

# Current Thoughts

*from Dwight's corner*

© American Baptist Churches of the Great Rivers Region  
*e-Current* 080312

Eleven years ago this same time I was in Russia teaching at a Pastor's School. Christians in Russia (even Baptists) celebrate Easter using the Eastern Orthodox calendar which is different from churches in the West. For their calendar, Easter is rigidly tied to the date of Jewish Passover. I know how ours is determined (the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox)—but I am not sure why. Inevitably, there were questions about why we in the West celebrated Easter when we do (they were deeply troubled by the pagan roots in our dating). And there were times they got quite energized about it.

I agreed that the Orthodox dating of Easter made more sense to me. But I also pointed out that early Christians treated each and every Sunday as a memorial to the Resurrection. That attitude was reflected in the Russian days of the week. For them, "Sunday" is "Voskrisenya," which is literally "Resurrection Day." (I have to admit that I found some humor in the irony that Communists who were officially atheists spoke of resurrection every week.)

Egg-laying bunnies; crisp new dresses; glorious anthems; bountiful brunches; Spring vacation; irritated atheists; other faiths insulted. What kind of celebration is this? What difference does it make and why do we bother?

In a culture marked by idolatrous individualism, selfish spiritualism, anemic activism, competitive consumerism, and naive nationalism there is quite possibly nothing more important for professing Christians to do than shout "Christ is risen!"

Christ is risen! The unexpected, unequaled, unfathomed God who loved the entire creation came as Immanuel to redeem that creation. Yes, Christ was crucified as part of that redemption story, but it is not the end of the story. "If the Messiah has not been raised, we are still in a universe where sin reigns supreme and undefeated." (N.T. Wright) Resurrection affirms Jesus Christ as the authoritative Word of God who is still normative for authentic human living. Without Resurrection, the bare Cross confirms the old song "only the good die young." Resurrection is not an inconvenient, embarrassing addendum to God's redemption story that needs to be ignored, explained away or demythologized.

Christ is risen! My body matters to God. The Resurrection affirms God's intention to redeem all the "stuff" of creation. It rejects the old Platonism that says flesh and blood is irredeemably bad and our only hope is some sort of ethereal existence by which we escape the "stuff." My hope is in Resurrection, not escape.

Christ is risen! I must follow Jesus. That is what true holiness is all about. Following Jesus means just that—following Jesus—not checking a box marked "I like Jesus" then going on to live life my own way. I don't get to share in God's life, and escape God's wounds, or avoid Christ's Resurrection. Holiness is never a matter of simply finding out the way I seem to be

made and trusting that is the way God intends me to remain. Resurrection is about the real possibility of redemption—transformation—beginning with my mind. "We should live in the present as people who are made to be complete in the future."(N.T. Wright)

Christ is risen! It is not only about me. The Resurrection shows that a new creation has dawned in which the forgiveness of sins is not only a private experience, but at the very same time, an essential component to the redemption of all creation. Not only does my body matter, other humans and the rest of creation matters. Personal holiness and social holiness and ecological holiness belong together.

Christ is risen! With the Resurrection straight we can get mission straight. Resurrection informs, undergirds, and directs the community of faith. We do not build the Kingdom, but we build for the Kingdom, anticipating the King's return. The Kingdom encompasses everything. Nothing is beyond the transformative, redemptive work of a God who orchestrates Resurrection. Nothing can be "bracketed" as exempt from the need for resurrection when viewed beside the lifeless body of Christ in a stone-cold tomb.

Christ is risen! Not just once a year, but each and every day of our lives. The reality of Resurrection "raises us up" each morning to do the work of the Creator—conforming our own lives to the maturity of Jesus Christ, building community centered in Christ, and caring for creation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. For now, it is a Kingdom *we see only through a glass darkly*. Indeed, *the entire creation groans*. We live between the Ascension and the Appearing with anticipation.

Christ is risen! The community gathered around the empty tomb is called to a radical new life—a life of hope rooted in and bearing the marks of Resurrection. Our hope is not in self, escape, doing good, wealth, or politics. Our hope is in the Resurrection. Our hope is not in diversity or homogeneity. Our hope is in the Resurrection. Our hope is not in doing the right things or avoiding the wrong things. Our hope is in the Resurrection. Our hope is not in a catchy motto or a lively tune. Our hope is in the Resurrection. Our hope is not in individual freedom or pseudo-community. Our hope is in the Resurrection. Our hope is not in economic development or going "green." Our hope is in the Resurrection.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The readers among you will identify my inspiration by N.T. Wright's newest book **Surprised by Hope**. This is not a book review and I do not presume to accurately interpret him. But I do highly recommend the book. I also confess the continuing influence of Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and John Howard Yoder.

