

"Let Nothing Move You..."

21.Mar.10

Session 6—*The Easter Experience* (*A Hope that Never Dies*)

1 Corinthians 15:53-58

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Sometimes when we think about Jesus we often let our intellect frame the conversation. Perhaps we need to let our hearts take the "front seat" when we think about the One Who fed the starving, healed the blind and the sick, brought people back to life; the One Who sat and ate with outcasts, Who did not hesitate to break rules which hurt people, and Who gave His last breath and His last heartbeat for us!

A 1999 issue of *Newsweek* magazine contained a cover story about Jesus. In it was this paragraph,

"Historians did not record his birth. Nor, for 30 years, did anyone pay him much heed. A Jew from the Galilean hill country with a reputation for teaching and healing, he showed up at the age of 33 in Jerusalem during Passover. In three days, he was arrested, tried and convicted of treason, then executed like the commonest of criminals. His followers said that God raised him from the dead. Except among those who believed in him, the event passed without notice."

(Kenneth Woodward, "2000 Years of Jesus," *Newsweek*, 29.March.1999, p. 52.)

Everything in this statement is fundamentally true. When Jesus walked the earth only His followers really knew He was here...plus, of course, eventually His adversaries. After He was killed it must have

seemed at the time that essentially nothing had *really* changed. Yet it is now 2010, and the world measures time by the date of His coming. The calendar of nations hinges on his arrival. If that were not telling enough, still 1.2 billion people (fully 1/3 the world's population) claim to be His followers.

Nonetheless, one could argue the case that within the Church universal the message of Christ seems to have lost much of its mystery and power...and, sadly, much of its hope. Maybe it is because too many Christians are ill at ease with *mystery*...though we embrace it in science fiction novels and movies as well as in the worlds of science and medicine. Maybe it is because we hear the story so often that it loses its impact. Or maybe because we permit the influence of the secular world to push the Church, along with the hope it offers, to the edge of daily life. Maybe the mystery and power has waned because too many Christians grow weary of hearing about suffering, and serving, and putting others first, and loving those who want to harm us, and turning the other cheek. We just do not like to hear these sorts of things.

Maybe the *hope* we want is one that will not cost us very much. Or perhaps Christendom has lost much of the *hope* because we worry about what the world will say about us. After all, we surely want people to like us, even though (or perhaps because) the Lord said several times that the world will despise us because of His name. As for me, I would rather worry a bit about what the *world* might say about me, rather than worry about what *God* will say about me...which is why I strive to be pleasing in God's eyes more than in the world's eyes.

Or maybe we just grow tired of some Christians insisting that *their* grasp of the Truth is right and anyone else's is wrong! Maybe the faith and our hope of Christendom is less potent because of things like these.

The question seems to be: Do we *really* believe the Cross and the Resurrection?

When you say the Apostles' Creed, you say "I believe in Jesus of Nazareth, Who was crucified." This means you believe Jesus was

murdered on a Roman cross at a place called Golgotha, outside the walls of Jerusalem. You believe it literally happened. You believe it is recorded history. You believe that if you had been there you would have personally witnessed His suffering and humiliation; His pain; the blood dripping from His wounds. You would have heard Him cry out and maybe even *felt* His last breath. When you profess Jesus as the Christ, you are saying you believe all of this happened; including the Resurrection.

So to want to pass over His Passion, or wish to turn away from it, wounds our Lord even more. Who among us would want to do that? Yet it seems to me that too many Christians do exactly that; to wit, the starkly reduced numbers of worshippers at Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday worship experiences. It is precisely the events of Christ's Passion and Resurrection which give us our *hope*.

When you and I say "Jesus died for me and my sins," we speak a mystery hard to understand. So let me offer a true story that may help us understand.

At the time of the Civil War there was a group of, what some call, "organized outlaws" along the Missouri–Kansas border called Quantrill's Raiders. They would sweep down on unsuspecting towns—rob, pillage, kill, and burn. Then disappear into the night long before any help could arrive. The situation became so desperate that some people in Kansas formed a counter-group to search out these Raiders and execute them.

Not long afterward, a group of Quantrill's Raiders were captured. A long trench was dug. The Raiders were lined up, hands and legs tied and eyes covered. The firing squad began to form. Suddenly a young man rushed out of the underbrush, yelling: "Wait! Wait!" He ran over to the one of the officers, pointing to a man waiting to be shot, and said, "I know that man. Please let him go free. He has a wife and four children, and is needed back at his farm. Let *me* take his place. I am equally guilty."

This stranger kept on insisting he be allowed to die in that man's place, so that the doomed Raider could be set free. The officers granted his request. They cut the ropes and released the

condemned man. The one who pleaded for the condemned man's freedom was put in his place. He was then executed.

After some time had passed, the saved man returned to that place, and somehow managed to find the still fresh grave containing the body of the one who had taken his place. He placed the body on the back of his mule and took it to a small cemetery near Kansas City. There he buried the one who had redeemed him. He also built a memorial at the head of the grave with these words inscribed on it: "He took my place; he died for me"

(Robert E. Coleman, *Written in Blood*, Revell Publishing, Old Tappan, N.J., 1972. PP. 111-112)

This is what Jesus did. And in doing that He gave us our *hope*. Our response? Stand firm. Do not let ourselves be moved from our faith and our witness. God said to the people through the prophet Jeremiah,

"Blessed are you who trust in Me,
whose hope is in Me.
You shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit."
(*Jer. 17:7-8, adpt.*)

Now-a-days, I ask myself how it is that so much of the power coming from the hope given us slips through our fingers and out of the Church. Or at the very least, how it is that so much of God's word is misrepresented and indeed perverted. Surely God deserves better of us. Surely the One Who redeems us, saves us, dies for us, and gives us hope deserves other than so much hate and bigotry flowing from the very ones for whom He sacrificed and died.

For St. Paul, it does not suffice for him to say "stand firm" 3, or 4, or 8, or 10, or even 12 times. He writes it over 170 times in his letters! Today's scripture passage is one of those times...

"Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast,
immovable, always excelling in the
work of the Lord..." (1 Cor. 15:58a)

Be steadfast. Stand firm in the Lord. Stand in your hope. Do not let yourself be moved.

Over these past weeks of Lent we have talked about the life and death of Jesus. So again, the question remains, **"How does what happened *then* change everything for you *now*?"**