

April 14, 2024

Let us pray.

O God of Love, O God of Truth;

Let us say strong things gently and gentle things strongly.

Let us speak the truth in love to all  
and love the truth that lives in each.

Let us hear the truth as we each need it and live that truth.

O God, we heed it through Jesus; Your Word & our Lord.

Amen.

### **Funding The Resurrection**

(A Sermon for "Planned Giving" Sunday)

*Matthew 28:11*

*"While they were going, some of the guards (from Jesus' tomb) went into the city and confessed to the chief priests everything that had happened. The chief priests and elders devised a scheme of hush money for the soldiers. They coached them, 'Say that his disciples came by night and stole him away while you were sleeping.' If the governor hears about this, we'll lie for you so you won't get in trouble.' So the soldiers took the money and did as they were directed...Meanwhile (the risen) Jesus came to the disciples in Galilee on the mountain. When some of them saw Jesus they doubted but most worshiped him. Jesus directed them, 'All authority in heaven and earth has been given me and I give it to you. Go and make disciples of all; baptizing, teaching, showing all I have commanded you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And remember, I am with you always and in every age.'"*

We don't often hear about it at Easter,  
but there was a money trail leading to the resurrection.

The trail began to show itself all the way back  
to the Monday before Easter.

On that day,  
Jesus angrily overturned the money-changers tables.

The back-story is  
that many Jews had traveled hundreds of miles,  
to come to Jerusalem and experience Passover  
at least once in their lives.

And when finally made it there,  
they wanted to make a sacrifice to God  
- a dove perhaps, or a goat or a lamb.

As these pilgrims stood on that vast Temple court yard,  
which some archeologists think was a huge as  
34 football fields,  
they could see numerous stalls set up by merchants  
willing to sell them such sacrifices,  
but at highly inflated extortionist prices.

That Monday before Easter,  
when Jesus saw all this - well, he went ballistic!  
(It was like selling bibles for a political campaign)

Seeing this kind of cheating and greed,  
he overturned the money-changers tables,  
and that inspired the chief priests and temple officials  
to conspire to kill Jesus.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> step of that money trail happened on Thursday.  
At some point during the work day,  
Judas came to those same chief priests & temple officials.  
He made them a deal.  
For 30 pieces of silver,  
he would point Jesus out to the police  
who had been sent to arrest him in the Garden of  
Gethsemane.

The sign Judas would give to them? A kiss!

The 3<sup>rd</sup> step of that money trail happened on Saturday,  
sometime after Jesus was dead.

This is the story we heard this morning:

*“While they were going, some of the guards (from Jesus’  
tomb) went into the city and confessed to the chief priests  
everything that had happened. The chief priests and elders  
devised a scheme of hush money for the soldiers. They coached  
them, ‘Say that his disciples came by night and stole him away  
while you were sleeping.’ If the governor hears about this, we’ll  
lie for you so you won’t get in trouble.’ So the soldiers took the  
money and did as they were directed.*

\*\*\*\*\*

Someone once said,  
**“Few documents in a person’s life  
reveal their religion, more than their checkbook!”**

Well, few aspects of the Easter story  
reveal the sins and injustices that got Jesus killed,  
more than this money-trail.

Money helped get him condemned.

Money helped get him betrayed.

Hush money helped pay for a cover-up.

In so many ways, money helped contribute  
to all the steps that got Jesus killed.

This describes perfectly the nature of money.

It can be used for good or for bad.

It can be used in ways that betray, condemn and lie  
about everything that Jesus lived for and died for.

Money helped fund the crucifixion,  
but what about the resurrection?

In some way, shape or form,  
the resurrection was meant to redeem how we use  
our money.

And here’s how.

Those people who survived Jesus,  
who loved him so much that every time they got together,  
and talked about his body of teachings,  
and reminisced over their body of memories,

and felt his spiritual presence in such a powerful and visceral way that they saw him risen -  
alive amongst them,  
those people were so filled with the resurrection  
that they called themselves "The Body of Christ".

Now, certainly, the Body of Christ,  
which we now call "The Church"  
witnesses to the resurrection in so many ways:  
every time we strive to heal sick and broken bodies,  
every time we revive dead relationships via counseling,  
every time we raise up depressed downtrodden lives,  
every time we inspire new hope in children,  
every time we bring out in each of us  
our higher angels - all this is resurrection.

But that first church of resurrection also realized  
they would need money.

And so they came up with a scheme -  
and we find that scheme in Acts 2:43

*"All who believed were together,  
and held all things in common.  
They would sell their possessions and goods  
and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.  
Day by day, they spent lots of time together...  
with glad and generous hearts,  
praising God and having goodwill toward all people."*

I wouldn't call it Communism,  
but it certainly was communal-ism.

And they saw it as their way of funding the resurrection.

The reason we know this  
is because of another story - a sad sounding story  
that I have never heard preached about before till now!

It is the story of Ananias and his wife Sapphira.

They were members of that early  
church of resurrection.

