

"The Hope of Glory"

Sermon Preached at Foundry United Methodist Church

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April 27 2003

John 20:19-23

Colossians 1:24-29

Well, preachers traditionally go on vacation the week after Easter. The excuse we usually give is that, because we've been through a busy season, we're tired and need the rest. The real reason, is that we are not fit to be around.

The week after Easter could be a let down. I have a friend who tells me that every Lent he gives up chocolate. For seven weeks he goes with out chocolate and then the week after Easter he eats seven times more chocolate than he ever had before and feels awful.

The week after Easter is like the hour after a wonderful party, when your last guest has left. You look around the house and you see all of the glasses half-empty , the coffee cups that need to be washed, the half-eaten food that has to be put a way, the wine stain on your Persian rug and the glass rings on your new coffee table.

The week after Easter is like the hour after a party when everyone's gone home and there's a lot of clean up to do.

The thing about life is that the high points of life are only points. The high points of life are only points in the midst of a lot of ordinary living. Most of life is overwhelming ordinary. Most of the time we live in ordinary days. For every year that has a Christmas, a Easter and a Birthday there are at least 362 other days of the year.

We spend much of our life anticipating - anticipating a holiday, a graduation, a job, a wedding, a promotion, retirement. We spend a lot of time anticipating what comes next and then it comes and goes so quickly. And life goes back to being ordinary. Most of life are ordinary days.

The Apostle Paul's letter to the Colossian Christians is a letter for ordinary Christians living in ordinary times. It speaks to a Christian phenomenon I have come to call the BB King syndrom - the thrill is gone.

Most of life isn't lived on a mountain top. Most religious experience is mundane, not ecstatic. Most religious experience is ordinary time. Most of the time the wafer and the grape juice mostly taste like wafer and grape juice. The Methodist professor of worship James White use to say that for him the hard part of Communion wasn't believing that the bread and wine were the body and blood of Christ. For him, he said, the hard part was believing that the wafer and grape juice were bread and wine.

Most of our religious experience is wafer-and-grape-juice experience.

The Colossians, like many Christians who live in ordinary times, were tempted to look for ways to somehow make their spiritual life more glorious, more exciting, more profound, more thrilling.

Some of the Colossians pursued super-religion, super-religious experience. Even though they were Gentiles, they had themselves circumcised so that they could become like Jews. They ate super-kosher diets, became more Jewish than the Jews, looking for a religious experience in a spiritual tradition that wasn't even their

own.

Some of them pursued esoteric and sophisticated theologies, thinking that if they just read all the theology in the world, if they just understood it all intellectually, maybe then their sense of God's presence would be more profound and more real.

Some joined cults. Some gave away all of their possessions. Some gave their bodies to be burned. Some became ascetics eating only dried bread and water - hoping to have the kind of religious experience that would make their spiritual life thrilling.

Well, most of life is not a thrill. Most of life is ordinary days.

What the Apostle Paul was trying to tell the Colossian Christians was this: that Christ is in the midst of the ordinary. Christ is in you ordinary people. The hope of our thrill, the hope of our glory, is the Christ in us as we live out our mundane, day-to-day lives.

William Barkley, writing a commentary on the Lord's Prayer - when he gets to the line that says "Give us this day our daily bread," Barkley says that one of the hard things about life is that it's so persistently daily.

The thrill is in the ordinary. Christ is in us.

The Apostle Paul wrote this to the Colossians while he was not physically well. It adds a poignant touch to what he has to say, because there is nothing in life much more ordinary and tedious than illness. Everything can become a chore when you are ill. Eating becomes a chore. Trying to sleep through the night. Waking up in the morning still tired. Dragging your weary body through the day. The Apostle Paul says it is this kind of ordinary life that Christ is in the midst of.

Christ is in you when you don't have enough energy to make it through the afternoon. Christ is in you when you can't get things in your life to work right. Christ is in you when you don't know how you're going to tolerate your co-workers another day. Christ is in you when you spend your day rolling the rock up the hill, only to have it roll back down at the end of the day, and you have to push the thing up again the next day. In the midst of this is where Christ is.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is the story of Elijah. Elijah was a prophet and he did what prophets are supposed to do. He took on the powers and the principalities of this world, and he announced that the emperor wore no clothes, and he called for change and justice.

Then, in the middle of his career as a prophet, the voice of God dried up in Elijah's life. It's an awful thing if you are a prophet whose job is to announce the judgement of God, and you've announced the judgement of God, and you gotten yourself marginalized and out on a limb, and suddenly the voice of God dries up in your life. This is an awful thing.

So Elijah hid in a cave trying to find the voice of God again. The Bible says that a strong wind passed, and the voice of God wasn't in the wind. Then there was an earthquake and the voice of God wasn't in the earthquake. Then there was a fire, and the voice of God wasn't in the fire.

We mistranslate what the Bible says next. We translated it as though it says that Elijah heard the voice of God as a still small voice, but that's not what it says. Caryle Marney called this translation a Protestant cover up. What the Bible really says is that Elijah came out of the cave, and what he heard was stone silence.

The way that I might translate it, would be to say that Elijah heard the voice of God in the absolutely

ordinary. The absolutely ordinary. After looking for the voice of God in all of the spectacular experiences outside his cave where Elijah really heard the voice of God again, was in the absolutely ordinary.

Christ is in us, we who are ordinary people. Christ is in the midst of our ordinary lives. Christ is in the midst of the tedious. Christ is there when the party is over and the carpet needs cleaning and the dirty dishes need washing.

And this is a glory that is much more profound than any thrill that we could seek, inside or outside the church, anywhere -- knowing that Christ takes tasteless wafers and sugary grape juice and consecrates them, just the way he consecrates your life and mine for the sake of the glory of God.