

Easter Day 2009*
St. Margaret's, Annapolis

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.
Amen.

We have finally come to this day! By way of the long season of Lent and the intense days of Holy Week, we are finally here to celebrate the Feast of the Resurrection!

Alleluia, Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia!

During the past few days... over Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday... we have been participating in the events that led to this point. By virtue of *anamnesis*, we have called that past into the present. This is much more than simply remembering or re-enacting. It is to bring the past into the present so that we become participants with Jesus and the disciples at the Passover meal in the upper room, in the garden when he was arrested, and finally at the crucifixion – all to bring us to this point: his glorious resurrection.

It was a morning much like this one, in which the women found the tomb empty and went away to tell the other disciples the news. All of this has been about one thing: GOD'S DIVINE PLAN OF SALVATION; that plan being about giving us a way to break free from the patterns of sin and destruction in which we have been stuck. In other words, it was about saving us from ourselves.

It's all about salvation.

I don't know about here in Maryland, but in the deep South where I'm from, it's common to have some well-meaning person buttonhole you and ask: Have you been saved? This is usually someone with a specific agenda and a specific definition of "being saved."

What I'm fond of doing is to answer: Yes! And when their next question is: Oh, great... when? I answer: Two thousand years ago. But I can tell you that once they get it, it's an answer that doesn't satisfy their agenda; that agenda being to make sure that I have fulfilled the formula of having committed my life to Christ by accepting Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

Now, that is a perfectly legitimate and acceptable approach to understanding God's plan of salvation. However, it can be -- *can be* -- a limited approach. It makes salvation a purely personal, individual experience, when in fact, scripture makes it clear that God's plan is to bring about the salvation of *all creation!* And it raises questions about what, if anything, we have to do to participate in this plan. All this gets at the very heart of religion... of our faith and what salvation means to us.

John Killinger, who is a Presbyterian minister and author, says that most people choose religion in the negative rather than the positive form. In other words, they choose to focus on the "thou shalt nots" rather than the "thou shalls." They -- we -- choose the rules and restrictions, the law and judgment, rather than freedom and grace. Killinger said, "I had an aunt who had enough religion to make her miserable but not enough to make her happy."

If we've been saved, what's not to be happy about? Our answer to that question depends of what we mean when we say "saved." For many good Christian people, being saved means saved from hell; that when they die, they will go to heaven. And being saved by that definition is usually associated with being good, with not sinning, between now and the end -- meaning death.

If you ask me, that sounds like enough religion to make anybody miserable and not enough to make them happy.

Let me tell you what I think salvation means.

- It means that our sinfulness no longer separates us from God. That because of Jesus' willingness to stand in for us, our sins will no longer be held against us.
- It means that no matter what we've done or what we've suffered, we have God's help to heal and become whole.
- It means, whatever life throws our way and no matter how lonely or desolate we may *feel*, we are never truly alone.
- It means that we have God's grace and life-giving spirit to help us break the patterns of sin and destruction that threaten to undo us, that keep us in bondage, and that stand between us and God.
- It means that now, thanks to Jesus, NOTHING stands between us and God. Between you and God. Nothing.
- Most of all, it means that God is saying YES to us; YES to you.

Listen to this wonderful poem by Kaylin Haught:

*I asked God if it was okay to be melodramatic
and she said yes
I asked her if it was okay to be short
and she said it sure is
I asked her if I could wear nail polish or not wear nail polish
and she said honey
she calls me that sometimes
she said you can do just exactly what you want to
Thanks God I said
and is it okay if I don't paragraph my letters
Sweetcakes God said
Who knows where she picked that up
What I'm telling you is
Yes Yes Yes*

Salvation, being saved, is ultimately about God's YES to us. Are there rules to live by? Of course. Are there things we should or shouldn't do? Naturally. But those things are incidental. They are not the basis of our salvation. I say again: salvation is about God's YES to us.

So, short, skinny, tone deaf... tall, fat (yes, even fat), athletic or not athletic, artistic, color blind, rich, poor...

*Sweetcakes, God says
Who knows where she picked that up
What I'm telling you is
YES YES YES*

Next time someone asks you if you've been saved, just say YES!
But more importantly, hear God saying YES to you.

Alleluia, Christ is risen.
The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia!

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