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Trinity Presbyterian Church -Pensacola, FL  
April 4, 2010 Easter Sunday

## **"VICTORY"**

Luke 24:1-12 Acts 10:34-43

Comedienne Jerry Clower used to tell a story from his days as a student at Mississippi State University. Jerry had a friend who worked at the funeral home in Starkville and one night his friend had to drive the hearse over to Tuscaloosa, AL to pick up the body of someone who had died. Jerry agreed to ride over with him. On the return trip home, running low on gas, they stopped to fill up the hearse at a gas station in Columbus, MS which is roughly twenty miles from Starkville.

When Jerry's friend went inside the gas station to pay for the gas, a student from MSU who was hitchhiking back to Starkville walked up to Jerry and asked for a ride. Jerry said "Sure, but you'll have to ride in the back, and there's a body back there. Are you okay with that? The student was okay with it and hopped in the back. Jerry didn't tell his buddy that they now had a rider in the back!

Jerry's friend came back to the hearse and they headed for Starkville. A few miles down Hwy 82, the student in the back parted the curtains in the hearse and asked, "Hell! Is it okay if I smoke back here?" In his panic, it was all Jerry's friend could do to keep the hearse between the ditches as he swerved to and fro!

I doubt that the women who came to the empty tomb that first Easter morning were any less shocked or panicky! They ran back to the disciples, their hearts pounding with both shock and excitement. Jesus had risen from the dead! Nowadays we hear about someone whose heart has stopped and is given CPR and revived. But three days dead in the ground? No one had ever risen from the dead!

Arkansas Governor and Presidential candidate Mike Huckabee was asked if he believed in the resurrection. "Of course I do," said Huckabee. "Dead people vote in every election we have in Arkansas. Resurrection is very real to us." Huckabee was joking, of course, but the resurrection is very serious - it is the cornerstone of our Christian faith, it is the substance of our hope, it is the essence of our preaching !

In Acts 10:34-48 Peter preaches the essence of our Christian witness:

- Jesus is God's gift to humanity to express God's love for us. God is not an angry God we must somehow pacify lest he destroy us. Jesus came to reveal and fulfill God's love.
- Jesus went about healing, to banish pain and sorrow from the earth.
- Humanity killed Jesus on a cross out of ignorance. That is what we humans are capable of doing that because of sin.
- Jesus rose again - God's power defeated the worst that humanity can do; his power defeated Satan, he defeated death! We have VICTORY in Jesus!
- We are witnesses of God's power, called to preach and teach and demonstrate God's goodness and love, not as something we dig out of a textbook, but something we experience in a personal relationship with the living God through Jesus our Lord!

- The result of all this is forgiveness of sins and new relationship with God! *"Through his name everyone who believes in him has received forgiveness of sins!"* (Acts 10:43)

That's a promise with a catch: you have to accept God's gift, you have to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and trust in him as your Lord and Savior.

- Acts 10:43, "everyone **who believes in Him** has received forgiveness."
- *John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, **that whoever believes in him** should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

When Jesus died, he didn't die alone. Two thieves died on crosses beside him. We often focus on the penitent thief who cried out to Jesus *"Remember me when you come in to your kingdom."* We know that man was saved because Jesus said to him, *Today you will be with me in paradise*" (Luke 23:43). But don't forget that the other man hanging beside Jesus cursed and swore and blasphemed Jesus as the Son of God. The verses suggest that he died condemned; un-forgiven.

**One thief saved - that none of us should despair.**

**One thief lost - that none of us should presume.**

We still have to accept God's offer of forgiveness and salvation in Jesus on the cross; else we negate God's gift and doom ourselves.

- Acts 10:43, "everyone **who believes in Him** has received forgiveness."
- *IJohn 5:12 "Whoever **has the Son** has life; whoever **does not have the Son of God** does not have life."*

The death of Christ cannot save if you do not believe in him. Believing in his name is more than just believing facts about Jesus. Lots of people do that. James 2:19 states that even the demons believe in Jesus, but they are not saved. To "believe in Jesus" or "to have the Son of God" is to accept God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ, to yield control your life unto God, and to commit to living as God's word teaches us to live.

Look at what happened to the disciples after the first Easter morning, after they finally accepted and believed in the resurrection that Christ had told them about. They departed the Upper Room and went to the ends of the earth preaching gospel and creating a mighty church despite the efforts of Emperors and Rulers to destroy them and the church. They went from being people afraid of dying, to sacrificing their very lives to help others come to the faith, and hope, and joy that they had found in Jesus Christ. Like people through the centuries who have since believed - those disciples were transformed by the resurrection and in the God who brought it about!

Victor Hugo, author of *Les Miserable*, wrote this about his victorious spirit:

"I feel in myself the future life. I am like a forest which has been more than once cut down. The new shoots are stronger and livelier than ever. I am rising, I know, toward the sky. The sunshine is on my head. The earth gives me its generous sap, but heaven lights me with the reflection of unknown worlds. The nearer I approach the end, the plainer I hear around me the immortal symphonies of the worlds which invite me. When I go down to the grave I can say, like so many others, "I have finished my day's work," but I cannot say that I have finished my life. My day's work will begin again next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. It closes in the twilight to open *in the dawn.* "

" It closes in the twilight to open in the dawn. " Isn't that marvelous? It's the pull of immortality - our triumphant hope in Christ!

