

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

We Believe in the Resurrection of the Body

Sunday, November 11 2018

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2 Corinthians 4:17

The music has been wonderful today. It is amazing how sounds can stir the mind, heart, and spirit. Music has a marvelous way of igniting an array of emotions. We can listen to a song, close our eyes, and feel once again the exhilaration of a first kiss or the bittersweet memory of love that was lost. A note or two of music can resonate a deep chord within us. Moviemakers know this well and use it to their advantage. Ever tried to watch a movie with your television muted? The drama of the movie is removed. The screeches, screams, and other spine-tingling sounds give the movie its impact.

There are two notes of music made for a particular movie which have probably caused more terror and fear than any other notes created for the big screen. In fact, these notes are so effective that they have permeated the American psyche. They are the note “E” followed by the note “F.” When they were first recorded for the movie, the instruments used were six cellos and three bases. Do you know the movie? The notes were used for the movie *Jaws*. The music and score was written by John Williams, who has done many other memorable soundtracks. Williams was once asked why he chose those two notes for *Jaws*. He replied, “I was looking for something that would describe the shark to the listener in an unconscious way. The music needed to be very primal and unstoppable” (Joseph Novenson, “Decreation and Recreation” in *Preaching Today*).

Well, if you have seen *Jaws*, you remember the primal and unstoppable nature of the shark. Perhaps after seeing the movie, you were one of many who thought twice about wading into the ocean. Williams took two simple notes and struck at the depths of people’s emotions. These two notes say to many people – No hope! No hope! No hope!

The message of these two notes seem to be the soundtrack of our culture right now. Another mass shooting – No hope. Another polarizing

election – No hope. More deadly fires in California – No hope. Another loved one dies – No hope. It seems that the jaws of hopelessness are attacking all around us. And it is so easy to get discouraged, to get pulled in by all the bad news. It is so easy to allow ourselves to be swallowed up by disappointment. It is so easy to drown in despair.

But I have some good news for you. You don’t have to hang your head. You don’t have to resign yourself to discouragement. You don’t have to be swallowed up by the jaws of defeat. Why? Because we are resurrection people! We believe in the resurrection. Today, as we conclude our series on what we believe, we are going to celebrate our belief in the resurrection of the body.

The truth of the resurrection rings like the notes of the Hallelujah chorus – notes are so bright, so vibrant, and so loud that you can no longer hear the E and F notes of hopelessness. And this is my promise: If you allow the truth of the resurrection to penetrate your soul this morning, you will experience a hope that will bring healing, a peace that will bring joy, and a life that will be worth living. For here is the truth of the Resurrection: God has the last word! The worst thing is never the last thing.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, yet shall they live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. I am alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. I died and behold I am alive forevermore. Because I live, you also shall live.”

This is why we worship on Sunday. Every Sunday is Easter. Every Sunday is Resurrection Sunday. Every Sunday we are reminded that we are people of the resurrection and that God has the last word. Therefore, every message I preach should have a word of hope.

Let's face it: preaching is empty without a resurrected Savior. If Jesus is dead, I've got nothing important to say to you, and you've got nothing worth getting out of bed to hear.

I remember a Sunday School teacher who wrote three questions on the board: Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? Then he said this: "Science tries to answer the first question; philosophy tries to answer the second question; nobody even tries to answer the third question. But only Christianity answers all three questions."

A few years ago, Billy Graham was invited to attend a luncheon in his honor in his hometown of Charlotte, N.C. He was hesitant to go because of his Parkinson's, but leaders said, "We don't expect a major address, just let us honor you." He agreed.

After they said wonderful things about him, Billy Graham stepped up to the podium and said, "I am reminded today of Albert Einstein, the great physicist. Einstein was once traveling by train, and the conductor came down the aisle, punching tickets. When he came to Einstein, Einstein reached into his vest pocket, and he could not find his ticket, so he reached into his other pocket. It was not there. He looked in his briefcase, and it was not there. He looked all around, but he could not find it. The conductor said, 'Don't worry, Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. Don't worry about it.' Einstein said thank you.

