

Sermon 041617 Easter  
Scripture John 20: 1-18  
Sermon Title Jesus Loves Me!

*Jesus loves me, this I know,  
For the Bible tells me so;  
Little ones to him belong,  
They are weak, but he is strong.*

*Yes, Jesus loves me-  
Yes, Jesus loves me-  
Yes-Jesus loves me-  
The Bible tells me so.*

May I embarrass you a little by asking by a show of hands just how many of you sang this song in your youth? Aha! Just as I thought! I would argue that this is probably the most famous Christian song ever. It is more famous than *Holy, Holy, Holy or How Great Thou Art*. *Amazing Grace* might be close, but this hymn impacts Christians when they are very young. Hence, it is at the top of the Christian hit parade.

Why? Well, it's simple, which is helpful. It's is singable, which always helps in a song. It holds a fundamental truth with which we can identify. It is not abstract, not philosophical, not doctrinal, and not theological. It is existential, which is to say it is about you and it is about me.

For better or for worse, the only way we come to understand the gospel is when we come to understand it in terms of ourselves. It

doesn't matter what the church fathers thought or believed. It doesn't matter what Jesus' disciples thought or heard. It doesn't matter what clergy say or think. What ultimately matters is only how it rings true in our experience.

I don't pretend to know much about children, but it's easy to see how *Jesus loves me* impacts children directly. I would imagine that children have little idea what is happening when they sing, "It came upon a midnight's clear" or "Hark! The herald angels sing." But *Jesus loves me* hits the bullseye with young and old alike. After all, we are all fundamentally children at heart. We carry with us through life what we learned as children. Jesus loves you just as he did when you were a child.

It is orthodox, it is evangelical, it is Protestant, it is Catholic, it is Reform. Jesus loves me. It is all the likes of us may ever know about our religion. I suspect we already know that which is why we are here.

Ours is a world that is filled with doubt and uncertainty. It is a world where things do not always or often turn out as expected. It is a world rife with unintended consequences. It is important for us to have even one thing upon which we can rely. We need one truth that does not change from time to time or circumstance to circumstance.

We know that the next news can be devastating, the next phone call a disaster. Sometimes we hang on barely by the fingernails; life

lived on a thin edge. There is one conviction, however, that puts all else in perspective. We can deal with anything and everything if this one thing is so, and that one thing is Jesus loves us.

If Jesus loves me- if there is one being in the celestial realm of beings who actually loves me, and loves me as I am, who knows me by name, and that is God on earth then what can the world do to me? What can anyone do to me?

So what if I don't get the job. So what if I don't get the promotion. So what if those undeserving move ahead faster and further than me. So what. Somebody up there likes me, and that somebody is Jesus, and he knows my name.

Some of you I do not know by name. That is not important. Some of you don't know my name. That is more important but still not really important. None of that matters. As you sit here in church with your bundles of complications, egos, and mistakes and the terrible little secrets that you bear, he knows who you are, he knows you by name, and he loves you; he still loves you no matter what. Somebody needs to tell you that and that somebody is me, now, today!

We heard the wonderful passage from John's Gospel about Mary weeping by the tomb. She expected the worst (don't we all) when suddenly the resurrected Christ appeared to her. He didn't say, 'dearly beloved' or 'sister.' He called her "Mary." He knows all about her. He

knows her from beginning to end. He knows her state of mind. He knows her state of being, and he loves her. So it is with you and with me. This is the good news of the gospel and there is no better day to proclaim it than Easter day.

I have been asked on more than one occasion if I dread writing and delivering Easter sermons. This is because so many preachers turn into lawyers at Easter trying to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt the facts of the resurrection story.

My answer is always simple, and usually surprises people. The Easter sermon, my dearly beloved friends, with no disrespect, is the simplest and easiest sermon of them all. For fifty-one Sundays a year, more or less, I have to slog through trenches of biblical literacy, theological orthodoxy, evangelical sincerity, and all that it means to live as faithful Christians.

Easter, however, is another story. You have come to hear what you already know. All I have to do is tell you that Jesus loves you and gave his life for you. He then overcame death so that you-we-may have life and have it more abundantly. That is not just an easy task but it is a joy. It is a glory. Thousands, millions like you have come to places like this to be reassured that while you may have left God, God has not left you.

It might be easy to forget that God has made you in God's own image. God knows what God is doing. God does not make junk, or mistakes. You may feel lost and abandoned in a world that doesn't love you. But God loves you. God loves you so much God gave God's only begotten Son for you. By believing in that truth, your life can be turned around.

So, my heart goes out to the ministers that turn into lawyers this morning trying to show proof of the resurrection through the evidence that is presented in the gospels. The proof of the resurrection is you-us. We, who made the effort to come here this day are the Easter evidence.

We, who accept the reality of Jesus' love for us is all the evidence we need. This is all we need to know to live life more abundantly.

Let us pray:

*Because he lives, I can face tomorrow;*

*Because he lives, all fear is gone,*

*Because I know he holds the future,*

*And life is worth living*

*Just because he lives.*

Thanks be to God. AMEN