

VOTING FOR A WINNER

Acts 10:34, 37-43

There was a young boy in one of the churches that I have served that called this the “gravy song” day. Not familiar with that one? Neither was I, so I asked him to teach it to me. Rather impatiently, he made sure I understood I wasn’t much of a pastor if I didn’t know the gravy song, but he would teach it to me...and he began: “Up from the gravy arose.”

That’s the best theme song I can think of for our most Holy Day of the year...the day of Easter Sunday. Jesus rose from the grave! He was dead. No breath in him. No life in him. Sealed up in a closely guarded tomb, already forgotten by the ruling authorities, mourned by his closest disciples, decomposing in the ground. But, let’s face it, the stone at Jesus’ tomb was but a pebble to the Rock of Ages inside.

This is truly a day of celebration for all who bow at the name of Jesus. The Master has defeated the powers of death, decay and destruction. He is alive for evermore. As we ponder the meaning of Easter Sunday, we would do well to reflect on something that happened years ago to Representative Dan Kuykendal of Tennessee in the U.S. A man walked up to Kuykendal after he had won a hard-fought battle for election to the U.S. Congress. This man slapped Kuykendal on the back, pumped his hand vigorously and said sincerely:

"If I'd know'd you was going to win, I'd of voted for you." Those are the kind of supporters we all need, aren't they? "If I'd know'd you was going to win, I'd of voted for you."

I wonder if, on the last day, there will not be people approaching the throne of grace with the plaintive cry, "If we'd known you were going to win, we would have voted for you."

How do you vote for Christ in a secular world that has crowned materialism and greed as its reigning monarchs? How do you cast your ballot for the resurrection and the final victory of righteousness in a world saturated with sensuality, whose cry is, "Just do it!"? In a world of cynicism and despair, how do you let people know that Christ reigns in your heart this Easter Day and throughout the year?

I would like to suggest that there are four distinctive marks of a Christian: These are A TRANQUIL MIND, AN UNQUENCHABLE JOY, AN OUTGOING LOVE, and AN IRREPRESSIBLE SENSE OF VICTORY.

These four elements paint quite a complete picture of an Easter Christian.

LET'S BEGIN WITH A TRANQUIL MIND. A tranquil mind comes from knowing that God is at work in the world. A Christian is a prisoner of hope. What could have looked more hopeless than Good Friday? But then, at Easter, God says, 'From this moment on, no situation is untransfigurable.' There is no situation from which God cannot extract good.

This is the message of Easter to the world. No situation is untransfigurable. God can take the worst and bring out the best. God can lift up the humble, comfort the brokenhearted, give beauty for ashes, weakness for strength, life for death. Take the most hopeless situation, add God to the equation, and suddenly there is hope!

THE SECOND MARK OF RESURRECTION LIVING IS AN UNQUENCHABLE JOY. One year when I was doing a children's sermon on the meaning of Easter, I had a young person ask me, "What did Jesus say right after He came out of the grave?" IMMEDIATELY, the hand of one little girl shot up. "I know what He said," she insisted. "What was that?" And the girl exclaimed, "Tah-Dah!"

That little girl understands resurrection living. She gets what it's all about. The message of Easter is that God has entered human history; God has altered human history; God has exalted human history.

Think for a moment what that first Good Friday must have looked like. No one would have called it "good" back then. Eleven desperate, terrified men huddled in the locked Upper Room. Their Messiah was dead, their enemies surrounded them. All hope was gone.

Now let's return to the Upper Room just a few days later. The door is open. The sounds of laughter and joyful singing fill the air. Men cannot stop talking about the joy, the incredible wonder of the risen Christ. In fact, they want to go out and tell the whole world about it! Almost everything in the world was different. It was after Easter.

The disciples had discovered the unquenchable joy that comes from knowing that Jesus conquered death. These were men who did not need to say when they stood before the throne of God, "If I'd known you were going to win, I would have voted for you." A tranquil mind. An unquenchable joy.

AND AN OUTGOING LOVE. When Easter faith enters your life, like those transformed disciples, you want to share the message and the meaning of Easter with the whole world. You want everyone to know, as John 3: 16 tells us, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

When you truly grasp the incredible love of God that caused Him to humble Himself, become human, take on our sin and our suffering, and die for us--when you truly grasp how much God must love us, then you can't help but let that love flow through you to others.

There's a short poem that sums it up pretty well: "Someone is watching, someone is listening, Dying to know what we know so well. It will help them believe it, if in us they see it. That's why we must live to tell."

A tranquil mind. An unquenchable joy. An outgoing love.

AND, ONE THING MORE: AN IRREPRESSIBLE SENSE OF VICTORY. The Christian knows the outcome of human history, the end of the story--God wins. That is the message of Easter. We have the joy of knowing the war is won! We don't have to live in fear or defeat anymore. Jesus is alive, God is working in human history, and "no situation is untransfigurable" with God's grace.

One famous sport personality once said, "When you win, nothing hurts." There is a sense in which that is true for the believer in Christ. The testimony of the New Testament is that Christ's victory at Easter is just the beginning. Someday Jesus will come again to establish his kingdom on earth. He will remove the power of evil from this world. There will be no more suffering or pain or emptiness or death. No More!

The King of kings will raise his pierced hand and proclaim, "No more!"
The angels will stand and the Father will speak, "No more!"
Every person who lives and who ever lived will turn toward the sky and hear God announce, "No more!"
No more loneliness. No more tears. No more death. No more sadness. No more crying. No more pain.

That is the ultimate victory, and we as Christians can live out the joy of that victory today. We don't have to confine the resurrection to one Sunday a year. We can live out the joy of the resurrection every day of our lives! We can sing the "gravey song" any time we please. And other people will know the truth of the resurrection when they see the tranquil mind, the unquenchable joy, the outgoing love, and the irrepressible sense of victory that marks our lives. And we won't have to say, when we stand before God: "If I'd known you were going to win . . ."