And they just sold a piece of property  
but conspired to keep some of the profits  
for themselves.

So they brought the remaining proceeds to Peter,  
the head of the Jerusalem church,  
who felt something sinister was going on.

He said to Ananais,

*"Why has Satan filled your heart  
making you willing to lie to the Holy Spirit,  
and keep some of your profits for yourself?"*

And wow! The story has an infamous ending,

*"When Ananais heard this he fell down dead.*

Then, the same fate befell his wife Sapphira.

No wonder no one preaches on this story?  
It's kinda "in your face" isn't it?

Now, not for a moment do I think Ananais & Sapphira  
both actually and instantaneously  
fell down physically dead - that's not how God works.  
To me, their death is purely symbolic.  
Given how resurrection was funded,  
and how Ananais and Sapphira's lied,  
they made themselves dead to their church.

\*\*\*\*\*

And this, friends,  
leads me to the connection between today's sermon  
and what's happening later this morning  
during our 2<sup>nd</sup> Hour,  
when the Bd. Of Trustee's initiates their  
"Planned Giving" program.

A planned giving program is a formal way for  
every single church member  
to not die to their church after they actually die.  
A planned giving program is a way for every one of us  
to contribute to resurrection.

Look around this room.  
These lovely stained-glass windows

were all given in memory of someone who died.

Few of us, if any, know them personally,  
but their spirit lives on through their gifts.

Look at the various plaques cemented to various walls  
in the hallways of this building.

They represent the on-going generosity  
of members long dead,  
who helped this congregation witness to resurrection.

Look at the newest list of donors to the church's  
new addition?

Renovation can be a part of resurrection.

Over the last 27 years  
this church has been blest by numerous members  
who, after their death,  
wanted their beloved church to thrive & live on,  
and so, included us in their wills.

The Baldwin Fund, the McGuffin Fund,  
The funds from Charlotte Brooks & Zaide Boyce,  
are all acts of planned giving,  
and each, in their own way, funds resurrection.

Now, my financial knowledge is pretty meager.

And so the “how”s & “wherefore”s  
of any planned giving program I gladly leave to experts.



But spiritually speaking,  
it is easy to think of planned giving program  
in terms of resurrection.

Once we die - we can remain dead to our church.

The truth of what we love and believe in  
can be hushed or betrayed - once we die.

Or, once we die, we can help fund resurrection  
and one small way to do that  
is through planned giving.

In closing,

let me say that nearly all of us already do planned giving.

Yes - it's called insurance.

Think of the various kinds of insurance you pay for:

liability insurance against collision,

insurance against theft or damage or acts of god  
on your home,

medical insurance in case of disease,

life insurance to alleviate the cost of funerals  
or afterlife debt,

insurance against malpractice,

insurance against accident.

Most of our planned giving - called insurance -  
targets death, disaster, disease or destruction.

Why not, friends,

why not do planned-giving in favor of resurrection?

Prayer of Pastoral Care Easter 3 April 14, 2024

Psalm 4 says: *“Let the light of your face shine on us, O LORD! I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety.”* Ps.4: 6b, 8.

Let us pray for the needs of the world, saying,

Hear us, O God, **your mercy is great.**

Holy God, as the risen Christ opened the minds of the disciples to understand the Scriptures, and gave power through the Holy Spirit to walk boldly in this world, open your people today to the healing, wisdom, and faith given in your Word.

Hear us, O God, **your mercy is great.**

As Christ Jesus showed his wounded hands and feet to the terrified apostles, reveal to your church, and to people of prayer in every faith, the wounds of our neighbors, the fears of individuals and families, and the ways toward healing. Hear us, O God, **your mercy is great.**

Author of life, we pray for peace among nations, peace throughout communities, and peace within families.

We pray for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza, and for an avalanche of aid to reach doctors and hospitals, civilians and hostages, & for all at risk of starvation, many subsisting on less than 300 calories a day. We pray for safety and peace to prevail in Haiti, in Ukraine, and other areas of violence in our world. Guide leaders and voters, judges and juries, we pray. Teach diplomacy and help us to find ways for the welfare of all creatures, and people.

Hear us, O God, **your mercy is great.**

May your brightness burn in places shrouded in violence. Unveil the needs of our own hearts so that we may know the power of vulnerability. Your Son was raised to life from the grave. Show us again that life comes from death.

Hear us, O God, **your mercy is great.**

We lift before you in prayer those on this church's immediate needs list. ...

Trusting in your abundant mercy, O God, we commend into your care all for whom we pray, and our own lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*\*HYMN # 628 Precious Lord, Take My Hand*

OFFERING As Jesus gave himself fully for us, let us help bring wholeness and healing to others through our tithes and offerings.

**\*DOXOLOGY**

**\*PRAYER** Merciful God, we offer to you a portion of what you have given us. Work your grace through these gifts so that others may share in your joy; in Jesus' name. Amen.

*\*CLOSING HYMN # 464 God of Grace and God of Glory*

