

“Be Foolish and Not Frightened ... and the Church of Hopeless Causes!”

By Steve Ramer, Pastor

Easter

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Scripture

1 Corinthians 1:18-27

Matthew 28:1-10

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles... 25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. 26 Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong..."

Matthew 28:1 After the sabbath day, at first light on the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala and the other Mary came to inspect the tomb. 2 And suddenly there was a strong earthquake. You see, a messenger of the Lord had come down from the sky, arrived at the tomb, rolled back the stone and was sitting on it. 3 The messenger gave off a dazzling light and wore clothes as white as snow. 4 Now those who kept watch were paralyzed with fear and looked like corpses. 5 In response the messenger said to the women, "Don't be frightened! I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here! You see, he was raised, just as he said. Come, look at the spot where he was laying. And run, tell his disciples that he has been raised from the dead... 8 And they hurried away from the tomb, full of apprehension and an overpowering joy and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Hello!" They came up and took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid..."

Sermon

For Christians Easter is our defining event.

Simply put, without Easter we aren't Christians!

Theologically speaking, the once alive, breathing and crucified Jesus
was laid into a freshly cut tomb and sealed with a large stone.

But in the first light of dawn, on the first day of that week,
it was Christ, who overcame death, exploding from that tomb,
and who now dwell among us in spirit.

But of course, as Jesus always taught it must be more than just theology.
It is actually far more simply and simultaneously profound.

And since the term Christian literally means, "little Christs,"
there must be more to this label than only saying "I believe"
this story to be true in every detail as we read it.

In our desire to become, "little Christs," we must imitate "the" Christ
and thus be willing to follow literally in the very steps of Jesus.

And if the lyrics are true, "And they'll know we are Christians by our love!"
Then love must be the ultimate standard of our behavior
in determining the fullness of what is our true identity.

Paul gives us another indication of what he thinks
makes one a true believer or follower of the Christian message.

How do those around us treat us?
Do they consider us to be fools to believe
and act as if this story of Jesus is true?

But again, he's really only quoting Jesus, who thought we should be happy,
"when people revile you and persecute you
and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely."

I really like the "yourdictionary.com" definition of "revile,"

To revile is to criticize in an abusive or hostile way, or to spread negative information about. When you verbally attack someone and call them names and say mean things, this is an example of a time when you revile.

But we who follow Jesus audaciously live in the power of resurrection
and shouldn't be too concerned with the names we are called.

The power of Easter not only has meaning and power because
on some early Sunday morning, a long, long, time ago,
somewhere in an obscure part of the world called Palestine,
among a poor and oppressed people that were suffering
under the heel of a brutal military occupation,
that a certain tomb was found empty.

But the power of Easter is due to the ongoing,
continually unfolding story of the power of God's redeemed people
who are living resurrected lives!

As little Christs we too must, like him, be willing to serve
and to sacrifice, to even risk our lives and reputations!

That should be the proof of our faith. To quote an early Anabaptist,
"One cannot truly know Christ unless one follows him in life!"

In Matthew we read that the messenger in white tells the women,
in a rather loose Ramer paraphrase:

*"No need to be frightened. I know what you're looking for, but there is no corpse here.
Jesus is very much alive! Or did you forget that he told you that it would actually turn out
this way?"*

Indeed, in the stress of an overwhelming crisis we too can easily forget.
But a firm and simply reminder can change the moment.

By recalling what, and in whom their faith is based upon,
the women run from the empty tomb,
"full of apprehension and an overpowering joy!"

**Fear was not eliminated on the cross, but how we encounter our fears
can now be radically transformed because of resurrection.**

Matthew tells us that those guarding the tomb (likely men?)
became like corpses due to their paralyzing fear.

Meanwhile the women, who as far as we know, experienced
the same angel and earthquake, kept enough wits about them
to actually listen and to put the angel's requests into action.

They were more than alive as they hurriedly left the scene,
“full of apprehension and an overpowering joy!”

And, once again, like so often in scripture, we encounter a dialectic,
or two seemingly opposing views or two opposing feelings
existing at the same time.

If Jesus is alive, how scary is that?
All my previous assumption must now be questioned.

Assumptions regarding the nature of power, fear, joy, hope,
and knowledge must be once again scrutinized!

But this doesn't work too well in a society
That is so consumed with being authoritative
And erasing doubt.

In the words we heard from Paul,
living in the reality of resurrection will not always be easy.

It will not always be easy but it is always real!
It is a more than a mere belief, that life can come from death,
or that hope can rise from despair,
or that joy can result from suffering.

It is true because we have experienced this as reality, time and time again.
But it is also a reality that many in our world refuse to accept.
It is a stumbling block for some and mere foolishness for many!

And so dearly beloved, we gather together (virtually for now)
because Easter can make us into a real church!

It's really a fool's errand and a place of last resort, since we are helpless
and truly hopeless to live out the resurrection on our own!
Maybe we should call it "The Church of Hopeless Causes"?!

It's the place where we manage at times to simply stumble into;
beaten up, tired, and broken from another week spent in a world
that seems Hell bent on beating all the good and all the hope out of us!

After all, hope-filled people who burn with resurrected passions
are a bit more difficult to keep under control,

They don't seem to feel the need to horde consumer goods
and they are often less likely be manipulated by fear than many others.

Resurrected peoples march to the beat of a different drummer,
a drummer who coincidentally beats out the cadence of true life!

And if God can raise Jesus from the dead,
then what exactly can constitute a hopeless cause?

And if God can raise the dead, how much more hopeful should we be,
those of us who are supposedly still alive, that we too can be transformed?

As I end this morning allow me to repeat a story
that I shared with you a couple summers back.
A when I say a couple summers back, I mean like 10 years ago!

I had just returned from leading a CPT delegation in Palestine,
you know foolishly trying to do something, if only minor,
to build a lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis -
a seemingly hopeless venture even in the best of times!

Our delegation took a break from the normal routine,
to take advantage of our location and get in some biblical sightseeing.

Since we were in Bethlehem, of course that meant a visit to the Church
of the Nativity, built upon the spot where Jesus was supposedly born.

Like a lot of really old churches in that part of the world,
there are tombs and mausoleums underneath this church,
housing the remains of various martyrs and saints from ages past.

And in the nooks and crannies you can also find statues, as well as graffiti.
Not ordinary graffiti,
This graffiti has been scratched into the limestone walls for centuries.

Most historians believe that early Christians likely met
in underground crypts such as these to worship.

In one stairway that is not used anymore
and thus, a bit out of sight and off the beaten track,
I found some far more recent graffiti.

Some of it was, sadly, just like what you find everywhere;
"so and so was here," or "so and so loves so and so."

Some were quite offensive calling both Jews and Palestinians horrible names!
But in big, bold and black capital letters that could not be missed
were two simple words, **“LOVE WINS!”**

Within a few steps from the place where Jesus may have been born,
in a land so torn by fear, hatred and killing,

I was able to find what is both the simplest and the most profound
encapsulation of what the resurrection truly means!

LOVE does WIN!

That IS Easter!

**And if we truly believe that love wins, then we must live our lives
as if we truly believe it!
Our World needs it!**

And when we do live this out as a community of foolish followers of Jesus,
then we will also come to the rather unspectacular realization
that there are really no hopeless causes or hopeless people!

And, my sisters and brothers, if “Love Wins!”
then we can be filled with joy, peace, courage and hope.
What on earth can ever really paralyze us with fear?

Rather, we too can be sent scurrying away from our paralyzing fears,
out of the land of dead and dry bones,
running back into our daily lives,
“full of apprehension and an overpowering joy!”

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