"The conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets, and he looked back and saw Einstein on his hands and knees looking for his ticket. The conductor rushed back and said, 'Don't worry, Dr. Einstein. I know who you are. Don't worry.' Einstein replied, 'Young man, I too know who I am. What I don't know is where I am going!'"

After telling that story, Billy Graham said to the crowd, "See this suit I am wearing? It is a brand-new suit. My family said I needed a new one. So I bought one for this occasion and one more occasion. You know what that occasion is? This is the suit I am going to be buried in. But when you hear that I am dead, don't remember the suit I am wearing. I want you to remember this: I not only know who I am, I also know where I am going."

You see, the resurrection of Jesus Christ means we know where we are going. It means that

life wins over death. It means good wins over evil. It means God wins over sin. The resurrection of Jesus Christ means God has the last word. Only the Christian faith claims this.

Those who follow New Age philosophy believe that history is a war between forces of light and darkness, but we have no assurance as to which of the forces will win in the end. Buddhism teaches that this world is nothing but an endless cycle of sufferings, and followers of Buddha can only hope for Nirvana, which is an extinguishing of consciousness where personal identity is destroyed. Hinduism teaches that the world is basically unreal and that before long, this world and all who live in it will return disintegrated and leave no trace, assuring us that history and our lives have no significance. Our culture teaches us to be very afraid, look out only yourself. Don't trust anybody. Only the strong survive. You only go around once, so those with most toys wins, right?

Only the Bible teaches us that God is going somewhere with this world. The Bible teaches us that God has destroyed evil and death and given our lives purpose and meaning. When we say we believe in the resurrection, we are saying that God can repair what is broken, raise up what is cast down, renew what is old, restore what has been ruined. God has the last word!

So, if you feel discouraged and worn out by life, you have come to the right place today. Because I will tell you this morning, you have not come to a nice concert today. You have not come to an event center today. You have come to the only place in the world that will tell you where real life is found. You have come to the only place that will tell you where you can find real hope, peace, joy, meaning, and purpose. You have come to the only place that will tell you where you can find freedom and resurrection power! And you can find all of these things in Jesus Christ, our risen Lord. You will find what you are looking for through a relationship with Christ.

Christ will give you resurrection power for living. And Christ will give you resurrection power when you are dying, so you can't lose! You can soar in life and you will soar in death. The Apostle Paul said in Romans, "The same power that rose Christ from the dead lives in you!"

You know, life has many great truths. Susan Sparks said that one truth is never slap a man

chewing tobacco. Another is when you put “the” and the word “IRS” together, you get “theirs.”

Still, another truth in life, Sparks reminds us, is deep down, the human soul yearns for joy, yearns to soar. Spark compared it to the movie *Mary Poppins*, a movie I watched over and over again as a kid. Without a doubt, my favorite scene is the one where Uncle Albert starts laughing in that lifeless, sterile bank vault. As he laughs with joy, he begins to float up to the ceiling. The laughter and life and passion he feels brings him a lightness that makes him float. And everyone around him begins to laugh and float up as well.

That scene gets to the root of a deep human truth: We all have a soul that yearns for joy and lightness – a soul that yearns to soar. We all have been made for greatness. We have all been made by God to rise above the darkness and soar above defeat. We know that deep within us. But the distractions of life so often get in the way. And then we begin to seek the living among the dead, and slowly we can become the living dead – no life, no purpose, no joy, no passion, no vision – all because we forget the truth of the resurrection. All because we forget where real life is found.

So, for everyone out there who feels that their dreams have been destroyed, their hopes dashed, their spirits crushed, here is the good news of Easter morning: The risen Christ can give you the life you have been looking for. Jesus Christ can make your spirit soar! God has the last word in life. And God has the last word in death.

