life-giving power of God in Jesus Christ. It is for the Church to proclaim that no matter how deep the darkness, God Who raised Jesus from the dead, is at work bringing new life.

Dear friends, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above...set your minds on things above, not on earthly things; for you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He us risen indeed! Alleluia!