

- The third lesson is from the Gospel according to Saint Luke, the 24th chapter: But on the first day of the week at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground. But the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? "He is not here but has risen. "Remember how He told you while He was still in Galilee "that the Son of Man must be handed over "to sinners and be crucified "and on the third day, shall rise again." Then they remembered His words and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the 11 and to all the rest. This is the word of the Lord.

- Thanks be to God.

- A recent article in "USA Today" proclaimed death is no longer a downer. Quote, "Death's former finality has been upstaged "by Hollywood's vision of the afterlife "where dearly departed communicate with loved ones, "influence events, even come back for another go around." The article went on to note how we've always loved movies that end happily ever after, but Hollywood has recently extended ever after. "Buffy and the Vampire Slayer" features Buffy and her boyfriend, Angel, who just won't die. Then there was "Meet Joe Black," an interminable movie about the delayed termination of a tycoon. In "What Dreams May Come," Robin Williams is killed in a car crash but is incredibly reunited with the family dog in a kind of German Romantic landscape. "Titanic," a movie that took three hours to sink, ends with Jack and Rose back on the staircase, reunited after all. Gerald Celente in his book "Trends 2000" theorizes that we Baby Boomers are watching our parents die, we're getting AIDS, we're saying to ourselves, "Wait a minute, a generation as wonderful "as ours just can't die, maybe we won't." When Meryl Streep dared to die of cancer in "One True Thing," it was a box office bomb, giving credence to James Swanson's idea in the "Chicago Tribune," that "the grandiose narcissism "and impertinence of the Boomers. "They're determined that, for them, death will be optional." He calls it Faith Lite. Princess Di's Elton John's eternal candle in the wind, she goes on forever. We may be immortal like "Jack Frost," Michael Keaton, in which a deceased father comes back as his son's snowman. Well, just one thing about all of this Hollywood immortality. It has nothing to do with Easter. You heard the story, Jesus really died. He did not appear to die. He was not asleep. He died. He died a death more cruel than can be conceived. He wasn't dead for a moment on the operating table having an out-of-body experience. He was sealed in the grave three days. The disciples did not deceive themselves and think that though He was crucified, He will live on in our memories or any such pagan drivel. You heard how the disciples came to the first Easter in great grief. They came to Jesus' tomb with no cheap, false consolation, "His message will never die," or "If we endow a chair at the university, "everyone will remember Him." When they saw the empty tomb, they didn't think, "Jesus has been raised from the dead." They thought, "Somebody has stolen His body." And yet, within just a few days, His disciples came to understand that what had happened to Jesus was according to the scriptures. According to the scriptures, Israel believed that there would be a day when God was going to solve the problem of Israel's suffering. And

