

**PILGRIM CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
The Rev. John Tamilio III, Senior Pastor  
Easter Sunday, 12 April 2009**

**Sermon Title: "The Resurrection...Now"  
Gospel Lesson: Mark 16:1-8**

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**Three people die and arrive at the Pearly Gates: one is a Red Sox fan, one is a Cleveland Indians fan, and the other is a New York Yankees fan. Saint Peter tells them that they can enter Heaven if they can answer one *simple* question.**

**Saint Peter asks the Red Sox fan the question first: "What is Easter?" The Sox fan says, "Oh, that's easy. It's the national holiday in November when everybody gets together, eats turkey, and is thankful for all the blessings in their lives." "Wrong!" Saint Peter replies, and proceeds to ask the Indians' fan the same question: "What is Easter?" The Indians' fan replies, "Leave it to a Red Sox fan to screw-up something so easy! Easter is the holiday in December when we put up a nice tree, exchange presents, and celebrate the birth of Jesus." Saint Peter looks at the Tribe fan in disgust, shakes his head, looks at the Yankees fan and pleads, "Please, can *you* tell me, what Easter is all about?"**

**The New Yorker smiles and looks Saint Peter right in the eye. "Yes, I can. Easter is the Christian holiday that coincides with the Jewish celebration of Passover. Jesus and his disciples were eating the Last Supper on what we now call Maundy Thursday. Jesus was betrayed by one of his disciples (Judas Iscariot) and was turned over to the Roman guards. The Romans Empire crucified Jesus as a traitor of the state. He died and was buried in a nearby cave, which was sealed off by a large boulder. On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead."**

**Saint Peter smiled broadly with delight. "That is correct!" But the Yankees fan continued, "Yes, every year Christians commemorate this central celebration of their faith. The stone is rolled aside, Jesus exits the tomb — and if he sees his shadow..."**

**Yes, we are often confused about Easter, are we not? Nominal and even committed Christians often think it is about hunting for brightly-colored hard-boiled eggs, eating chocolate covered hollow rabbits, and having a ham dinner with their families. Beyond that, in contemporary theology and church-circles, people debate the accuracy of the resurrection in their quest to fully discern the historical Jesus. Did**

Jesus actually rise from the dead? There are many answers to that question, as I discussed in *The Messenger* this month.

- There are some who feel that the Resurrection is a myth. There is no historical accuracy to it at all. People do not rise from the dead today, so neither did Jesus: it is just that simple.
- There are others who feel that the Resurrection is something that occurred in the collective consciousness of the Disciples, but not in the pages of history. In other words, the continuation of Jesus' ministry by the Disciples is (essentially) the living embodiment of Jesus' spirit that death could not destroy.
- There are others who believe that the Resurrection occurred exactly as it is detailed in the Gospel, or at least pretty close to those accounts.
- Still, there are those who do not know what to believe.

Of course there are other explanations as well, but these are the biggies. I think if you were to poll the members and friends of Pilgrim, you would find that we have folks that fall into all of these categories, and a sundry of other ones, too!

Marcus Borg has a quote for which he is well-known: "I believe that everything in The Bible is true — and some of it actually happened." The idea being that the stories in Scripture are laden with truth, whether or not they are historically accurate. There are some stories in The Bible that I think are historically factual, and there are others that I believe are poetic and mythic. Regardless, the poetic and mythic tales still have a great deal of "truth" to teach us about God and humanity, even if they never occurred in actual history. In short, there is a difference between truth and fact. One can say that all facts are true...and all truths are true, whether or not those truths are factual.

This is how I want us to think about the Resurrection on this Easter Sunday. Regardless of your personal understanding of this event — whether you believe it actually happened or not — I want you to ask yourself *What does the Resurrection mean? and How is this event actualized in our lives today?*

Atonement theology notwithstanding, most theologians believe that through the Resurrection, Jesus defeated the powers of sin and death. Daniel Migliore sums-up this view quite well in his book, *Faith Seeking Understanding*. Migliore claims that, "Under the veil of his humanity, Christ battles...all the principalities and powers that hold human beings captive. By his cross and resurrection, Christ decisively defeats

these powers and thus frees their captives.”<sup>1</sup> Now aside from what that means in an “other-worldly sense,” what does it mean now? **Let’s** pause for a moment and talk about the practical as opposed to the metaphysical.

