



April 27, 2008

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

I Peter 3:13-22

John 14:15-21

“Living the Easter Faith”

“It doesn’t really matter what you believe, as long as you’re a basically good person and live a basically good life.” Have you ever heard that opinion expressed? I’ll bet we all have. What do you think? Is that really true? Is that all we need to live by?

It isn’t. It isn’t really true. And it actually doesn’t even make much sense. It DOES matter what we believe. Because what we believe tells us about goodness and living. What we believe will define for us what a good life is, how to go about trying to live it, what it means to be a good person, and so on.

Friends, we are still in the Easter season of the church calendar. We have rejoiced in God’s promise to turn all death to life. We observe Pentecost in two weeks, when we remember the gift of the Holy Spirit that weaves us into a community we call the church. We are an Easter people. We are called to live an Easter faith.

Also in two weeks, on Pentecost Sunday, we will celebrate the confirmation of the young people who have attended Confirmation Class this school year. They will claim and proclaim the Christian faith for themselves, promising to follow Jesus with God’s help. This seems like a perfect moment to consider what Easter people believe, so we might go out to live as Easter people are called to live.

First, Easter people accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. At confirmation, when we join a United Methodist Church we are asked to make that commitment. This is what is sometimes called “conversion”. It’s accepting the free gift of God’s grace and love, and it comes to us through his Son, Jesus, manifested in our lives

through the Holy Spirit. We don't earn God's love. We don't have to be good for God to love us. God just loves us. Mysteriously, completely, fully, deeply, and eternally. When we are good; when we are bad. Accepting this gift of God's love changes us. It changes the way life seems. It changes our understandings of ourselves, of our brothers and sisters, of the world, of the universe. Easter people stand upon the grace of God, given to us by Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

What does it mean for us to say "Jesus is my Lord"? This is not a natural thing for Americans. We like to be independent. We don't have kings or queens or ladies or lords. We are in charge of ourselves, thank you very much. But friends, if you choose to be a Christian, you're going to have to let go of that piece of being an American. Because, saying "Jesus is my Lord", the Lord of my life, means I am not the boss of myself any more. I am not the boss of my own life. I remember my kids squabbling when they were little if a brother or sister tried to tell them what to do--- they'd say, "You're not the boss of me!! You can't tell me what to do!" Well, are you grown up enough NOW to let someone ELSE be your boss? When we accept Jesus as our LORD we are saying, "I'm not smart enough, wise enough, mature enough, compassionate enough, humble enough, loving enough to be the boss of my own life." Instead of saying, "No one ELSE can tell me what to do!" as we live from day to day, we're going to turn to God and say, "Lord, please, tell me what to do, say, think." Easter people accept Christ as their Lord and Master.

What does it mean to say, "Jesus is my Savior"? I'm not sure this is any easier for us than accepting him as our boss! I think about this two ways.

First, sometimes I ignore God and take charge of my life. I rely on my own judgement, my own wisdom, my own strength. And if I do this long enough in enough challenging situations, I end up in a mess, in the muck, sinking in quicksand. I can't get myself out and I need a SAVIOR. God COULD say, "Hey, listen, you decided to go along on your own, without any instruction or help from me, so—save yourself!" But He doesn't do that. We can turn away from GOD, but God never turns away from us. He WILL reach out to pull us out of the mire; he is always there for us, if we only turn to him for help.

Second, Jesus is my Savior when I am wounded by tragedies of life. There are things that can happen to us, to people we love, that we cannot imagine surviving. We really think our only option is to sink into the pit and be swallowed up. But Jesus is the One who can pull you through, pull you out of ANYTHING.

Some years ago, now retired Bishop Woodie White shared a story about his mother. She was in her late seventies. Walking along the street one night, she was brutally assaulted and raped. She was taken to the hospital, where her son was

contacted. He says he was beside himself, full of rage and anguish. But when he got to the hospital; when he saw her in the bed; when he knelt by her side, when he took his mother's hand and found himself sobbing in her arms, she began to speak. "God is good," she said. Over and over she repeated those words, "God is good. God is so good."

When I first heard that story, I didn't understand it. How could that woman, after such a horrible assault, be full of the knowledge of the goodness of God? Now I think I may understand. She was feeling the truth—Jesus IS our Savior! He was bringing her through--- she could see the light in the darkness. Easter people accept Christ as their Savior.

Easter people try, in every way, to live as Christians. They take following Christ seriously. At all times. In all places. With all people. With friends. With enemies.

To live as a Christian, we have to learn all we can about Christ. We learn by reading the Bible, by observing and knowing other Christians, by worshipping together and studying together and praying together—seeking God's presence TOGETHER. That's why we ask those being confirmed, becoming members of the church, if they accept and embrace the faith as it is found in the Bible--- that's why we ask them if they promise to live a Christian life and live that life in the community of the church.

Finally, Easter people are asked to uphold the specific church where they are members. In the United Methodist church we promise to do that by PRAYING for the church-

Have you ever made that promise? Do you ever DO it? Do you pray for our church?

In the UMC we promise to uphold our church by being PRESENT. Are we present in worship? Are we present in all kinds of ways our church lives in the world? Are we present where there is a need? Have you ever promised your presence here at BMUMC? Did you mean it?

We promise to uphold our church by our gifts. This means gifts of money. Do you have an easy conscience when it comes to sharing your financial resources with the church? Have you made that promise? I don't care how young or old we are – if we have said we would do this—then we need to do it. Generously, joyously, trusting that God will not get us into financial trouble. Accumulating debts can get us into financial trouble. God won't lead us to do that.

We promise to uphold our church by our service. This means we offer the gift of time to our church. We offer the gift of our talents and abilities. We serve others in the name and in the Spirit of Christ. I did a wedding at recently where the sister of the bride sang a solo during the service. What a gift. Not only to her sister, the groom, the guests. To me. The sound of her voice soothed my soul and spoke to me of God's reality right here, right now. There are so many ways God loves, speaks, touches, helps and heals. And many of them are through OUR time, OUR talents, OUR service. Easter people support their own church, through prayers, presence, gifts and service.

What we do here today, who we are, who we are becoming- this is not trivial business to be taken lightly! Promises we have made, or we are considering making—promises are sacred. They do not WIN us God's love, but they are the fruit that we bear from the seeds of God's love planted deep within. Jesus said this. He said it, straight out: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. The one who has my commandments and keeps them, that one loves me."

Will we go out today to live the Easter faith? Let's go into the hurting world, remembering Jesus great commandment "Love one another as I have loved you." Will you make the promises God yearns for you to make? If you make those promises will you keep them? God is counting on us. By his Spirit we can do this! Amen. Amen.