while God was at it, God would solve the problem of evil, injustice, death in the whole world. The scriptures promised a day of divine victory, and on Easter, Jesus' disciples discovered that day in the resurrection of Jesus. The cross, which they thought would be the end of their relationship with Jesus, was its beginning. Easter was God's answer to the deep question, what is to be done about the world? In "The Green Mile," when something good, something spiritual is about to happen, this glitter started falling from the sky and the camera got out of focus. Everything turned blue and fuzzy. That's the way Hollywood does God. Well, note that the Gospels go to great lengths to demonstrate that what happened to Jesus on Easter, while strange, happened here, it happened now. They're details, it was still dark, there was this linen cloth is rolled up, Mary weeps. These are mundane details from everyday life. This is where we live, where people weep. And people get confused about life, and things end in tragedy, and it doesn't always work out in the end. These are details from daily death. It is resurrection of the body, not immortality of the soul. In a way, it's not even life after death. There is life after death, and God's people can expect it. But it will not be Hollywood's version. Christians don't believe in the immortality of some disembodied soul. We believe, as we will say in the creed, we believe in the resurrection of the body. Not resuscitation of the body, a corpse brought back to life. Not immortality of the soul in which some divine spark just goes on and on forever. That only happens in Hollywood. We believe dead Jesus was raised by a loving God whose purposes for the world will not be defeated by death, here, now. The disciples found the grave empty. Jesus' dead body gone. When the risen Christ appeared to Mary, He didn't appear as some disembodied ghost, a spirit, but His body. Sure, it was a changed body. She didn't recognize Him at first, but it was His body. Later, the risen Christ would appear and be touched by His disciples in His resurrected body. So we Christians really do believe that, as sometimes people say, when you're dead, you're dead. Death really is death. It is cause for the some of the greatest grief we will ever know. But we also believe that in the resurrection, God decisively acts, defeats death, makes a way when we thought there was no way. And this is much better than Hollywood. The resurrection of the body, Jesus' or yours, means that this world does matter now. We may not know exactly how our resurrected bodies will look. As Paul says, "It does not yet appear what we shall be." But we believe that just as Jesus' body was raised by the love of God shall we be brought along with Him. And this means that the matter of this world matters. We're not bound for some disembodied, fuzzy never-never land. God has in the resurrection made a decisive bridgehead against the onslaught of death, here, now. You will note in the scripture, and in the hymn that is to come, there are these battle images. This thing is very political. That's why we pray every Sunday, Thy kingdom come on Earth as it is in heaven. Resurrection, it's about God getting, at last, what God wants, here, now, on Earth, in the body, that which God will one day have completely in heaven, forever. It's not just that there's some cushy afterlife in store for those of us who make the grade some day. If that were the case, then Christianity could be justly accused of being some kind of pie in the sky, by and by, rather than Thy kingdom come on Earth as it is in heaven sorta religion. If Easter is just Jesus exiting the tomb to some ethereal, spiritual bliss, leaving the body in the tomb to rot, well, where's the hope? Go on and make movies that do death as only apparent, spirits taking off for pastel skies. But resurrection is more than some vague spiritual inclination. It's about Thy kingdom come on Earth as it is in heaven, a new heaven, a new Earth, first hinted at in the resurrection of Jesus, one day come in fullness when God does Easter for the whole creation. God faced evil and death on Good Friday, and on Easter, God triumphed. And now God intends to do for the whole world, through us Easter people, what was done for Jesus on Easter. I've noted that in Hollywood, when people die, things tend to get kind of fuzzy and vaporous, pink. You will note, here in church, we do Easter with things of this world, flowers and

parades and people, and above all, with music. Yes, music, it's like a world having gotten out of tune, marching to the dirge-like beat of death, finally gets back its intended song, as if the whole creation once faded for futility now soars, healed, reclaimed by a God who is powerful enough not to leave us in death. Karl Marx claimed that Christianity lulled people into political complacency. Christianity's just got heaven on its mind. Something that removes you from experience of struggles, here and now. John Brown's body lies moldering in the grave, but God, oh, God goes marching on and, no. The first witnesses to Easter knew something happened. Their world had been entered, encountered, wrought, reformed. Easter wasn't God saying, "Now, let me take you out of this deadly, tearful world." Easter was God saying, "Now, let me show you what I am doing to your world, here, now." Take away the resurrection of the body, Marx is right, Christianity is some kind of vague wish fulfillment, some sort of inner feeling of our own creation. But you take the resurrection of the body seriously, or maybe to the point of disservice, joyously. And responsibility is laid upon you 'cause if you dare to sing "Alleluia, Christ is Risen," you're saying that Jesus Christ really is in charge. He is Lord, and all other little lord-ettes of this world are not. When we sing the strife is o're, the battle is won, it's an invitation for us to join in the mopping up action wherever evil still dares to challenge the reign of the One who now sits on the throne. The Jesus seminar of a few years ago said that at Easter, what happened was the disciples of Jesus had this experience. They sat around and said, "You know, it's just like "He almost was still with us, we've had an experience." No, that just won't lift the luggage. The resurrection was not some inner spiritual experience. It was God's outer act in Jesus, bodily, physical, a rising of the sun that puts all other suns to shame. Today, that great master of defeat, death, has been defeated. Saint Paul says that in the resurrection, every ruler, every pompous politician, every presumptive power is now in big trouble. "For He must reign until He has put "all of His enemies under His feet, "and the last enemy to be destroyed is death." This day, a great battle has been fought and won, and the kingdoms of this world shall be the kingdoms of our Christ, and He shall rule forever and ever, amen. (soft trumpet music)