

# Are you an Optimist or a Pessimist?

Krisdos Hareav ee Merelots! Christ is Risen from the Dead!

Not only am I warming up the crowd with that greeting, I also intend to make this our simple and profound Easter greeting the topic of today's sermon. Like any greeting, like 'how are you,' it is used so formally that it can lose its meaning. It can become part of the furniture in a room that we never notice. But there is a big difference when you say 'how are you' like 'hey,' and when you actually mean 'how are you?' Today my goal is to help us redeem 'Christ is Risen from the Dead' from a once a year spiritual 'hey' to God and others, to recover its spiritual depth as a life phrase that can guide us on our way for a healthy and joyful Christian life.

Am I asking too much of these six words 'Christ is Risen from the Dead,' to make so much out of it? Well the famous missionary priest of the Church of Scotland Bishop Newbigin, didn't think so. One day a reporter following this great man's struggles and triumphs in bringing the Gospel to South India asked the Bishop if he was an optimist or a pessimist. 'I am neither an optimist,' he said 'nor a pessimist,' Christ is Risen from the dead! I think the wise Bishop put his finger on something here. Let's start with the two main perspectives, optimism and pessimism which color our lives, work and relationships.

Our optimistic side believes that for all its struggles, life eventually moves toward the good, and our lives are to be spent seeking that good for ourselves and others. Let us never forget that this life and everything in it was created by God, and he called it good. So optimism about our life is from God and of God. Jesus certainly was optimistic, especially like all of us when he started out. His first public words were a jaw dropping statement of optimism about changing the world for the better: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free' (Lk 4:18) Jesus made good headway in healing the sick and lifting up the downtrodden, and he wants us to continue his work in our ministry as a church to those in need.

But alas, even though optimism is to be a pillar of our Christian lives, it cannot stand alone. Anyone who has spent more than a couple of decades in this world, soon finds that there are stark limits to the good we can achieve. The power of evil and sin is real and powerful enough to make anyone a pessimist. Try to make a change for the good in the world, in your family, even in yourself and you will be opposed by the most powerful forces. All things seem at war with themselves between good and evil, even our very selves. That's what St. Paul's said with great honesty and insight, 'I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do (Ro 7:15,19).' We need such pessimism or realism, because without it, our good intentions have no chance at making headway in this broken and sinful world. Jesus was a stark realist in addition to being an optimist. He advises his disciples 'See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.' Jesus does not want us to be surprised or overcome by evil, but to be strong enough to look it in the eye.

So what is our answer then? To live a good life are we to a bit of an optimist and a bit of a pessimist, seemingly like Jesus? Did the ancient Greeks had it right; life it is all about balance, find the golden mean? Well that is not what our dear Bishop told us, nor how Jesus ultimately lived. Our Bishop said 'I am neither an optimist, nor a pessimist,' Christ is Risen from the dead!

And here now, the world's wisdom leaves off and something greater rises in its place. Now we follow Jesus to the end of his worldly ministry, with him through Holy Week, where all talk of balance and virtues are turned on their heads by the cross. On Palm Sunday, Jesus entered the city in triumph, bearing all the optimism and hopes of a persecuted people that finally their strong man had come. He brings their hopes to die on the cross, revealing to them a still greater hope. Christ is Risen from the dead! On Good Friday Jesus endured the most pessimistic side of humankind; betrayal and torture. He brings this pessimism to die on the cross, saying forgive them father they know not what they do. Christ is Risen from the dead! Early this morning on Easter Sunday, Jesus appeared to his disciples. The optimists thought Jesus was back to fix things now. The pessimists didn't think it was possible. Both are right and both are wrong. Christ is Risen from the Dead! Krisdos Hareav ee Merelots! Orhneal eh Harootyoonun Krisdosi!