

As you know I grew up in Ames, Iowa - for those of you who don't know, when I was growing up, it was about 35,000 with 25,000 college kids 9 months of year - so I feel like, even almost 14 years into my priesthood, I'm still trying to figure out how small towns in southern Minnesota work

I remember one time several assignments ago, I made a small announcement at Mass about an event we were having - I just figured that before long everyone would know - that news and information in small towns spread faster than you travel - well that didn't happen - someone had to teach me that in small towns some types of news spreads faster than others - that juicy gossip is different than boring Mass announcements

In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter, Jesus' right hand man, the first pope, is speaking and evangelizing - he says basically you know of all the amazing things that have been happening recently starting with John the Baptist and now more recently with Jesus of Nazareth

Peter says that God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power - Jesus went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil

Peter says that they are witnesses of all Jesus did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem

This Jesus was put to death and rose on the third day - and then Jesus commissioned them to preach and testify that Jesus is the one sent by God to judge the living and the dead - to teach that anyone who believes in Jesus will receive the forgiveness of their sins through Jesus' name

Jesus came to save us from our sins and heal all of us who are oppressed by the devil

Jesus made this possible by dying on the Cross and rising from the dead

St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians reminds us that if we are raised from the dead with Jesus Christ, if we allow Jesus to save us, then we are destined for greater things - we are destined for eternity with God in heaven - we are destined for salvation

Thus even now, we should seek what is above - we should seek heavenly things where Christ is seated at the right hand of the God the Father

I'm guilty of it too, but how much of our time and energy day in and day out is spent thinking about eternal things? - I spend way too much time and energy thinking about things that really don't matter in the long run

St. Paul says that if we have died with Christ, then our lives are hidden in Christ - this means that if we have surrendered our lives to Christ and His will for our lives, then our lives will be secured in Christ

If we give our lives to Christ, if we put Jesus first in our lives, if we make Christ the center of our lives, when Christ appears, then we too will appear with Him in glory

Sometimes I think this is hard to do because we lose sight that Jesus isn't just a god who is out there - sometimes I need to remind myself that Jesus is a historical figure - so often He is a God that I love and serve who is close but in some ways distant

God does love us and yes, Jesus is not walking the face of the earth now, but 2000 years ago He did - I think that is one of the powerful things about taking a pilgrimage to the Holy Land - you are faced with the fact that this God of ours, who created the universe, walked the face of the earth

When you are in the Holy Land you can visit the very places that Jesus visited - the stories in the Bible become not just stories, but historical events of our God loving and caring for humanity

Two thousand years ago, a divine Person, the Second Person of the Trinity, who looked like any other human male because He had taken on our human nature, rose from the dead

Two thousand years ago, on the first day of the week, on a Sunday, Mary Magdala came to the tomb of Jesus early in the morning and saw that the stone the Romans had put in front of Jesus' tomb had been removed

She ran to Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, aka, John the Apostle and said, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him."

So Peter and John ran to the tomb - Peter was like me - old and slow - so John arrived first - John looked in, but did not go into the tomb

When Peter arrived, Peter went into the tomb - and then John followed - John records himself going in, looking at the burial cloths and believing - some have surmised that the burial cloths were lying flat and not unraveled - I'm old, but kind of like when characters in Star Wars "die" and join the force - their clothes just kind of fall to the ground - so Jesus' burial cloths were not unraveled, but flat as if the body of Jesus had disappeared from inside of them

Thus Peter and John knew something special had happened - that their rabbi, their teacher, their best friend, had risen from the dead

Jesus has risen indeed! - Praise the Lord! - Alleluia! - Jesus has risen from the dead and now offers us saving grace - as Peter proclaims in the first reading, we are all opposed by the devil - every day we do things we don't want to do - every day we pay the consequences of other people's bad actions - every day we read how bad things are in other parts of the world

Every day we must cling to the hope and transformation that is only possible in Jesus Christ - Jesus Christ, in His death and resurrection, has conquered death and evil - will we allow Him to conquer the evil found in your fallen soul?

This is the great promise of Easter - that change is really possible - that we can change - that we are not stuck - that Jesus came not just to forgive our sins, but to give us the grace to change, to become saints, to become holy

We cannot do it on our own, but with the grace of Jesus Christ, we can change our behavior, we can change our actions - again, this is the great promise and hope of the resurrection

We are resurrection people - we are people filled with hope - our Savior has come to save us

Our Savior is here to heal us from the wounds of battle that we have had with evil

Our Savior is here to set us free - free to be sons and daughters of the God - free to become saints and to be with God forever in heaven