

THE MASTER HAS COME

He was eight years old and mentally retarded. His name was Stephen. I don't know much about him. I only read his story in another church's bulletin. But I was truly touched by it. There were seven other children in his Sunday School class. In the spring as Easter approached the children were asked to bring to Sunday School one of those L'eggs panty hose containers, with some object inside which represented new life.

Not wanting to embarrass Stephen, and being afraid he had not understood, the teacher asked the children to place the containers on the table to be opened one at a time. They opened the first and found a tiny flower, and one child said, "That's mine." They opened another, and found a rock. Another child said, "I brought that one." The child explained the rock had moss on it- a sign of life. They opened a third, and a butterfly flew out. Another child spoke up, "That was mine."

They opened the fourth and it was empty- and the teacher, knowing it must be Stephen's, reached for another. But, Stephen said, with halting speech, "Don't skip... mine." The teacher said, "But it is empty." And Stephen answered, "That's right. The tomb... was empty, and that is... new life for everyone." That summer Stephen's condition became more serious, and he died. The children in his class attended his funeral. On his casket they placed eight L'eggs containers- all empty. That is what Easter means: an empty tomb. The master has come- to be Lord of life.

It was early that morning when the women made their way out toward the garden tomb to anoint the body of Jesus with spices. Slowly they walked those dark streets, took that little road out toward a grave in a garden. The first rays of light streaked across the sky. The sun peeped timidly over a hill, and reached its long arm down into the garden.

And when they came to the tomb they discovered that great tomb door had been rolled back. They peered inside, and then stepped in. The body of Jesus was gone. The tomb was empty. Their questions were interrupted by those words, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" Then those voices said, "Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise." They left the tomb, and hurried to find the disciples, who had been hiding in the upper room since early Friday morning. They told the disciples the good news, but Luke, in his Gospel, records, "they did not believe them."

Later that afternoon, two of their friends came in from Emmaus, and told of their experience with a stranger on the road- how he had come to their home and broken bread with them, and how they realized it was Jesus. Then, suddenly, Jesus came and stood in the midst of them. His unexpected appearance frightened them. But, Jesus said, "Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have."

The Master has come- to be Lord of life. Because of this, nothing has ever been the same since, nor will it ever be. The Easter message is truly good news for us. It is good news about the power of God, the power of good over evil, of life over death, of hope over despair, love over hate, and good news about the Master's power.

The Lord of life has a power over death. Easter means that, first and foremost. There is a power over death. That power is God. It is expressed in Jesus Christ. They put Jesus on a cross, and drove nails through his wrists, and they said to each other, "That's that. We have taken care of this problem. We don't have to worry any more about this king of the Jews." But they didn't know that wasn't that. They took him down from the cross and sent him off to be laid in a tomb. They said, "We'll hear no more from him. He's dead and gone." But they didn't know that, though he was dead, he wasn't gone. Yogi Berra, the often-quoted baseball player, once said, "It ain't over till it's over." They did away with Jesus, and they said, "He's finished. His kingdom is over. This blasphemy is over." But they didn't know it wasn't over. It wasn't over until Easter morning. He has a power over death and it's still not over.

God always has the last word. That is the good news of Easter. God has a power over death. We think death is the end, that with death everything is over. We dread it. We fear it. An angel came to see a man late in the night, and said, "I have some good news and some bad news." The man said, "Let me have the good news first." The angel then told him he had been selected to play in a golf tournament in heaven with Bobby Jones, Bing Crosby, and Babe Ruth. The man asked, "What is the bad news?" The angel replied, "You tee off at eight tomorrow morning." Death is bad news for us.

Too many of us look at death as bad news. But Easter is the good news. Easter means the only thing that is over is death itself. A little boy attended the funeral of his grandfather. He noticed there in the funeral home that everyone spoke in hushed tones. There was a somber atmosphere he did not understand. So finally he said, "Why all this whispering? No one's asleep!" He captured what Easter means. The Lord of life has a power over death.

The Lord of life also offers a power for living. The message of Easter means more than something otherworldly. The Christian Gospel is not a fairy tale about streets of gold that you get someday up yonder. The power of the Resurrection is a power for living.

The reality of the future life, in God's Kingdom proves itself because it is a power for living in the present. Eternal life begins now. That means we do not have to be bound by fears and sorrows, toils and troubles, hardships and heartaches. There is a victory built into life. And the Cross of Jesus Christ is the symbol of that victory.

We are troubled by many things aren't we? Life has a way of getting the best of us. We let it get us down. There are times when some of us feel like giving up. The disciples felt that way that fateful Passover weekend. But, that was the last time they would ever be that low again. That weekend they learned that they were serving a risen savior. That gave them a power for living. It gave them courage, hope, and stamina. They discovered the abundant life of which they had Jesus speak. They could face anything. Easter means that. The Lord of life offers us a power for living.

Lastly, the Lord of life provides a power for witness. Easter offers this too, for the risen Lord empowered the disciples to become the church. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ provided a power for witness. It produced the church. And the church is living proof of the resurrection.

Something earth-shaking happened to these disciples which transformed their thinking and their living. They would not- could not- have gone out from Jerusalem to face the power of Rome were it not for the power of a risen Lord. Have you ever had anyone say to you, "How do you know the resurrection is real? How can you prove it is true?" the answer is simple, "You don't have to prove anything. It proves itself. The existence of the church is proof enough- the church of a living Lord. Only a resurrection could have made it happen then, and could keep it going today." The Christian church did not just happen. It had a supernatural beginning. The New Testament calls it RESURRECTION. And the living Lord provides a power for witness today- the power to be Christian, the power to carry the Gospel to the world, the power to serve, to help, to encourage, to feed, to clothe, and to offer mercy- all in the name of Jesus. Many people simply don't understand all this. But, we understand.

A missionary and his wife had spent 40 years in the mission field. When they retired they sailed home. There was an army general on the ship. They had many conversations on the journey. The general could not understand these people, and why they had done all this hard work for no visible reward. When the ship reached port, there was a great crowd there, waving and cheering. The army general was welcomed home as a hero. The missionaries were met by no one. But, as they wondered

why, they seemed to hear a voice which said, "You're not home yet." They smiled, for they knew at their home town train station all their friends would be there. They made the trip home, looking forward to seeing everyone. And, when the train pulled into the station they looked out the window. But there was no one there. The old man was overcome by disappointment. But, his wife put her hand on his, smiled, and said, "We're not home yet."

We are not home yet. But the Master has come- to show us the way. And that means everything will be alright.