The reality of our existence on this sojourn is that we are all broken. We do horrible things to one another and to ourselves. I have quoted the poet Seamus Heaney before, who wrote, “Human beings suffer / they torture one another / they get hurt and get hard.”<sup>2</sup> But I believe that the promise of the Resurrection is that the grace of God breaks into our lives in spite of ourselves — in spite of what we may (and may not) do. *We may do horrible things, but that does not mean we are horrible people.* In God’s eyes, we are worthy. Through the power of God’s love, we can rise again from the mire in which we find ourselves.

I am not much of a blogger. Facebook caters to my internet-addiction enough, thank you very much; I have no desire to share my daily thoughts (or read the commentary of others) in cyber-space. My wife recently informed me of a new blog-spot called “Beauty Tips for Ministers.” Now, I do not know if she was trying to tell me something, but this just confirmed (for me) how *little time* I have for blogging.

Recently, however, Sue introduced me to a piece by a young blogger named Prodigal Jon entitled “Stuff Christians Like.” In one entry he discusses the pain he felt when his five year old daughter expressed her first sense of embarrassment and shame — being conscious of what others think and believing that she falls short of their expectations. Jon relates this to Genesis 3:11. Adam and Eve have just eaten the forbidden fruit and are hiding from God. God finds them and asks, “Who told you that you were naked?” Prodigal Jon claims, “this is one of the saddest and most profoundly beautiful verses in the entire Bible.” He claims that “There is hurt in God’s voice as [God] asks this question, but there is also a deep sadness...”<sup>3</sup> It is as if God is asking them:

- Who told you that you were not enough?
- Who told you that I didn’t love you?
- Who told you that there was something outside of me you needed?

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 152.

<sup>2</sup> Seamus Heaney, excerpt from “The Cure at Troy.”

<sup>3</sup> Prodigal Jon, *Stuff Christians Like*, #512: “Thinking You’re Naked” (Wednesday, April 1, 2009). Taken on-line from <http://stuffchristianslike.blogspot.com/2009/04/512-thinking-youre-naked.html>.

- Who told you that you were ugly?
- Who told you that your dream was foolish?
- Who told you that you would never have a child?
- Who told you that you would never be a father?
- Who told you that you weren't a good mother?
- Who told you that without a job you aren't worth anything?
- Who told you that you'll never know love again?
- Who told you that this was all there is?
- Who told you that you were naked?

Have you been told these things? I hate to assume, but, if I may, then I assume that we have all heard these or similar things before — either from others or from ourselves. (Maybe we have made other people feel this way by saying such things ourselves.) At some point in our lives, we discover *shame*. Maybe that is what The Fall is actually about — it is not an Original Sin that we inherit by virtue of our birth, but a sin we are all bound to repeat by virtue of our humanity: *we discover the belief that we are not good enough*. In *The Exorcist* (of all books), author William Peter Blatty describes it this way: “And there lies the heart of it, perhaps: unworthiness. For I think belief in God is not a matter of reason at all; I think it finally is a matter of love; of accepting the possibility that God could love us...”<sup>4</sup>

Through the Resurrection, God shows us that, indeed, we are loved. Through the Resurrection, God enables us to rise from our own graves of inadequacy, remorse, guilt, and shame and to see ourselves the way God sees us: beautiful...created in the image of God...loved in spite of ourselves...forgiven, rather than judged...accepted, rather than cast aside.

As Prodigal Jon concludes, “in response to what you are hearing from everyone else, God is still asking the question, ‘Who told you that you were naked?’ And [God is] still asking us that question because we are not” naked.

- In Christ we are not worthless.
- In Christ we are not hopeless.
- In Christ we are not dumb or ugly or forgotten.

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<sup>4</sup> William Peter Blatty, *The Exorcist* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1994), 352.

- **In Christ we are not naked.**

**Rise today, my friends. Rise from your graves. Rise from your broken relationships, your lost jobs, your possible foreclosures, and your illnesses, because none of those things define who you are. None of those things have anything to do with your worth as an individual...and neither do the wrongs you have done and the things you have left undone. You are not defined by your brokenness. Your value comes from God who is love and promises, through the Resurrection, to offer you new life. That is what we find at the empty tomb: no, we do not just find it empty; we find it full – full of infinite possibilities that Jesus offers to us and to all of creation. Alleluia and Amen.**