

Chan Willis – F.P.C.-L.C.
April 16, 2017 – Easter Sunday

“Christ Revealed”

Acts 10:34-43; Colossians 3:1-4

This past week Barrie and I went to go see the movie “The Case for Christ.” Yes, ANOTHER movie! After last week’s reference to “The Shack,” some of you may be thinking, ‘Gee, is ALL he does go to movies?’ Yeah, riiiiight. Hey, can I help it if my vocation requires research of current movie culture. (Truth is, we actually RARELY go to movies!) BUT, I do recommend this one... as the movie is set in the early 80’s, just seeing the ‘vintage’ cars and clothes of my youth was entertaining enough!

If you’re not familiar with it, it is the story of Lee Strobel, who was an award-winning legal editor with the Chicago Tribune in the 70-80’s. Both he and his wife were ‘devout’ atheists... until a Christian nurse rescued their young daughter from choking, and through their developing relationship, would lead Strobel’s wife to faith in Christ. The aggressive, analytical, get-to-the-facts-of-the-story reporter resented his wife’s newfound faith, and became obsessed with a different type of ‘investigative reporting’-- debunking the Christian faith. And in particular, to disprove the validity of what lies at the very core of that faith: the **resurrection**. Well, things *didn’t* turn out exactly as Strobel planned. But as God planned. Not only did his exhaustive research prove the historical **truth** of the resurrection, he himself became one of Christianity’s strongest apologists... to the point of quitting his journalist career to join the staff of Willow Creek Community Church, where his wife had begun her faith journey when it first met in a movie theatre. That ‘new church development’ now numbers about 26,000 worshippers on a given weekend... and is still led by its founding pastor, Bill Hybels. Small beginnings leading to great things. Hmm. Perhaps like a little piece of property in a new development?

My point here is that for ANYONE who either **embraces** this ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’ belief system known as ‘Christianity’... or one who chooses to zealously **reject** it... the RESURRECTION of Jesus Christ lies at its **core**. In the words of Josh McDowell, Christian apologist and evangelist who himself was a self-proclaimed atheist in his younger years, “Few people seem to realize that the resurrection of Jesus is the **cornerstone** to a worldview that

provides the perspective to all of life.” Now, speaking of ‘vintage’ days, I remember Josh McDowell from his days of ‘stumping for Jesus’ at Free Speech Alley in front of the LSU Student Union back in the 70’s. So here’s a little more current, succinct quote from John Ortberg, preaching pastor at Menlo Park Presbyterian in CA: “At the **heart** of Christian faith is the story of Jesus' death and resurrection.”

But my message today is NOT going to be one that defends the truth of the resurrection. I would recommend the book... or the movie... “The Case for Christ”... if you would like to pursue the validity of this most central tenet of our Christian faith. Or, perhaps Mere Christianity by C. S. Lewis, or McDowell’s Evidence that Demands a Verdict. In Strobel’s words, “...the historical evidence for the resurrection establishes convincingly that Jesus is divine.” Instead, for the remaining time, I want to consider just HOW that ‘resurrected Christ’ impacts our daily lives... NOT the life that comes when we enter that *‘sanctuary not built with human hands, but eternal in the heavens.’* How does an ‘empty tomb’ result in a ‘full life?’ How does the ‘Christ revealed’ as the resurrected Savior become the ‘Christ revealed’ in our every day, walking around, sometimes-faithful, always- flawed flesh-and-blood? To put it quite simply, how does what we BELIEVE affect how we ACT?

And so, in consideration of how we are to ‘ACT’ as believers... and, as we have before us a reading from the ‘ACTS’ of the Apostles... we will therefore keep with that theme of ‘A-C-T.’ Some of you have heard of how the types of prayers we lift up to God can be summed up in that acronym, ‘ACT.’ **Adoration. Confession. Thanksgiving.** Those very same words can be used to show how the Resurrected life of Jesus is to ‘ACT’ itself out in our own ‘resurrected lives.’ The first ‘action’ we are to demonstrate is that of...

