

Easter and the Earth

I Corinthians 15:19-26 John 20:1-18

Preached by Richard Bolin at Culver-Palms United Methodist Church

Easter April 8, 2007

The Engineering Management Society Newsletter printed the following letter under the title "A Personnel Matter."

To: Jesus, Son of Joseph
Woodcrafters Carpenter shop
Nazareth 25922

From: Jordan Management
Consultants
Jerusalem 26544

Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for management positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests; and we have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant.

The profiles of all tests are included, and you will want to study each of them carefully.

As part of our service and for your guidance, we make some general comments, much as an auditor will include some general statements. This is given as a result of staff consultation and comes without any additional fee.

It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. All of the other profiles are self-explanatory.

We wish you every success in your new venture.

Sincerely yours,
Jordan Management Consultants

Whoever wrote this little gem did some pretty good biblical research. Like most humor, it is funnier because of the truth that is in it. Time and time again in the four Gospel accounts of Jesus' life the disciples are shown to be misunderstanding, self-centered, afraid, and finally disloyal. Yet these were the leaders of the early Church. These were the ones left to tell the story. These men together with a few women of equally undistinguished reputations changed the course of world history. What happened that these common-people are today spoken of more often than the Roman emperors - who at the time didn't know by name any of these individuals in Palestine? What happened? Easter happened!

Indeed, the fact that this small band of nobodies played such an important role in history is the strongest evidence we have that Easter is a reality. In the words of Clarence Jordan, "The proof that God raised Jesus from the dead is not the empty tomb, but the full hearts of his transformed disciples. The crowning evidence that he lives is not a vacant grave, but a spirit filled fellowship; not a rolled-away stone, but a carried-away church."

Easter is about new life and changed lives. Many years ago, pastoring my first church in Phoenix, I met a man named Lynn. Lynn was an elderly gentleman who was a tireless parish visitor. He put in countless volunteer hours visiting shut-ins and making hospital calls on behalf of his church, and he enjoyed doing it. By the time I came along Lynn was going strong as a parish visitor, and at first I took for granted that Lynn had probably always been around doing that sort of thing. But that was not the case. A year or two before I met him Lynn's wife died. Her death had devastated him. He was despondent, despairing, and lonely. He sat at home and took pity on himself, wondering why she had died and he was still alive. She had been so much a part of what life meant for Lynn, that without her it at first seemed that there was no life. People in the church wondered if he would come out of his grief, and they didn't know how to help him.

As far as I know there was no particular event or act that brought Lynn back to the land of the living. He told me that one day it simply dawned upon him that he was not the only one who had lost a beloved spouse. There were many others also struggling with loneliness and despair, and they might like someone to talk to. He decided that caring for others was more important than his own grief, and through reaching out to the hurt of others, he found life again.

One of the things I have learned in ministry is not to underestimate another's sufferings. It is too easy for me to stand in the pulpit and talk about this or that person overcoming adversity, and to imply that therefore any of us can overcome such adversity. When you are given the privilege, as a pastor sometimes is, of being alongside people as they struggle with death and calamity, it is not at all apparent how they will endure it; or whether they will endure it and once again live life in its God-given fullness. When it happens, I give thanks to God for allowing me to be a witness to the resurrection.

I never had a conversation with Lynn about his resurrection beliefs. I doubt that Lynn spent a lot of time sitting around theologizing about it. He just did it! Resurrection is not something we think about so much as it is something we do.

The resurrection changed Lynn the same way it changed the followers of Jesus. The change was from being absorbed with self to being focused on others. The change was from hiding in your room to going out on a mission. The change was from giving up on your own life to being a life-giver.

Beginning today through the rest of the month of April, Culver-Palms UMC is lifting up the moral issue and the Biblical imperative to care for the earth. Let us allow the resurrection to change our lives to be life-givers, to be mission-sent, and to extend our outward focus to include all of God's creation!

Easter is not just about us. It's about the earth. It's about Creation. **The new life that is resurrection life involves all of life.**

Genesis tells us that God created light and darkness, land and sea ... "God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:20-21).

And again, after the flood, God's promise extends beyond human beings: "When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth" (Genesis 9:16).

When the Psalms sing out in praise of God, it is with the knowledge that all creation joins the song:

"Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;

let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

let the field exult, and everything in it.

Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy" (Psalm 96:11-12)

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he knew that the rocks were ready to shout his praise if the crowd was silenced. And after his resurrection he instructs his disciples to "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." (Mark 16:15)

Paul tells us that when resurrection happens, nature itself is transformed: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God ... in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now" (Romans 8:19-22).

So on this Easter Sunday, when we celebrate the resurrection, we envision God's all encompassing resurrection. Can creation itself experience resurrection?

In the context of nature, the resurrection seems so "unnatural." It at first seems to us to be a denial of the natural order of things. Our experience is that everything dies. We see it in the plants and animals all around us. Even in the great forests of Redwoods and Sequoias, where we stand in awe of a great tree that was growing on that spot even before Jesus hung on another tree half-way around the globe - even there in nature's cathedral we see the Redwood giant that fell in last winter's storm, and feel the confirmation once again that "nothing lives forever."

But resurrection faith is not "anti-nature." The Christian boldly proclaims that the final word in creation is not death, but life. Death is real, but Christian faith witnesses to a deeper reality at the very center of creation. What we are witnesses to in God's creation is the struggle of life against death. Every living thing, from the smallest microscopic cell to the towering Redwood giant, strives for continued existence. The natural order of things is for life to struggle against death. The resurrection proclaims that this struggle is not in vain. God's creation, with life at its center, is not mocked! The enemy death has been defeated.

I said earlier that resurrection is not something we think about as much as it is something we do. And part of what it means to "do resurrection" is to live in harmony

with God's creation. When our planet suffers due to human abuse, part of "doing resurrection" is participating in the healing of the earth.

Let us do resurrection by caring for the earth. Let us do resurrection by living changed lives that lead to New Life. Let us do resurrection by proclaiming an all encompassing vision of God's salvation that includes the plants, the animals, the fields and the seas. Let us be leaders in our community. Let us be partners with people of faith and good will, with nature itself and with God in the blessing of all creatures great and small, the soil, the sea and the sky. Amen.