

## Column –Power of the Resurrection continues

Easter Day is past for another year. The instinct of many is to move on to the next holiday, whether that be Mother's Day or the Fourth of July. But if we really understand what happened on that day, we know that the resurrection of Jesus is an exciting and on-going reality.

God the Father raising Jesus marks nothing short of new creation. The sabbath rest spoken of in Genesis 2:2 is ended. That is why Christians gather on the first day rather than the seventh. We are living in God's new week.

The resurrection of Jesus has important implications in our personal lives. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul says, "If anyone be in Christ . . . new creation," meaning, among other things, that the life of the resurrected Jesus now belongs to Jesus' people. Because He was raised, they will be raised. Death for them is no longer a period or question mark, but an exclamation point.

This knowledge has many outworkings, including that the despot's most cherished weapon – death – has been snatched from him. “The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,” says Martin Luther's hymn “A mighty fortress is our God.” This new reality brought about by the resurrection enabled Stephen, the first Christian martyr, not to flinch before his accusers and boldly make the claim that Jesus was the promised Messiah. His faithful proclamation had consequences; indeed, it cost him his life.

Hopefully, you and I will not have to face what Stephen had to face; even so, he reminds us not to bow before the prevailing culture, but to be witnesses, bold and articulate ones.

Following Stephen's lead is especially needed in our own day where the trajectory is downward for Christian faith and practice. According to a recent analysis by Lifeway Research, 4000 churches closed in 2024. A number of these were old main-line churches which had slipped into a maintenance mode as passion for the Gospel had receded into the sunset.

The picture may appear bleak until we remember the situation Stephen and others in the early church faced. They found themselves outnumbered and facing fierce opposition, but what happened? They were faithful. They went out and announced Jesus, crucified and risen, and many who heard found themselves believing their message and being changed by it. The Gospel proved powerful and eventually culture itself was changed. Gladiator fights ended; the status of women rose, and the practiced of abandoning unwanted children at garbage sites ceased.

People still long for meaning and purpose in life. They hunger for answers about life's ultimate mystery, death. Only the gospel, centered in the resurrection of Jesus, is able provide those answers. It remains powerful and has been handed to us to pass on.

Those now referred to as 'nones' (people professing no religious faith and who now number 24 percent of the U.S. population) represent a new mission field. On the positive side, a recent study by the Barna Group reports that in 2025 young adults

(Gen Z and Millennials) are returning to church. Equally encouraging is that interest among young men is on the rise.

Regardless of the statistics, the Easter faith sends us out with courage and confidence. What President Roosevelt said in his 1933 inaugural address – “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself” – is a word for Christians today.

*O GOD, who for our redemption didst give thine only-begotten Son to the death of the Cross, and by his glorious resurrection hast delivered us from the power of our enemy; Grant us so to die daily from sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through the same Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)*

*The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Church, Blue Ridge.*