

“Witnessing the Resurrection!” (topical sermon)

For Your Life in Christ the Week of the Resurrection of our Lord,
Sunday, April 24th, 2011
Saint Paul’s Lutheran Church of Irvine, CA (LCMS)
Rev. Dr. Al Espinosa

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Introduction: Witnessing the Resurrection in Two Respects:

- A. Sharing the powerful testimony of the first-century witness.
- B. Sharing the powerful testimony of 21st century disciples who live in the resurrected Christ.

Part I: We Need This Good News of the Resurrection!

- A. Montgomery: “for it [Christ’s resurrection and deity] meets man’s most basic existential need to transcend the meaninglessness of finite existence.” (*Faith Founded on Fact*, 61)
 - 1. Suicide note of Cartoonist Ralph Barton: “I have had few difficulties, many friends, great success; I have gone from wife to wife, and from house to house, visited great countries of the world, but I am fed up with inventing devices to fill up 24 hours of the day.” (McDowell, *The Resurrection Factor*, 1)
 - 2. What if this is all there is? No one knows this better than God does, so in mercy He addresses our greatest need!
- B. We also need to be bold about what makes the Christian faith so unique: we make no bones (no pun intended) about what makes the faith true and legitimate:

1st Corinthians 15:17: “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”

- 1. The Word admits that the resurrection is the linchpin for the wheel of the Christian faith.
- 2. This is called falsifiability. That is, the faith is testable!

- 3. Other religions don’t want to go here. Instead they hide in a corner. Example: “I had a vision!” How do you test that?

Part II: The Substantial Christian Faith:

- A. Dr. Gary Habermas teaches on “the two E’s”:
 - 1. Testimony to the resurrection is **E**arly.
 - 2. Testimony to the resurrection based on **E**ye-witnesses.
- B. The two E’s are incompatible with myth: “*It passes the bounds of credibility that the early Christians could have manufactured such a tale and then preached it among those who might easily have refuted it simply by producing the body.*” (McDowell quotes Montgomery in *The Resurrection Factor*, 89)
- C. Dr. Craig Hazen (Biola University) offers these 12 Known Historical Facts:

#1 Jesus died by crucifixion.

#2 He was buried.

#3 Jesus’ death caused the disciples to despair and lose hope, believing that his life was ended.

#4 The tomb was discovered to be empty just a few days later.

#5 The disciples had experiences which they believed were literal appearances of the risen Jesus [consider fish on the beach, Jn 21!]

#6 The disciples were transformed from doubters who were afraid to identify themselves with Jesus to bold proclaimers of his death and resurrection.

#7 This message was the center of preaching in the early church.

#8 This message was especially proclaimed in Jerusalem, where Jesus died and was buried shortly before.

#9 As a result of this preaching the church was born and grew.

#10 Sunday became the primary day of worship.

#11 James, who had been a skeptic, was converted to the faith when he also believed he saw the resurrected Jesus.

#12 A few years later, Paul was also converted by an experience which he, likewise, believed to be an appearance of the risen Jesus.

Part III: Without The Risen Christ There Is Only Desperation:

- A. Without Christ and without eternal life, people must live desperately and cling to false gods.
- B. Timothy Keller in *Counterfeit Gods* identifies what drives people without the Lord: power, approval, comfort, and control.
- C. But these are bottomless pits, for example:

Ecclesiastes 5:10a: “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money...”.

- D. Anything a person may trust in like wisdom, pleasure, work, education, relationships, success, etc, since all of these things are finite and limited, they will always fall short of filling the void within us. False gods are bitterly disappointing.
- E. Many of you will remember the media circus surrounding O.J. Simpson and one of the most publicized murder trials in American history. Years earlier when he was at the height of his success as a Heisman Trophy winner, as the one who set the all-time rushing record in a season (at the time) rushing for over 2000 yards in 1973, and as an all-star in the NFL, this is what he said to *People Magazine* in 1978: “I sit in my house in Buffalo and sometimes I get so lonely it’s unbelievable. Life has been so good to me. I’ve got a great wife, good kids, money, my own health – and I’m lonely and bored...I often wondered why so many rich people commit suicide. Money sure isn’t a cure-all.” (McDowell, *ibid*, 1)
- F. If there is a cure-all, it must be better than everything else that is finite and limited. The cure-all must be infinite and limitless! This is the significance of the resurrection. Death which represents all limitation could not limit Christ!

Part IV: The Resurrected Christ Gives His Infinite Gifts:

- A. For example, He gives you infinite forgiveness. When we are given infinite forgiveness, we have the power of forgiveness!

- B. Walter Wangerin Jr. in his book *As For Me And My House* describes the power of forgiveness given to Christians through the Resurrected Christ. It consists in:
 1. Giving Up: “Forgiveness is a willing relinquishment of certain rights.” (79) When you know that God gave up His “rights” and willingly took flesh and willingly suffered and died for you, then you are enabled to relinquish your rights. Your forgiveness becomes empowered by God.
 2. Giving Notice: “the clear communication to the sinner that she/[he] has sinned.” (80) Silence is not golden when a serious offense takes place; it is cruel when silent bitterness denies reconciliation. But the Lord communicated your great need for forgiveness, and then He forgave you!
 3. Giving Gifts: “Forgiveness is, at the same time, a pure, supernal giving: the receiver doesn’t deserve it; the giver wants nothing for it...forgiveness is giving love when there is no reason to love and no guarantee that love will be returned.” (80) And this is how the RISEN CHRIST forgives:

Romans 5:8-10: “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”

- C. Since He is risen, He loves you infinitely, now love infinitely; Since He is risen, He never stops serving you, so never grow weary of doing good; Since He is risen, He will never stop holding you, so you never need give up hope. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you! Since He is risen, He bears witness of His love and mercy for you each and every day, so bear witness to Him...bear witness to Him since He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!