

The Triumph Of Christ's Passion

Bible Reading:
Matthew 28: 1-15
1 Corinthians 15: 1-28

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There is a pattern that we can see in life.
Not terribly pretty.
But a pattern nonetheless.
Have you seen it?

Professors of thermodynamics discuss it while teaching about heat flow theory as their 2nd law - the law of entropy; saying basically that heat flows downhill; from higher, concentrated forms to wider, more diluted forms.

Homemakers talk about it as they gaze with amazement into the wilderness known as a teenager's bedroom.

Automobile mechanics make a living from it - repairing and replacing parts that wear out, rust out, or fall out.

Those who manage organizations are constantly on guard against it - if they don't inject constant energy and attention into the development of their group, things will eventually come unglued, friction between people will set in, projects will come off the rails, conflicts will develop, stagnation will set in.

Our Canadian health care system strains under the weight of this pattern with an increasingly aging, creaking population.

That's how life functions on this planet called earth.
Right to the most basic of levels.
Left alone, things decay.
They go downhill.

All of us,
every single one of us
experiences this inevitable slide.

Even well-meaning government grant programs.

This past week some of us gathered here for the funeral of John Vlaming.
John's life on earth had experienced that slide, and ended as all of our lives are destined to do

-

- in death.

It's not how things were originally meant to be when they were created by God.
But it certainly is the way things are now.

The bible's explanation for this tragedy;
for this perverse gravitational-like pull from order to disorder, from structure to chaos,
from peace to conflict, from life to death –

The Bible's explanation is sin. Human sin.

In a perfect, structured, ordered, peaceful, life-rich cosmos our first human parents lived. They enjoyed their surroundings. They enjoyed each other. They enjoyed their God.

And in that perfect, structured, ordered, peaceful, life-rich setting
somehow
for some reason we'll never fully understand
they rebelled against God.

The fallout we've all experienced ever since.

It's depressing when you think about it.

In fact, the more you think about it, the darker it becomes.

Actually, if you let yourself really go deep into it, eventually you'll have to come out onto the side of many contemporary artists.

Look through the National Gallery, read many of today's works of literature, and you'll see a pattern that is deeply pessimistic about life.

It sees no meaning.

It sees no future.

It is dark, disjointed, despairing.

Our purpose here today is to celebrate that - in fact - we **don't** have to live with such pessimism or angst.

We're here to celebrate the central message of the Bible.

And that central message is this -

that while humans are off making a chaotic mess of their surroundings, and while the entire cosmos is caught in the convulsive fallout of the effects of sin, God has been, and continues to be, working to counter this tragedy. God is far too passionate to allow things to slide towards total destruction. God cares far too much about His creation about Humanity to allow it to be all totally destroyed.

God is deeply, passionately, fully in love with His Creation.

And He is working to save it.

He is working to save it

and

He **will** succeed.

That is the Bible's message.

And **that** is what we're here to celebrate today.

Oh, we still see enormous tragedy all around us.

In big ways and small we witness the effects of human sin and a broken creation:

- witness the headlines about bloodshed in Iraq; or the ongoing, and largely forgotten carnage in Congo, or the daily terror of children in Uganda afraid of being kidnaped and used as sex slaves or child soldiers.

- millions who go to bed hungry; and tens of thousands who die of starvation day after day after day.

- witness death this weekend due to cancer of one of our member's colleagues, a young father leaving a wife and two small children.

We see it and don't downplay it.

But today we celebrate that these events don't have the last word.

They are not a foreshadowing of the direction in which everything is headed.

The central message of the Bible,
the message we celebrate

is that God has been at work, and continues to be at work, shaping and moving human history towards a day when all horror, all tragedy, all despair will be ultimately, finally and totally reversed.

That's the Bible's message.

And at the centre of that message is the person of Jesus Christ.

On Friday we held the first part of this weekend's worship service. It was part one. Today's gathering is part two of the same, ongoing service. In both parts of this service we focus on the person of Jesus Christ.

On Friday we focused on the depths of His love;
just how incredibly deep his passion for human beings was.

We witnessed His descent into suffering and death.

It was a heavy time.

Because His suffering for us was so heavy.

It was all so heavy we can barely stand it.

Some of you have mentioned how it left you feeling uncomfortable;
that you even lost sleep over it.

Well, that's the same feeling which Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion Of The Christ*, has given to many.

People have condemned it.

They have squirmed under it.

They have insulted it.

Truth be told, while there is a bit of artistic license, the main thrust of the movie is absolutely right on in conveying the Bible's message.

The message is this -

that our human condemnation, sin and rebellion was all thrust onto the shoulders of one man - the Son-Of-God-man Jesus Christ.

God placed on Him the horror that all of us should have experienced.
in physical ways.

And - as Gibson metaphorically portrays in graphic detail -
in spiritual ways.

Jesus faced evil, demons and hell head on.

It is deep.

It is horrible.

But it cannot be denied.

It cannot be ignored.

It cannot be minimized.

You cannot downplay,

You cannot overemphasize,

You cannot exaggerate the extent of the effects of sin.

