

EASTER

April 5, 2015

*I Corinthians 15:13-20: **“Seriously?”***

I. Why Are You Here?

II. I Corinthians 15:13-19.

III. I Corinthians 15:20

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I Corinthians 15:13-20

Dear Friends in Christ,

I have said many times that the way the human mind works is baffling. I've said that mostly in light of the odds and ends it regurgitates. For example, every year throughout all these years of ministry, as we come to the end of the Lenten Season, the music of Irving Berlin's 1933 hit *Easter Parade* pops into my mind. I find that upsetting because there are many other more appropriate pieces that ought to be there.

And then it occurred to me - that is, the lyrics and their significance for this morning. Are you ready? Here are the lyrics I want you to recall, which I have put in front of you before:

*In your Easter Bonnet
With all the frills upon it.
You'll be the grandest lady in
The Easter Parade.*

*I'll be all in clover,
And when they look you over
I'll be the proudest fellow in
The Easter Parade.*

Do you see the significance? 1933. Eighty-two years ago. Entertainment was doing then what it has been persistently pursuing all along: Underplaying and undermining the spiritual - drawing attention away from Christ, from God, from Godliness, from eternal hope and comfort. Is that it? Easter presented as frilly bonnets, and bodies to be "looked over"? Ooh, we've traveled some distance, haven't we? Is the focal point of your world this world?

SERIOUSLY?

I. Why Are You Here?

Well, I've got something else for you. I ask you to listen and to do so very carefully. I ask you to think about what you will hear in light of where we are today. Here it is:

"The world today is trying to get into the Church in a way different from that of former times. The radio is a most wonderful invention, and by it the pure Gospel is brought to thousands who otherwise would not hear it; but by the same means false teachers are admitted into the homes of many who otherwise would not hear them. The automobile and good roads have shortened distances and made travel more convenient; however, the automobile is not only used to bring people to the churches, but also to take them away from it. The moving picture is a most valuable educational means; but it is largely used in the service of sin, and thousands, even small children, go to the movies who formerly never or seldom would have gone to the theater. The rapid growth of our cities is making it possible for our Church to reach more people than ever...but at the same time it is, for various reasons, making the work of the Church more difficult, is destroying home life, and is bringing with it all the evils of crowded conditions of living. The great wealth of Christian people enables them to give larger sums of money to the Church, but is also more than ever, bringing them face to face with the danger of riches. The higher social standing which the Christian people of to-day enjoy ought to be used in the interest of the Church; but is often used to bring them into closer contact with the world. The elimination of much hard work by labor-saving devices is not conducive towards emphasizing the dignity of toil and has a tendency to make people think that hard work is unworthy of a gentleman or lady. (Emphasis mine.)

"We are living in a restless and restive age. Life to-day is much more strenuous and nerve racking. People, especially the young, are impatient of control and hard to keep in check." (John H. C. Fritz, Pastor Theology [reprinted by] Concordia Theological Seminary Press, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1984, p. 13.)

Those are words penned by Lutheran professor Dr. John H. C. Fritz and were first published in 1932. Eighty-three years ago! So, what's new?? The burning quest for better and more has taken this world, this country, the church into a very dark and horribly fretful time. So, why are you here? Would you say that the victory of Christ over sin, death and hell - His Resurrection - is the one reality that guides your day to day thinking and pursuits? Seriously? Our text . . .

II. I Cor. 15: 13-19.

“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

“If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.” (vss. 13-19)

You see? Everything hinges on the Resurrection. People can talk and argue and debate about Jesus all they want - but the Resurrection confronts the world with the singularly greatest, most colossal event ever. Complete victory over the grave. Your eternal life rests on it! My eternal life rests on it!

And if He was not raised from the dead then, as Paul states, “we are of all people most to be pitied.” And that because our ultimate hope is in Christ alone. And that because we don't live for this world as those without Christ. And that because this world isn't, in any way, our everything.

Whoops! Excuse me. I forgot that most Christians in this country are becoming very, very hard to distinguish from those who embrace this world's thinking and ways. I forgot that most of the church looks like the world, acts like the world, thinks like the world. I forgot that even Christians sitting in Biblically grounded churches spend much of their lives in tension and conflict trying to reconcile this world's Godlessness with the Scripture's call to Godliness!

As some of you already know, I call it **Americanity**. Well, it isn't Christianity! It's the effort to blend this world's ways, thinking and demands into the church. It's the pastor who cries out, “We've got to think like the world if we're going to win the world.” It's the member always on the prowl for a new program, a better deal, a more “meaningful” worship, but can't - and doesn't want to - discern the truths of God's Holy Word, much less learn them. It's the member who has become distracted by stuff and whatever this world throws in the public arena, but has little to no understanding of the issues - church and world! **Americanity**; a strange, twisted and grossly deformed representation of Christianity. Seriously!

III. I Cor. 15:20.

So, here we are this morning. Celebrants of the greatest event that ever came to this earth: Christ's suffering, death and resurrection to overcome sin, death and hell for those who believe. And Paul instantly drags us from the roots we drive into this world, drags us over the grave mounds and states the case without question: “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (I Cor. 15:20)

And there you are - there we are - sinful humans unworthy of any good thing from God but in Christ granted forgiveness of every sin, eternal life and the promise that this world will come to its end and these bodies that are filled with decay and death will be raised to unending joy - raised to a world without suffering, sorrow, pain and death!

I ask you to listen to these most pertinent words written by Alexander MacLaren:

I believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, (among) other reasons, because I do not understand how it was possible for the Church to exist for a week after the Crucifixion, unless Jesus Christ rose again. Why was it that they did not all scatter? Why was it that the spirit of despondency and the tendency to separation, which were beginning to creep over them...did not (materialize)? How came it that these people, with their Master taken away from the midst of them, and the bond of union between them removed, and all their hopes crushed did not say: "We have made a mistake, let us go back to...our fishing again, and try and forget our bright illusions"? That is what John the Baptist's followers did when he died. Why did not Christ's followers do the same? Because Christ rose again and re-knit them together. (*Expositions of Holy Scriptures*, I and II Corinthians, Alexander MacLaren, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982, p. 241)

I suggest that one of the great driving statements behind the comfort and joy we receive this morning is summed up in this verse: "And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it." (Matt. 28:2) The Angel rolled away the stone and sat on it! And that's the end of it for those in Christ! Death was conquered! Death is conquered! What you manage to grab out of this world before your hands are stiffened by death is not the issue. Do you see it that way? Seriously??

Blessed Easter.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott