

Pastor Bill Sass – Sermon for Sunday, July 26, 2020

“YES!”

Easter Day– Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 28:1-10

A Dr. tells about a wedding video he saw. The video was shot from the back of the church, looking up the aisle, toward the bride and groom. Because of the camera angle, you could see several members of the congregation. Suddenly, during the vows, a man jumped up and yelled, “Yes, Yes, Yes!” as he pumped his fist. Then he froze, and slid down into his seat—and sheepishly took off his headphones. It turned out he had been listening to the Auburn & Alabama football game, and his favorite team had just scored.

Easter is a day for Christians to pump their fists in the air and say, “Yes, Yes, Yes.” Yes is what Easter is about. God’s “yes” to humanity, as God grants us the gift of immortality. God’s “yes” to Jesus and all Jesus taught us about the meaning of life. God’s “yes” to the victory of life over death, love over hate, faith over fear, hope over despair. Everything about Easter says, “Yes, Yes, Yes.”

Recently I read a hilarious story about a six-year old boy named David who was taking a walk with his grandmother. They decided to detour through the local graveyard. Stopping to read the tombstones, Grandma explained the first date on the tombstones was when the person was born and the second date was when the person died.

“Why do some tombstones only have one date?” David asked. “Because those people haven’t died yet,” his grandmother explained.

David was obviously stunned by his grandmother’s explanation because, that night, he couldn’t stop talking about the excursion. “Mom,” he said with wide eyes, “some of the people buried in the cemetery aren’t even dead yet!”

Leave it to a six-year-old to put a different twist on things. But Easter puts the grandest twist of all. Easter says people buried in Christ are not dead at all. They’ve simply exchanged a worn-out or hopelessly-damaged physical body for a new perfect, spiritual body that will last for all eternity. What can we say to this, but “Yes!”?

You know the basic story. The details vary according to the Gospel you are reading. These are eyewitness testimonies early Sunday morning after Jesus’ crucifixion. Some women went to the tomb where His body lay, and found the large stone guarding the tomb rolled away. His body was gone. Later the risen Christ appeared to his followers on many occasions, beginning with Mary Magdalene on that first Easter Sunday. The Apostle Peter in a sermon recorded in the book of Acts, described the whole episode like this:

“We are witnesses of everything He did. They killed Him by hanging Him on a tree, but God raised Him from the dead on the third day...He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead.

He commanded us to preach and testify that He is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living, and the dead. All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.” (Acts 10:39-43, NIV) Let’s look for a few moments at Peter’s words.

First of all, Easter is an act of God. God raised Jesus from the dead, says the Apostle Peter. Easter is an act of God. We benefit from Easter, but we did nothing to bring it about.

In fact, Easter is the ultimate act of God. God raised Jesus from the dead. No human being on his own can achieve immortality alone. Many people have tried. But it cannot be done.

No one can work the way to immortality, no one can will it, or even merit it. Only one way does a person who is truly dead come back to life, by an act of God. A Pastor compares our human struggle to pushing against a huge stone like the one that blocked the entrance to Christ’s tomb. We have all been pushing against something for a long time. And we push hard. He said,

“Maybe we’ve been pushing against a supervisor hard to satisfy, or the threat of having our job downsized. Or maybe we’re pushing against a marriage that seems destined for the ditch. Or maybe pushing against chronic pain, depression, loneliness and grief, or against some other obstacle between us, and our dreams. We’ve all been pushing against the anxiety that terrorists will strike again, or a new virus.

We work so hard to save our lives. We push and push, and in the end, it seems all that waits on the other side is death. But then we come on Easter Sunday morning, and realize the stone we have been pushing against has been rolled away--God has given us his divine “Yes!” and suddenly we have a new picture of our lives.

That supervisor will not get the best of us, the loss of a job will not destroy us, neither will the loss of a marriage, the loss of a dream or even failing health. These tragedies that come to us all do not have power to destroy us because, in Easter, God says there is nothing in this world, or the next, that will forever defeat one of God’s children. Easter is an act of God.”

Easter is also an act of grace. God accepts us as we are, not because of anything we’ve done, but because of what Christ has done. In his sermon earlier, Peter links Christ’s death and resurrection to the forgiveness of sins. “...God appointed (Jesus) as judge of the living and the dead,” Peter declares. “All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.”

We did not deserve to be delivered from the power of the grave. We are sinners. We are imperfect and flawed, but still God loves and invites us into His eternal house.

In April 1995, Edye Smith lost her two small sons, Chase and Colton, in the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. Two men with deep hatred for the American government set off a truck bomb that destroyed the front half of the federal building, including a day care center, and killed 169 people. Edye and her mother, Cathy Wilburn, were devastated by the loss of Chase and Colton. But hatred and suffering did not have the last word in this family's story.

At the trial, Cathy Wilburn, grandmother of the murdered toddlers noticed that (Terry Nichols') mother and sister were alone in the courtroom, bearing the brunt of hatred from the victims, and the public.

And, as a Christian, Cathy Wilburn knew what her responsibility was. So, Cathy befriended (Terry Nichols') mother and sister. In fact, she opened her home to them, offering hospitality to two women she could easily have hated.

Such love, such forgiveness is possible in this world. It is possible because of what God has done in Christ. Easter says that Christ has forgiven our sins—not because we deserve it, but simply out of His great love for us.

And Easter is a summons to grateful living. We have God's favor. God has rolled away the stones of fear and death. Now it is our turn to live as Easter people, to let our lives say, "Yes!" to the people we meet each day. A doctor points out the disciples seemed aimless, and confused, after Jesus' resurrection. Some of them even returned to their old job of commercial fishing. What was their problem? They were viewing the resurrection as the end of the story. Jesus arose from the dead and now what? They didn't immediately understand that Jesus' resurrection was really the beginning—the beginning of new victorious life in Christ.

The disciples were in a fog following the crucifixion of Jesus, but His resurrection and appearances to them caused the mist to rise and reveal the light of a beautiful new day. What they "began in the fog" they continued in the sunlight. And so it is for anyone who hears, and believes, the message of Easter.

AMEN

"S.D.G."