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| A Sermon by the Rev. Jeffrey A. Packard | Prepared for the congregation of Christ Episcopal Church, Spotsylvania, VA |
| To be delivered on April 16, 2017 | On the occasion of Easter |

Claim Your Rights and Your Responsibilities

The tomb is empty!

Jesus has been raised from the dead!

God has vindicated his righteous Son and offers new life in him to all!

The world has been irrevocably changed. Sin has been defeated. Death has lost its sting.

We rejoice in the blessings that have been showered upon us by Christ's victory over death. This is Good News, and we celebrate today.

As a result of this Good News we live a new life, in a new creation. We are called to live differently because of the Good News. Because Jesus died for our sins and rose again, we are called to repent of our sins and to live according to God's commandments. Because Jesus showed compassion for us, we are called to be compassionate. Because Jesus did not withhold even his own life, but gave until he had nothing left to give, we are called to a generosity of spirit, to be generous with our self, with our time, with our money, and with our good will. Because Jesus was committed to following God's will even when it meant his own painful death, we are called to be committed to God's purposes even in the face of personal pain or loss. Because Jesus loved us, we are called to love others in his name.

Living this new life in the new creation is not just our private, personal choice. It is something that has consequences for every aspect of our lives, as individuals and as members of society. We cannot say to someone, "God loves you!" and fail to feed that person when he is hungry. We cannot proclaim that God has set us free from sin and death, and fail to work to dismantle the unjust structures of society that oppress our brothers and sisters. We cannot claim

to be servants of the Prince of Peace, and fail to work and pray for peace at every level of society, from our own homes to international relations. We cannot be Christians on Sunday and something else on the other six days of the week. For that matter, we cannot be Christians on only Christmas and Easter.

The Good News we proclaim today is real Good News. It has real impact on the world, that is, if we believe it and act on it. If we don't, then our Easter acclamation is meaningless, our Alleluias ring hollow. If we fail to follow Jesus, he may as well still be on the cross or in the tomb. But the reason you came to church this morning was to see that tomb empty, to meet the risen Christ. The world changed that day, and it can change today too. Today we recommit ourselves to follow our Lord, trusting in his mercy to forgive all past sins. This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it! This is the first day of the week, the first day of the new creation, the first day of the rest of your life. Don't leave here today without that joy in your heart that is your right as a Christian. Claim it. Claim the joy of new life, new possibilities, new gifts, new challenges. Claim the gifts of God that have been given to the people of God. They belong to you, because Jesus purchased them on your behalf. Claim the joy. Claim the thanksgiving. Claim the victory. Claim all the blessings that God longs to shower upon you as we together proclaim:

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!