

"CHRISTIANITY: NOT A FEEL GOOD RELIGION"

John 20:19-29

Sermon preached by Dr. Cahill

Babcock Presbyterian Church

Sunday, March 30, 2008

Last week we began our Easter celebration singing **"Jesus Christ is Risen Today, Our triumphant holy day."** And so with victorious hymns, anthems, and celebrative prayers, we joyfully welcomed the Risen Christ to fill up the empty spaces in our lives. Because of the prevailing atmosphere in this sanctuary it was easy to get **"pumped up."** Some might even say, **"I got my Easter fix,"** and left feeling really good.

Let me share a concern with you. Even though it was right to throw a big party for the Risen Christ, even though there is an upside, there is also a downside to our high holy day celebrations.

The upside is that when done in Spirit and in Truth our worship celebrations give God the praise he deserves.

The downside of joyful inspirational worship is that the worship can be perceived to be an end in itself. In short we leave saying, **"My what a beautiful service,"** instead of saying, **"My, what a beautiful God."** Do you catch the difference? The power of the service gets in the way of God, instead of showing the way to God. We then judge the service by how we feel. If you feel uplifted and good and pumped up the service was a success. But what happened on Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday were you still **"pumped up"**, or were you down again as you faced the ongoing frustrations and the routines of your day to day living? If you did experience a let down are you then left to wonder **"Where is that joyful experience I had on Sunday? I don't feel the presence of God anymore. Has God left me? Was I kidding myself. I don't feel good about myself or my faith right now. What's wrong with me?"**

We live in a time when the prevailing secular culture places such a high premium on feelings. Human emotions, how you **"feel"** about yourself or your sense of purpose, have become the ultimate measuring stick that determines the general quality of just about everything. If it feels good it must be O.K. If your feelings outweigh common sense, go with your feelings. But the problem is feelings are not always a reliable barometer to measure the ultimate reality of any given situation. And feelings can sometimes mislead you.

It may shock you when I say the Bible doesn't care very much about how you feel. This is not because God is heartless and insensitive. Quite the contrary Jesus himself throughout his life experienced the whole range of human emotions and always responded appropriately and lovingly whenever anyone he encountered was hurting.

So when I say the Bible doesn't care much how you feel I mean to say that whether or not you **"feel"** the presence of God is not important. Whether or not you always **"feel"** the love of God is less important. What does matter is that you are willing place your life in God's hands and then wait and see how God's commitment to you unfolds.

Thomas' problem with the news of resurrection was that he could not **"feel"** Jesus' risen presence. That's why he said, **"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hand and put my finger in**

the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Question: Why is it that sometimes you see people become so enthusiastic about a cause or a project and then just as suddenly lose interest. Maybe it's the same reason why teenagers of all ages fall head over heels in love with someone but then, just as quickly fall out of love because another pretty face has suddenly entered into the picture. So many of the popular songs you hear on the radio make the proposition **"let's fall in love."** But hopefully as we grow older and wiser we realize love is based on more than feelings. After the initial infatuation subsides, if the relationship is to deepen and grow there needs to be something more. There needs to be a decision to love. As I tell the couples I marry, each day you must recommit yourself to loving the other whether you feel like it or not.

Can you imagine how precarious our salvation would be if God's love for us was based simply on feelings? Thank God it isn't, therefore how could God love us and how could God expect us to also love the unlovable? And quite frankly, how could we grow in our love for God?

I'm sure you've experienced this: You are praying and then all of a sudden in some indescribable way you sense the very presence of God. You feel close to God and good about the direction your life is going.

But then, explicably suddenly this wonderful spiritual experience this spiritual **"high"** you are having dries up. You now find it harder to pray. You read the scriptures and it's just words. So you get discouraged, your desire to pray and be with God quickly disappears and soon you are out of the discipline of making time to be with God. Why? Because it no longer feels good and you are afraid you are wasting both God's time and yours.

Has this happened to you? If it has you are in very good company. Everybody, even the most prayerful saints experience those long dry periods during which they cannot **"feel"** the presence of God. Their prayers seem to go unanswered. The growth spurts they've experienced in the past eludes them. And yet, in faith, and with deeper trust these good saints continue to pray and search the scriptures and they continue to seek out the presence of God with the same intensity they sought out God when they could **"feel"** God's love and presence pulsating through their very being. Every day, whether they feel like it or not they make the decision to love God, fully trusting that every single day God decides to love us whether we feel God's presence or not.

That's why I said earlier the bible doesn't care very much how you and I feel on a given day. Instead the bible places before us a promise that is backed up by the cross and the empty tomb.

My friends, whether you are standing at the foot of the cross or the door of the empty tomb, whether you are in an intense season of spiritual growth or in the midst of a dry desert- like time of life, always remember that faith is so much more than feelings, that your well being as a human being and a child of God and a disciple of Christ is founded on this promise. **"I am the resurrection and the life. If you believe in me you will not perish but have life everlasting."**

So, make the decision decide to love and trust in Christ and then, by the grace of God live in his Easter light.

Let us pray!