

Easter Sermon 2007
You Are Loved
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FPC
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John 20:1 ¶ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.

John 20:2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

John 20:3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb.

John 20:4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

John 20:5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.

John 20:6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there,

John 20:7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.

John 20:8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;

John 20:9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

John 20:10 Then the disciples returned to their homes.

John 20:11 ¶ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb;

John 20:12 and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.

John 20:13 They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

John 20:14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

John 20:15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”

John 20:16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher).

John 20:17 Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

John 20:18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

The Easter story can seem like a confusing epic. A man born around 4 a.d. named Jesus of Nazareth claims to be God.

His saying this, made him unique among every other leader of a major religion. Jesus claimed to be fully God and yet fully human.

He began His public ministry when He turned 30 healing people, helping people, sharing the good news that to the poor in spirit would be the kingdom of heaven.

Those who mourned they would be comforted,
Those who were meek would inherit the earth,
Those who thirsted and hungered for righteousness would be filled.
Those who were merciful would obtain mercy.
the pure in heart would see God
Peacemakers would become children of God
And those who are persecuted for Jesus sake God be rewarded.

Why did thousand and thousands of people in Jesus' time flock to Him?
....because He proclaimed the message – YOU ARE LOVED!

God loves you. No matter what you have done...God loves you. No matter what you have done God forgives you It's the same message He proclaims today.

No matter how bleak your future might be God has something better in store for us.

We live in a world where that kind of love, real enduring love is hard to find.

We are told in TV that we are not complete unless we drive certain cars, use certain shampoos, wear certain clothes or eat certain foods. Magazine pictures ell us that we need to be thin, rich and famous!

We live in a world that is very critical of us. Very negative.
Case in point.

Earlier this year I was flying from Charlotte North Carolina to San Francisco.

I was wearing my orange croc shoes – those big rubber comfy shoes that have big holes in them. I like my crocs. They are really comfortable. They breathe. If my feet swell during a flight I have room to grow. They are soft on my feet when I walk.

I was sitting there minding my own business when the flight attendant came up to me, looked and at my crocs and said...do you like those shoes?

Yes I do.

I bet they are hot when you wear them.

No actually they are okay.

I bet they make your feet sweaty.

Oh, they're okay.

You know, I think they are really ugly.

Welll....

No, I think they are really ugly.

We live in a negative, critical world

Then I remembered I needed to turn off my cell phone.

So I took out my phone and as I was turning it off my seat mate, this young blond woman said to me, "do you like your phone?"

"Well, yes I do."

She said, "I was going to buy that phone but then I realized that my blackberry phone is better."

I said, "I would have liked to buy the blackberry but due to my phone system I had to stay with mine.

She continued, "well, my phone is really better look at this knob on the side. It really helps wheeling down through my email....unlike the button you have."

"Yeah, I like that knob I wish I had that."

"I thought about your phone and mine, and I really think mine is better."

"Ok."

Then I decided to shut out this negative world so I pulled out my headphones to plug into my ipod, and as I pulled out my headphones, this same woman said to me,

"Do you like those headphones?"

Yeah, I actually do."

“I was going to buy those headphones but my brother in law who really knows audio said I should buy these headphones (and she showed me hers). They have much better fidelity than yours and they are much lighter and sleeker. Here try them on, see the difference.”

So I took her headphones and she took mine and we put them on and listened to the airplane music through the arms of the chair...and I said, being a pastor and needing to tell the truth, plus I thought she was kinda pushy “You know, um, I actually think my phones do sound better.”

She replied, “Well, that’s what you think...my phones are actually better and knock out more sound when the engine starts up...and they are lighter.”

To which I said,, “yes, they are lighter” as I took back my phones, slipped on my grade B headphones and plugged into my ipod...before drowning out the last from my seat mate which kind of sounded like – “hey, do you like that ipod?”

I didn’t take the bait and closed my eyes and turned up the music. She was probably going to tell me how her mp3 player or ipod was better than mine – maybe hers was a Bono red ipod.

This is the world we live in – negative, critical.

It’s a world of mass media advertising that basically tells me that I am incomplete unless I have their product.

We live in a world blasting with voices that say you are not smart enough...not thin enough, pretty enough, buff enough, fast enough, strong enough, worthy enough, rich enough.

And then along comes a man who claims to be God named Jesus who says....you are loved as you are.

You don’t need to change for me to love you...but I love you as you are – RIGHT NOW!

The voices that say that we are not smart enough, thin enough, fast enough, competent enough, rich enough, pretty enough, worthy enough, are not from God who created you.

When God created you....He said you are very good. You are worth my love.

From the beginning of time, God knew humankind would have a hard time believing that every one is worthy of love and no one is better or less than the other.

So around 4 a.d. God Himself came to earth at a time we remember as Christmas to tell us how much He loves us. He was born in a city called Bethlehem. He was born Jesus of Nazareth.

And at age 30 He began to preach and teach and heal and love people to show how much God loves us. It's incomprehensible that God would do this!!!

But Jesus also had to do one more thing equally if not more incomprehensible. Jesus needed to show us eternal love and eternal life.

Our life here on earth is limited. For most people 70 – 90 years of living on earth.

