

Sermon 040118 Easter  
Scripture Luke 24: 1-12, Galatians 5: 16-26  
Sermon Title- Easter Courage

I wish you could all have my perspective at this moment. You make a beautiful picture. The colors, the bonnets, the faithful and the mildly curious are all here in beaming splendor. This is delightful.

I know there are folks here who are not normally in church on Sunday mornings. These folks are called by a great preacher who passed away in 2011, Peter Gomes, as Easter Christians. He spoke of when he was a boy that his Baptist pastor used the term negatively. He would say things like Merry Christmas and Happy Easter. That's the sum of people's religious life. Gomes and I view the term Easter Christians very positively and we'll get into that in a minute.

But let me say to one and all that if you are going to come to church one day of the year, this is the day to do it, and if you are going to go to one church... this is the church. Welcome, we are happy to have you here.

We just heard the fantastic Easter story of the women finding the tomb empty. The resurrection story of Jesus is both glorious and hard, almost impossible to fathom. It is for us and it was for those people who were in the story. When you think about it, we know more about Easter than they did. People always expect bad

news, never good news. It was true of those first folks that found the tomb empty. They found themselves in a confusing and chaotic state- complete with the ever scary, confusing, and annoying angels. They thought the empty tomb meant something really bad before accepting what happened and realizing that it was the best news ever.

We don't have their confusion. We don't experience the chaos, but we also have a hard time accepting that it actually happened. No doubt my fellow clergy all across the fruited plain are turning themselves into pretzels trying to prove to their listeners the facts of the resurrection. I won't do that. No preacher, investigator, lawyer, or scientist could build a foolproof case that it actually happened the way it says in Scripture. There is proof of the resurrection but it is not in the facts of the case, as we'll see.

It took great courage for those first disciples, the first Easter Christians, a) to accept the truth of the resurrection and b) to bring the news to the world. The resurrection changed that ragtag group of followers of a murdered prophet into disciples of the living God. They had the courage to believe the unbelievable. They were ordinary people who had the courage to turn away from the darkness and toward the light. That morning they were frightened people. They became brave. They were brave enough to tell a

story that people would likely not believe but to tell it because it was the truth. When the three women in Luke's tale tell the apostles, all of them think it's an idle tale and they didn't believe them. The first Easter Christians were nobodies who became somebodies. They had the courage to share their amazing story and they redefined the world. The resurrected Christ did not change the world; he changed a few people who went on to change others and eventually the world.

Even though his letters appear after the gospels in the New Testament, St. Paul was the earliest New Testament writer. He wrote of how Jesus Christ changes people. He wrote of the Fruits of the Spirit that Christ followers are called to. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are the spirit by which Christ believers are to live.

Christ followers, Paul instructs, are called away from what he calls, 'works of the flesh,' fornication, impurity, enmities, drunkenness, carousing and the like. These 'works of the flesh' remind me of college life in the 1970's. It reads like the Animal House checklist.

So those first Easter Christians had not only been changed by the story of the resurrection, they had been changed by the message of Jesus Christ on how to live life. That is what the people that those first Easter Christians had contact with responded

to. They saw people that lived, lovingly, joyfully, faithfully, and gently. They came to realize that that is what faithful people are called to. They believed the resurrection story not because it was believable, but because it was told by Christ believers who had become the kind of people that God wanted them to be.

The real consequence of the resurrection is in how Christ followers live their lives, lovingly, joyfully, and faithfully. What matters most about the resurrection is not about having life after death. It is about having life before death; life lived in the Spirit. So how about us?

There is the worldly wisdom outside these doors that life is not to be lived lovingly, peacefully, with gentleness and patience. On the contrary, the worldly wisdom says that it's a dog eat dog world out there, might makes right, winning is everything, get the other guy before he gets you, good guys finish last. Nobody likes a loser. The world calls us away from kindness and gentleness and to aggressiveness and competitiveness.

That is why it takes courage to be an Easter Christian. It took courage for the first followers and it takes courage for us. Whether you are in church regularly or not, you know the right way to live. You know that the world is a better place when people are kind, loving, and compassionate. It takes courage to live that way in an often-ugly world.

You see; the resurrection is not so much about what happened to Jesus 2000 years ago, it is about what is happening now with you and me. It is about how we live our lives when we walk out these doors.

It takes courage not to follow the worldly wisdom. We have a chance to face down negativity with goodness. The proof of the resurrection is not in the facts of the story; it is in how you and I conduct our lives. It is in living the ways of the Lord 20 centuries later... not in just speaking about Jesus Christ, but following in His footsteps.

Easter Christians do not have to be great and good. We do not have to be Mother Theresa or Nelson Mandela. Easter Christians are regular people doing small acts of goodness daily. Easter Christians are empowered to make a difference... if we have the courage. Those early Christians had the courage and so can we. We do not have to live life heroically but honestly and lovingly.

Jesus, according to Paul, calls us to live by the Spirit and to be guided by the Spirit. Paul writes, "Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another." Instead let us live by the Spirit with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

This is the liberating gospel, the good news. Life is more

than competition. A life worth living is a life of loving. It takes moral courage to live lovingly and peacefully in a world full of hate and conflict. It takes courage to turn from the darkness and into the light. Be strong; be brave. You can do it. A better life is available to you in Christ. Love is the answer. Today is the day for each and every one of us to have the courage to become an Easter Christian... right here, right now. AMEN