

Easter day around the world...let's start with Asia: *the Kushan empire took shape as silk trade started to gain strength, giving power to particular Chinese tribes - a union of five Yue-chi tribes joined forces to establish a broad empire. The Kushans were just one clan of the Yue-chi, but they were the most dominant and soon the entire empire bore the Kushan name alone.*

- in Africa: *in West Africa the village of Jenne-jeno was developing into a major community through extensive trading and perfecting the use of iron – and the arrival of new crops allows expansion into the humid forests and low-lying river valleys of more central Africa; while in east Africa the Bantu-speaking people continued their slow migration down the coast.*

- in South-Central America: *the city-state of Teotihuacán was gaining full power, with large scale irrigation works, cultivated tomatoes and peanuts as well as maize and other grains and the domesticated turkey. Farther south the Mayan people continued to expand and develop a Classical Age of dominance and development.*

I could go on to describe other parts of the world – but I'm sure you get the point... or perhaps you don't get the point at all!!! What I'm doing is describing to you something of what the world was like in the first century AD – approximately around the time of Jesus' life and death, and Jesus' resurrection from the dead – something of what was happening in the world. At some point this week, I wondered to myself: 'how many people were alive at the time of Jesus?' – 'what was the world population on the day described in John 20 – the day of Jesus' resurrection from the dead....?' Any guesses? - the internet is a wonderful tool for quick research on such odd questions...the experts

estimate about 200 million people, give or take a few million. And of those 200 million people, how many on that day knew about the resurrection of Jesus Christ? – well, no one witnessed it; a few women heard about it in a garden; they told some men, who received the story with varying degrees of incredulity. The other 199,999,986 people just went on with their lives as they had before - Easter Day all around the world, and nothing changes – life and death in all its heights and depths goes on the same.

Have you ever thought of that? – thought about things that way at all?...of what the world was like on that Easter day all around the world? When we gather here today, it seems quite clear to me that there is something important about the resurrection of Jesus Christ – but is it important, does it make a difference, only when there are lots of bells and whistles to accompany it? – or in this case bells and brass and voices and organs and lilies and sculpture and lots of people...? When we hear the stories of how the news of Jesus' resurrection spread, among his followers, to others, in the Jewish community and beyond – then did it make a difference? – only then? What about the day itself – Easter day, there and around the world – in the Kushan empire; in the village of Jeene-Jeno; in the city of Teotihuacán? - no one celebrated that day.

There is a deep mystery in our faith in Christ that on that Easter day when no one celebrated, the mystery is that it did make a difference – a mystery not because it is something unclear or as a cop-out to say it can't be known – but a mystery in it being a truth so rich that it calls us again and again to be encountered by it and receive new meaning in it. It is the deep mystery that Peter expresses in what we heard today in Acts in this way: “Jesus Christ is Lord of all” – that's the truth and the scope of Easter day. In Jesus Christ what is happening is the defeat of death – death which is all that alienates

and separates humanity from God: sin and suffering, violence and fear, mistrust and despair. Jesus' death on the cross embraces all of those realities and Jesus' resurrection gives a new reality: 'Jesus Christ is Lord of all' Death in all its forms – the deadliness present in life - it is the true enemy because it's claim is to separate us from God; but in the resurrection, death is unmasked as a false power, a false lord – God in Christ claims all; death can claim nothing – 'Jesus Christ is Lord of all.'

And the mystery is: that was true on that day – that first Easter day when no one celebrated. In Jesus' death and resurrection, God embraces all creation in a new way – something is different – the foundation of death's all-encompassing reign is cracked and its demise is certain. And no one really noticed that day.

It's holding those 2 realities together – that's what's got me wondering...I wonder if a way to deepen our faith in the risen Christ, is to hear and trust that story even when it is not obvious, not celebrated – to encounter the mystery of Jesus Christ as Lord of all not *from* appearances but despite appearances. Is the resurrection only important where the church is? Is the Risen Christ Lord only when it is obvious to us? Only when we believe it, or someone else does? Do only our celebrations give the resurrection validity and power?

Lou Lotz is an RCA pastor with a regular column in the Church Herald, the RCA monthly magazine: a few months ago he wrote about trying to get at the center of our faith, and he started off this way: *'when someone tells me, as a young man did recently, that he doesn't believe in the virgin birth or the resurrection, or whatever, I have the urge to say: who cares? Since when is your personal experience the validation for Christianity? Who do you think you are?'* – he has the URGE today that even if he

doesn't - but I think he's getting at something very important – faith is not first about us: it is about who God is; the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not first about who is celebrating it: it is about the Spirit of God at work in Christ to bring life.

Sometimes we get things turned around. We forget that as the story of the Risen Christ does begin to spread, it was the Spirit of Christ that made that possible at all; we forget that as the disciples and Paul and the early Christians were spreading the story of Jesus, they were encountering the Risen Christ already at work in the lives of those they met. We sometimes forget the Spirit of Christ at work before and around and beyond us – that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. The followers of Jesus Christ proclaimed the good news not to make a claim on the world but because God in Christ had claimed them and the world – Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

Easter day around the world, today – are things so much different than 2000 years ago? In Asia, a modern day Chinese empire asserts its place in the world; in Africa, an AIDS epidemic runs rampant; in Latin America, a drug war rages violently to meet North American drug demand. And now how many people? - 6.7 billion people making their way through life this day, give or take a few hundred million...! Now many people know the story of the Risen Christ – but many don't; now many believe the story and many don't; it is Easter Day all around the world, and still life and death in all its heights and depths goes on the same.

Maybe Easter always feels something like the first Easter – a seemingly insignificant voice in a big world; and maybe that feeling will remind us what Easter is about – not us, but about this: “Jesus Christ is Lord of all”. It's about a reality that does not come from our voices or our numbers but from God's power and victory of life over

death – and as we hear that story, passed on to us from that first Easter day, we join the followers of the Risen Christ who told the story not because it is obvious but because it is true; who lived out the story not because it depended on them but because they depended on God; who carried the story into the world not to bring Jesus there but to encounter the life-giving Spirit of Christ in whoever they met and wherever they were. ‘Jesus Christ is Lord of all’ is the promise that in this world of more of the same, things are not the same – we and this world belong to life, not death – belong to God. That is the truth we live out, and it is a truth I believe all people yearn to receive and all of creation yearns to abide in.

What if Easter happened and nobody cared? – well – that’s kind of what did happen on the first Easter – and Jesus Christ is Lord of all. What if Easter is celebrated today and much of the world goes on oblivious? – and Jesus Christ is Lord of all. What if the Risen Christ meets us not only in our celebrations, but is present also where death still proclaims its false reign? – and Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

The Risen Christ is Lord of all: that is not the truth we claim this day, it is the truth by which God claims us and all and all creation, in this day and place, and for all time and place. Jesus Christ is Lord of all – it is not the truth that is obvious, it is the only truth: Christ is Lord of all and nothing can separate anything from God’s reign of life. And as we live in that resurrection truth the Spirit of the Risen Christ is at work in us and beyond us with unchanging hope - death dies, life reigns.

‘This is the Lord’s doing – and it is marvelous in our eyes.’ Amen.