But our souls live on for eternity. Many people think this life is it. When we die we just become dust and that is it.

But God says we are spiritual beings who for the moment live here on earth.

There is much more to life. Much more than being thin enough, rich enough, popular enough, "happy" enough here on earth...that would completely miss the point of living here.

The goal of living here is to discover a relationship with God, based on His love for us that then shows us how to love one another.

A love and a life that begins here but goes on into eternity. That's right! The love God gives us is eternal.

But there is one hang up. In the laws of the universe, there has to be justice. God is a just God. And we also have that sense of justice.

When someone commits a crime, or betrays us or hurts us we often say...that person has to pay for that. We feel that wrongs must be righted. Someone has to be penalized for doing wrong.

When we hear of someone who has abused a child or hurt a friend or betrayed a loved one or gossiped untruthfully about ourselves, we say they can't get away...that person must pay.

And in God's universe there has to be payment for a wrong done. There must be justice.

The phenomenal thing about God is that He loves us...and no matter what we have done, will do, He loves us. And He wants us to be with Him in eternity.

He cannot bear the thought of our not being with Him. He loves us so much.

But God is also holy. And He wants us to be holy like Him – all loving, all forgiving. And in order for that to happen, we as humans might be fully forgiven.

All of our debts...all of our sins must be paid for in order to be with Him for eternity.

We will say...we can't fully pay for all of our wrong doing – the unfair criticism, the lies, the selfishness, the acts of wrong. We know ourselves.

And God says, I will pay your debt...I will take care of the scales of justice...I will have my son pay for your sins...I will have my son Jesus die for your sins and the sins of humankind.

That is the amazing truth of Easter. God Himself in His message to us that You Are Loved says I will pay the price for your wrong doing.

That is what Easter is about. God gave Himself, sent His son to be killed on a cross so that justice would be done, so that the price would be paid for all our wrong doing.

Then He rose from the dead, from a grave yard tomb – was resurrected to new life to show us that we were truly forgiven and that because of Him we would have eternal life.

Jesus allowed Himself to be killed as the sacrificial lamb for all of our sins...that then gives us a new life here on earth and a new life in heaven.

Now this may seem a little weird...that God would send His son to be born on earth and then live here and then to die for us in order for us to have a new life.

But here's a story that may help make it clearer.

My friend Paul Edwards, who is a member of this church told me how years ago, he and his wife Jeannie went to the city of Ukiah which is way up in northern California near Mendocino...way up north above San Francisco...into the farm lands.

Jeannie's uncle Don is a shepherd. In fact he is such a good shepherd that he recently was named Sheepman of the Year.

I didn't know there was such an award. Maybe we if allow sheep to graze here at Ko'olau I can become Sheepman of the Year some day.

Back to the story: One day Paul and Jeannie were out with Uncle Don and Uncle Don said the sheep had grazed long enough at a lower pasture and now they had to go to a higher pasture

...a greener, healthier pasture where the grass billowed in the wind and was full and ready to be more food for the sheep. A huge COSTCO of delicious green grass for the sheep

The challenge was this. In order for the sheep to get from the lower pasture to the higher pasture, they had to cross a shallow stream. But get this: sheep hate water.

Uncle Don said he didn't want to carry the sheep across the stream. They would be too heavy. And if they got wet and he had to carry them it would be like hauling a big fat wet 160 pound bag of wool all dirty and slimy and muddy and made more heavy because they were soaked with water.

But Uncle Don had done this before. So he told Paul and Jeannie to sit down and watch. After all, he was Sheepman of the Year.

Uncle Don went up to the herd of sheep and picked up a little lamb, and with that lamb, he carried it on his back across the stream and placed the lamb on the other side, on the higher more green and full pasture.

When the lamb's mother saw this, she went up to the water and hesitated but then seeing her lamb across the way, that mother...that ewe then slowly crossed the river and then one by one so did the other sheep.

Get this: In order to get His flock to heaven...God did not just cross a stream, He crossed a universe and His lamb was the lamb of God...His own son.

And if we follow His son, He brings us to a higher greener pasture – eternal life where we can know God's life eternal and the love of others eternally.

And that is what Easter is about – God crossing the universe, crossing time, crossing everything we understand to show us how much He loves us.

Easter is about an empty tomb. Easter tells us that death is not the end. It is about being resurrected out of death, an old life to a hope and a future.

The new joy and life that God offers is not only heaven but also here on earth.

Here on earth...yes people can criticize you and misunderstand you.
We come here to church not because we are perfect but because we realize we are not perfect.

We come to church and to God because we need help. We are facing illness that scares us.

We face relationships that are tearing us apart.

We face financial stresses.

We face injury.

We face tons of unfair criticism of people who question our taste in living, wearing crocs , even what phones we use.

And the fact is God comes to earth to say YOU ARE LOVED. Of all the major religions, CHRISTIANITY is the only one that sees God as a person of all-encompassing love.

And we see it best at Easter...Christ came to love us, lead us...die for us. And the great news that He didn't just die...He is risen...He has power over death...power to give us life.

He is risen!

He is Risen indeed!

He is risen!

He is Risen indeed!

Amen!

Pray – you are loved.

He is coming

He is Here

He is risen