I love an Easter tradition in the Eastern Orthodox Church. You know what they do on Easter and the day after Easter? They tell jokes and just laugh their hearts out. They feel they are imitating the cosmic joke that God pulled on Satan in the Resurrection. Satan thought he had won and was smug in his victory, smiling to himself, assuming he had the last word. God said, “Not so fast!” God raised Jesus from the dead, and life and salvation became the last words. And so the sound of Easter is not a giggle. It is not a chuckle. It is a big, hearty belly laugh. Why? God has the last word!

Let me address an important question that is asked of me a lot as a pastor. Many Sundays we recite the Apostles’ Creed and stand up and say, “I believe in the resurrection of the body.” It is clear from scripture that our bodies will be resurrected.

But, does this mean our old bodies, the bodies we have today will be reconstituted by God? Some may say, “I hope not!” Or does this mean we will receive new bodies?

This is a great concern for many people, especially when they consider loved ones who have been cremated or buried at sea. It’s why many Christians insist on being embalmed and buried. What is the Christian answer to this concern? The answer is simple: It doesn’t matter whether you are cremated or embalmed, the body eventually returns to the earth. “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” Therefore, God will create new bodies for us. Others will still recognize us, but our bodies will be new and improved. We won’t need this old body of ours in heaven. Thank heaven for that!

But perhaps you are wondering how we will be recognized in Heaven. The Apostle Paul gives us a clue:

For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.
–2nd Corinthians 4:17

You know what C.S. Lewis said is the weight of glory? He said the glory we receive in heaven is not what others think of us. It is what God thinks of us. It is when God approaches you in heaven, throws his big, loving arms around you and says, “I’m so proud of you. Well done, well done.” That is our weight of glory.

What this means is that our beauty in heaven is something totally different than on earth. We will all be beautiful in heaven because who we are on the inside will be on the outside. Our character, our strength, our growth, our faithfulness, our love, our sensitivity will be seen on the outside, and it will be gorgeous.

So many people are afraid of death. But Christians are not afraid of it because death is our victory! At death, all the promises we lived for, worked for, groaned for will become reality. Now, this does not mean we are in a hurry to die, but we do not fear it. Whether we are alive on earth or resurrected with God in heaven, we are confident that the resurrection power of Jesus Christ is with us.

So, don’t be discouraged. Don’t lose heart. Don’t give up on your faith.

James Moore loves to tell the story about the great pianist Ignace Paderewski. Paderewski was Poland's most famous pianist and Prime Minister. During his long and illustrious career, Paderewski scheduled a concert in a small village to cultivate the arts in Poland. A young mother bought tickets for the Paderewski performance. Her young son had just started taking piano lessons, and she wanted to expose him to one of the greatest piano players in the world.

When the night arrived, they found their seats near the front of the concert hall. The mother spotted a friend nearby and began to chat. As she turned back from her visit, she was stunned to see that her little boy was not in his seat. He had slipped out of sight. Just then, the house lights came down, and the spotlight came up. It was at that moment that everyone knew where the little 10-year-old boy had run off to. He was seated at the concert piano on stage innocently picking out “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.”

His mother was mortified. The stagehands ran out to grab the boy, but suddenly Paderewski appeared on stage and waved them away. Paderewski quickly moved to the piano and standing behind the little boy, he whispered into his ear, “Don't quit! Keep playing! Don't stop!” Leaning over, Paderewski reached down with his left hand and began filling in the bass part. Soon, his right arm reached around the other side of the boy, and he played another part. Together, the old master and the young novice mesmerized the crowd with beautiful music. They did it together.

You know what the resurrection is all about? It is about the risen Lord coming alongside of you and whispering in your ear, “Don't quit on life. Don't quit on yourself. Don't give up on me. I'm here to help you rise above anything. We will do it together. I will give you resurrection power for living and resurrection power in dying. I have the last word. So don't ever quit.”



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