God can bring back to life that which has died!

God can bring good out of evil, love out of hate, and hope out of despair! I believe it! I trust it! Jesus is my hope and faith and joy! Jesus is my sure confidence and my hope in the future!

I told you the following story three Easters ago and it bears repeating.

One Easter morning small town pastor George Thomas came into the church carrying a rusty, bent, old bird cage, and set it on the pulpit. He got some strange looks from his congregation and he began to explain.

"I was walking through town yesterday when I saw a young boy coming toward me swinging this old bird cage. On the bottom of the cage were three little wild birds, shivering with cold and fright.

I stopped the boy and asked him, "What you got there son?"

"Just some old birds," he said.

"What you gonna do with them?"

"Take them home and have some fun with `em," he answered. "I'm gonna tease `em and pull out their feathers to make them fight. I'm gonna have a good time."

"But you'll get tired of those birds sooner or later. What will you do then?"

"Oh, I got some cats," said the little boy, "They like birds. I'll give `em to the acts," he said with a wicked grin.

The pastor was silent for a moment. "How much do you want for those birds, son?"

"Huh? You don't want them birds, mister," the boy said "They're just plain old field sparrows. They don't sing. They ain't even pretty."

"How much?" the pastor asked again.

The boy sized up the preacher as if he was crazy and said, "Twenty bucks?"

The preacher reached in his pocket and took out a twenty dollar bill. He placed it in the boys hand and in a flash, the boy was gone. The pastor picked up the cage and gently carried it to the end of the alley where there was a tree and a grassy spot. Setting the cage down, he opened the door, and by softly taping the bars persuaded the birds out, setting them free.

Well that explained the empty bird cage on the pulpit and then the pastor began to tell this story.

"One day Satan and Jesus were having a conversation. Satan had just come from the Garden of Eden and he was gloating and boasting."

"Yes, sir. I just caught the world full of people down there. Set me a trap; used bait I knew they couldn't resist. Got `em all!"

"What are you going to do with them?" Jesus asked.

Satan answered with a laugh, "Oh, I'm gonnna have fun. I'm going to teach them how to hate and abuse each other, how to smoke and drink and cuss. I'm gonna teach them to invent guns and bombs and kill each other."

"And what will you do when you get done with them?" Jesus asked.

"Oh, I'll kill them." Satan glared proudly.

"How much do you want for them?" Jesus asked.

With a sly grin, Satan said, "You don't want these people, Jesus. They ain't no good. Why, you'll take them and they'll hate you. They'll spit on you, cuss you, and they'll even nail you to a cross and kill you. You don't want those people!"

"How much?" Jesu asked again.

Satan looked at Jesus and sneered, "All your tears and all your blood--your very life! "

Jesus said, "Done!" then he paid the price.

With that, the pastor picked up the cage, put it on the pulpit and opened the door. He then walked away from the pulpit. (Source: Unknown)

That is what Jesus did for you on the cross. He paid the ultimate, immeasurable price so that you might be free from the inescapable penalty of death.

*If you will belief in your heart and confess with your tongue that Jesus Christ is Lord and God has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved and have life everlasting! -- Romans 10.9  
Through His name everyone who believes in Him has received forgiveness of sins. -Acts 10:43.*

I cannot preach Easter truth without inviting you to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. All you have to do is to open your heart, your life, to Jesus Christ, and say:

*"God, forgive me. I repent of my sins. I receive your gift offorgiveness. I trust in Jesus Christ alone for my salvation and I accept him as my Lord and Savior! "*

Does that sound too simple? You don't need a Ph.D. to become one of God's children. All you need do is open your life to Him and accept his gift of salvation. Will you? Do it! Do it now. This is the day of victory and new beginnings!

- Maybe you've never accepted Christ before.
- Maybe you have, but want to recommit your life to him and reaffirm your faith in him after years of ignoring him.
- Maybe you already know and love and trust Jesus as your Lord and Savior, but this can a time to just thank God again for his love and grace that sustain you.
- No matter your situation, let me pray this prayer for you: close your eyes and open your hearts, let this be your time of commitment!

*Dear God, I need you. I have tried to make sense of my own life, but I can 't I need you. I have done things I know I shouldn 't have and I have left undone some things I know I should have done. I am sorry for my sins. Forgive me. I put my trust in Jesus Christ alone for my salvation. I receive your gift offorgiveness. And I celebrate today the glory of Easter - my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is risen today! Thank you, God!*

*Lord God, enter into the hearts of those who seek you now.*

*Grant them your peace, your love, your strength, your hope, your renewing grace, Hear the prayers of those who want to know you, Lord, and renew the vitality of faith grown stale.*

*Forgive us, renew us, save us, and go with us into this day, making new our world, our hope, and our witness! In Jesus' mighty name we pray. Amen.*

**Thanks be to God for our VICTORY in JESUS! ALLELUIA! AMEN!**