

What Really Matters

Bible Reading:
1 Corinthians 15: 1-8

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Pastor Max Lucado shared an experience of a coffee-shop conversation he had with a university student some years ago [*No Wonder They Call Him Saviour* p.6].

"I just want to know what counts" the student had said in his deep Irish brogue. The statement was sincere.

"Don't talk to me of religion. I've been down that road. And please, stay off theology. I have a degree in that. Get to the heart of it, okay? I want to know what counts."

His name was Ian. He found out that Max was a Christian, something he had been wanting for himself but now had pushed aside out of frustration and disenchantment.

"I grew up in the church," he explained. "...But I quit. Something just didn't click. It's in there somewhere.... At least I think it is."

He was earnest.

Somewhere along the way he summed his frustration up with this question -

"What really matters? What counts? Tell me. Skip the periphery. Go to the essence. Tell me the part that really matters."

The part that really matters.....

Tell me - What would YOUR answer be?

What would you tell this hungry, frustrated, and disenchanting soul who desperately wanted the treasure, the meat?

Can you hear his question?

Can you taste his frustration?

"Don't give me religion," he was saying.

"Give me what matters."

Perhaps you have had a conversation similar to this with someone you know.

Perhaps you find yourself silently asking the question along with Ian, maybe experiencing the same frustration he did. Looking at the whole realm of Christian teaching and experience and wondering - what's it really all about?

What's at the heart of the matter?

Maybe you've gone through the acts of religion and faith and found yourself more often than not at a dry well. Prayers seem empty. Goals seem unthinkable.

Is this all there is? Sunday attendance. Pretty songs. Faithful giving. Fancy crosses. Neat suits. Leather bibles. Nice and all, but....

where is the heart of it?

Go to the source of Christian teaching, the Bible.

Of its 1000 or so pages, what is the central part? Among all the do's and don't and should's and shouldn't's, what is essential? What is indispensable?

The Old Testament? The New?

Grace? Baptism?

Speaking of hell or heaven, or love, or what?

If you could have nothing except ONE thing in the Christian faith, what would that be?

Read with me, please from

1 CORINTHIANS 15.1-8 p.176

"For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received...."

There it is: **first** importance..... keep on reading.

"...that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve."

There it is:

Jesus was killed, buried, and resurrected.

Almost seems too simple.

But this is it.

Here, hanging with the cross and the dramatic events of that cross, is the focus, the center-point of all of Christianity, all of human history for that matter.

This is what counts....

of first importance

the fulcrum of our faith.

If this Easter weekend event is absent,

our faith is empty.

All the talk of love and faithfulness and commandments and Shepherds; all the efforts of choirs and readings and giving and church-going; ALL OF IT is but fool's gold without

the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

To paraphrase one writer, "to try and live a Christian life, to accept or reject it, without a careful examination of the events surrounding the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, is like deciding on a car without looking at the engine. Being religious without believing in one's heart that the Bible's claims about Easter are true is like owning a Mercedes with no motor.

"Pretty package, but where is your power?" [Lucado, p.7].

Friends,

the power that we carry to the world is this -

This Jesus, who lived on earth as a blue-collar Jew, is God's Son.

He died on a cross as one rejected by God and left to face all the forces and powers of hell alone, bearing hell for the sins of humanity - your sins and mine.

He was buried in a carved-out Palestinian tomb on Friday and lay in it cold and motionless - dead - all day Saturday.

On Sunday morning he, that was very dead, rose from the tomb very much alive!

Death could not hold him down. The guardians of the gates of hades were beaten up and pushed out of the way.

He was supreme master of life. The territory which the kingdom of death had captured was repossessed.

In the days following Easter this Living Jesus appeared to his followers -

to Peter,

to the others of the twelve disciples,

then to many others - over 500 of them!

In other words, this is no myth.

Too many people saw him and witnessed of the truth of this in the days when this letter to the Corinthians was written for it to be merely some fanciful story.

It is the truth,

a fixed and definitive fact of history.

And as this Jesus died to pay for the sins of all who believe in him,
so also he rose from the dead
so that all who believe could follow the same path,
past the same wounded and defeated guardians of the gates of death,
and into the eternal halls of heaven to live,
joyfully, completely...
forever!

This is the central stuff of the faith.
Everything else - all rules for conduct, prayers, giving, discussions, singing, readings,
everything -
- revolves around this Easter material.....
of first importance!

This is the stuff that caused 12 people to stand here today to publically profess their faith.
This is that stuff that joins believers in this church to believers in churches throughout Ottawa, across
the province, throughout the world, and throughout time.
This is the stuff of life,
real,
abundant,
eternal life.

Believe it, trust in it, shape your life around it and you will live forever as a child of God, a member of his family,
cared for and love by him, destined to an eternity with him.
Ignore it, reject it, compromise on it and you are headed for a life alone, outside of God's family,
destined to eternity in darkness, the spirits of night your only companions.

Pastor Lucado, who had the conversation with Ian, thought about their encounter in the days that followed and
came to realize that this was what he would say if he ever had a chance to grab a coffee with Ian again.
He would sit down and examine the goings-on of that first Easter weekend with him. Easter is, my
friends, without any question THE central event in Christianity.

Which is why we sing, and celebrate.
It's the engine and power behind the music we're making here this evening.

Christ is risen!
He has the victory!
And we share that victory with Him!

For this,
more than anything else
this is the stuff of life
THAT REALLY MATTERS!