Neither can you downplay

Neither can you overemphasize

Neither can you exaggerate the extent of the Passion and love of God
which combats that sin through Jesus Christ.

Today we gather to celebrate that the powerful, passionate love of God in Christ, the powerful passion that seeks to rescue and restore -

That Redeeming Passion is greater

it is ***eternally greater***

and more powerful

than the power of evil which seeks to destroy.

Towards the end of Gibson's movie, after the crucifixion is over, there is a scene in which the character who metaphorically represents Evil and the Devil,

that character

screams.

You know what that scream is?

The director said in an interview that it is a scream of surprise and of terror.

For at that moment, Evil sees what is in store.

Evil thought it had destroyed Jesus.

It thought that it had conquered the Passionate Love of Christ.

That's what it ***thought***.

Well, friends -

Easter's message is that Evil miscalculated.

Evil got it wrong.

Evil underestimated the extent of Christ's Passion for humanity.

And Evil lost.

So Gibson's character screams.

The Bible tells us this -

1 Cor 2:8 But the rulers of this world have not understood it; if they had, they would never have crucified our glorious Lord.

*9 That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."
[NLT]*

Evil had **no idea** of how powerful God's passionate love was.

Evil had **no idea** that God's love could overcome death.

Evil had **no idea** that when death would be overcome, it's own doom would be sealed.

Easter's message is that **death lost.**

Jesus won.

He that **was** dead **is** now alive.

Bodily alive.

The grave is empty.

Eternally alive.

The grave will never see him again.

Evil didn't expect that to happen.

And neither did the women so many years ago when they trudged to the tomb with the embalming spices. It had been a violent weekend for them, a cruel one. Life had been swallowed up in death.

It was now Sunday morning and it was time to come and grieve in a quiet place. But hear what greeted them!

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!"

Can you possibly imagine the shock?

Impossible!! Against all odds!!

That's what the mind would say.

But angels.

An empty tomb.

Graveclothes laying to the side.

That Sunday, in the quiet of the morning mist,
the irreversible trend to which we all have grown accustomed,
the irreversible trend from life to death
against all expectations,
was reversed.

Some power, greater than death;
Some greater, holy power had been unveiled.

Jesus rose from the dead. Physically.

He was dead. The soldiers, who knew what dead was, said so.

He is alive. The grave is empty. People have seen him and given solemn testimony to that fact. Hundreds of people.

The resurrection is a fact of history.

And with that fact we can somehow begin to sense that all these other events which so much a part of history:

my own decaying health,
the mess in the teenager's room,
the rust on my car,
and my own tendency to doing evil instead of good
these events are now somehow affected,
altered by this one stupendously great event.

Death no longer is the stronger.

Hope was born where despair had reigned.

Can you sense it?

It is the beginning of the victory of life over death.

New life, eternal life.

Life for you and me,

for all who will accept the truth of the seemingly impossible events of that First
Easter Morning;

for all who will accept that Jesus is alive, really truly alive and that he is the one
who can lead us to eternal life.

So celebrate my friends!

Celebrate Easter.

Celebrate the holy power unveiled.

Celebrate that life isn't one horribly large tragedy, or exercise in pessimism.

Jesus has wrestled death and sin and Satan to the ground.

He has opened a path to eternal life for all who will follow him.

Today we live in hope -

- with the hope that we will see the unveiling of the heavenly promise;
- the promise which says that one day the trend which was started on Easter Sunday will swell and become the norm.
- It will completely swallow up death and evil and decay.
- They will be stopped in their tracks - forever.

It is the day that will be ushered in when Jesus, risen from the dead, returns in glory;
the day when, with a mighty roar, a new order will be introduced into the cosmos.
There will be life on earth. But it will be purified. It will be Easter for everyone and Easter everywhere.

All life.
No death. No decay. No sin.
Just pure, wonderful life.

Oh, I can't wait! Can you?
Until that time we can carry on in hope.
FOR EASTER IS HERE!

We can go back to our work knowing that this Jesus, with His holy power --
the power bigger and stronger than the forces of destruction and evil --
is alive and watching over us, even now.
We are not on some slippery slope to nowhere!
FOR EASTER IS HERE!

Because of Easter the things we do to try and bring some order and healing and hope into life are not done in vain. Jesus sees us do them. And he knows we do them in anticipation of the day when he will make all things new. And he blesses those things we do. He guides the results. And he builds on them. He considers them as being done to him, and for him. And he, the living Christ, smiles as we do them.

Yes – EASTER IS HERE!

We can make those trips to the cemetery without despair. We can face the graying of our own heads and the weakening of our own bodies without a sense of hopelessness, for we know that for the believer in Jesus death no longer has the final word.

It has become but a door to a greater and richer life, life in the very presence of God, eternal life!

EASTER IS HERE!

And so, while - yes - there are those who will tell you that Easter is about the renewing of the seasons, and rebirth in the cycle of life,
don't be satisfied with that.

We celebrate something bigger.
Much, much bigger.

We celebrate eternal life -
God's passion-filled gift to us.
Through Jesus.