Adoration. To ‘adore.’ Now there’s a word that we don’t use too much. At least guys. Women might say, ‘O, I just *adore* that dress you have on. Or, I *adore* that piece of jewelry.’ Or maybe, ‘isn’t that grandchild of mine just *adorable*?’ But when it comes to our life of faith in Christ, ‘adoration’ is something MUCH more important. **Praise** and **honor** might be better synonyms. Or, in keeping with one of the 5 qualities of a faith community, to **WORSHIP**.

The God who raised Jesus from the dead is most certainly **deserving** of our **honor** and **praise** ... **worthy** of our **worship**. Like any loving parent, he is pleased to hear his children speak well of his name. ALL of his creation.

In the first verse of our Acts passage, Peter says that ***“I truly understand that God shows no partiality [favoritism]. But in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”*** (Acts 10:34-5) That word fear is also translated ‘respect,’ or ‘worship.’ So, ‘anyone who *worships* and *respects* God is acceptable to Him.’ Note that it does NOT say, ‘anyone who worships *on Sunday morning at 2525 2nd Ave.* is acceptable to him.’ Worship is not about a particular time or location. It’s not about a particular style or liturgy. Worship is not a mere ‘latitude’ or ‘platitude’ but an **‘attitude.’** One that starts when we rise and ends when we lie down.

Our worship and adoration of God is not about ‘state of the art’ technology but ‘state of the **heart**’ theology. As we seek to fill that ‘God-shaped hole’ in all of us, we declare before our Lord *‘no matter what earthly challenges I may go through, God, I will praise your name because you loved me enough to send your only beloved Son to earth to live and die for me.’* Because death could not hold His body to an earthly tomb, neither will death hold us who truly **praise, worship** and **adore** the name above all names, **Jesus Christ**. As those who share in His **baptism**... as those who, at this Table, ‘eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead’... we bear a joyful witness to Paul’s words to the Colossians: ***“Christ, who is your life, is revealed.”*** May our trust in Christ... who IS our life... be revealed for others to see. David had a pledge that perhaps could be our own. I’d invite you to join me in saying these words of Psalm 34:

“I will praise the Lord no matter what happens. I will constantly speak of his glories and grace.”[“His praise will ever be on my lips”] ² ***I will boast of all his kindness to me. Let all who are discouraged take heart.*** ³ ***Let us praise the Lord together and exalt his name.”*** (Ps. 34:1-3, TLB)

And yet, even in the midst of our praise and **adoration** of the Lord, exalting his name, we can also be mindful of how short we fall of deserving that love. That is why we must also **CONFESS** our failures to God. That we can come before God in humble **confidence** that whatever sins we have committed, both big and small, we are **WASHED** clean by the blood shed

for us on the cross. And that just as that empty tomb could not hold the power of Christ, neither do our hearts have to hold on to those sins that would confine us. There may be no more encouraging words than those of the last verse in the Acts passage:

“...everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” (Acts 10:43)

Forgiveness. There is no doctrine, no theme, no concept more central to the Christian faith than that of ‘forgiveness.’ In the words of that well-known, and well-spoken, preacher and Pastor T.D. Jakes, *“Here is the amazing thing about Easter; the Resurrection Sunday for Christians is this, that Christ in the dying moments on the cross gives us the greatest illustration of forgiveness possible.”*

Jesus, having been betrayed, humiliated, scourged, his body beaten and exhausted, the very spirit of his human flesh draining out of Him bloody drop by drop, Could yet look down in love from his deadly perch, and cry out in inconceivable compassion, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*

It is that amazing love that Jesus could show in extending forgiveness to those least worthy of such a gift that we too are called to extend to others. To understand just how important his idea of forgiving others is, we need go no further than the Prayer that our Lord Jesus taught us. For in that prayer we ask God to ‘forgive us our sins/debts/trespasses... AS we forgive others.’ In the way we measure out forgiveness to one another will it in turn be measured out to us. This is the ONLY petition of the Lord’s Prayer that is **conditional**... where OUR action is directly tied to GOD’s actions. SOBERING? It should be. Because **forgiveness** is the most God-centered trait... the essential core of the Gospel that lies quite literally, at the CRUX... the CROSS... of our Christian faith. Though he was a secular satirical English poet, Alexander Pope was yet right on this core Christian principle when he said, “To err is human; to forgive, divine.” When we forgive, truly, the Divine Christ is ‘revealed’ in us.

And finally, along with our **adoration** and our **confession**, we must ‘ACT’ with **THANKSGIVING**. And that one of the most crucial ways we demonstrate our **thanks** to God for our salvation is by bearing **WITNESS** to others about this Jesus to whom we owe our very lives... like our FOREVER lives! This whole passage from Acts is about how God calls His followers to show their gratitude: *“You KNOW the message...chosen by God as witnesses...to testify that*

he is the one ordained by God as judge... preaching peace by Jesus Christ... 'Chosen'... 'witnesses'... 'to testify'... 'preaching.' YOU KNOW THE DRILL... er, 'message.' HOWEVER... We also KNOW that those ways of delivering the 'message' that can be oh-so difficult. 'Witnessing'... 'testifying'... 'preaching.' And so, I would leave you with a couple of examples that might make that task of 'witnessing' a little less daunting.

As I mentioned earlier in discussing "The Case for Christ," Lee Strobel did exhaustive research to determine that there was indeed a great wealth of tangible evidence to prove the resurrection to be true. But do you know what ultimately 'won him over?' What 'clinched the deal' was his **wife's** living testimony. Staying steadfast not only in believing, but by **loving** her husband despite all he did to attack her new faith... And indeed, to attack HER for remaining faithful to this belief system he so doubted. Her **actions** bore witness to her **words**. Do you want someone to exhibit the love of Christ? Don't TELL them how...SHOW them how!

The second example of being a witness to God's truth came just yesterday. At the Men's Breakfast yesterday there was a young 8 y.o. boy in attendance named Luca. I didn't know Luca personally, but knew enough about his family situation to know he'd had a very hard first 8 years of his life. Our speaker was from N.A.M.I., and spoke of the challenges that those who struggle with one of many forms of mental illness... 1 in 4 Americans... have to deal with. And when it came time for Q & A, after a few inquiries from some of the men, I noticed that Luca was patiently holding up his hand. And when recognized, with absolutely no hesitation, or nervousness, he said... and I'll do my best here... that *"we shouldn't treat each other differently because of how we look or act. God put the same heart in every one of us. And that he sends people to us to speak to them through that heart."*

"And a little child shall lead them." My friends, little Luca was a living, breathing, speaking testimony to what Peter before him said: ***"I truly understand that God shows no partiality [favoritism],³⁵ but... anyone who honors him and does what is right is acceptable to him."*** (Acts 10:34-35) That we honor our Risen Lord both by our words and our actions. God put the same heart in every one of us... and sends people to us to speak to them through that heart. Christ was clearly revealed to us in that young man's life. The question is... how is Christ being revealed to others in OURS...?

PRAYER

“No matter how devastating our struggles, disappointments, and troubles are, they are only temporary. No matter what happens to you, no matter the depth of tragedy or pain you face, no matter how death stalks you and your loved ones, the Resurrection promises you a future of immeasurable good.” (Josh McDowell)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

“Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime.” (Martin Luther)

“I don’t know what the future holds, but I do know who holds my future.” (L.S.)
(also attrib. civil rts. leader Ralph Abernathy, Tim Tebow, Oprah Winfrey, Homer)

“...**that changes everything.**” (L.S., from The Case for the Resurrection)

“The resurrection of Jesus Christ was necessary to establish the truth of his mission and put the stamp of all-conquering power on his gospel.” (EM Bounds)