

Easter Sunday

My family and I just moved. It was the first time we have moved within the same town. Alisha and I had moved four different times before this most recent move, and for the most part every move went fairly smoothly. There are always headaches associated with every move but this latest move had more headaches and frustrations than any other move. We only moved three streets down but it might as well have been a move to China or somewhere else across the world. When you pack up a house you pack up a house no matter how close or far you are traveling. The disadvantage to moving so close is that you tend to not pack as well as you should. In other words, you say, "Oh it's only three blocks just throw it in the trunk. It's only three blocks there's no need to tie it down. It's only three blocks just throw it in that box over there." Needless to say, it's been a complete disaster trying to organize our stuff in the new house.

What do Mucinex and a toaster have in common? They were packed in the same box. What do underwear and a waffle maker have in common? They were packed in the same box. However, the underwear was neatly folded and tucked inside the waffle maker. What do a baseball and toothpaste have in common? They were packed in the same box. What do a cell phone charger and a baseball glove have in common? They are both lost and nowhere to be found. I think the most frustrating part of the whole move is that our routine has been interrupted. I was cooking cinnamon rolls the other morning for breakfast and when the timer went off on the oven, I opened it up to see if the rolls were ready. They looked perfect so I reached in the drawer to get an oven mitt but there was not an oven mitt in the drawer. It was in that drawer in the old house so I figured it would be in the same drawer in the new house. I was wrong and frantically tore the kitchen up looking for an oven mitt before the cinnamon rolls burned. I finally found them in the last place I looked. Why does it work that way? Why is it that the first drawer is never the right drawer? Later that same night we had to go to Wal-Mart to get some trash bags and other related items and guess what, I couldn't find anything at Wal-Mart either! As many of you know the store is undergoing a remodel and everything seems to be out of place. I can't even go to Wal-Mart and find what I need!

Let's face it, as much as we hate to admit it we are creatures of habit, some of us more than others. To some degree all of us want things and even people in their proper place, but this Sunday the routine has been interrupted. This Sunday God has decided to throw everything up in the air

and disrupt routines. I was at a Lion's Club meeting the other day and the person who had the program for the day was unable to be there. So our group had lunch and talked about what is going on in the community and at each person's place of work. The president of the Lion's Club asked me, "Brad, what's going on at the church these days." I replied, "Oh, not much, just the resurrection of Christ." What's going on this morning? Just the resurrection of Christ, that's all. If you got something better I'd like to hear it. The church, unlike any other organization in the history of humankind, has a message that cannot be matched or topped.

As you can imagine, all four gospel authors included the account of the resurrection of Jesus in their gospels. How could you leave it out? All four tell basically the same story – God raised Jesus from the dead. While the people and events of the different gospel accounts are different, the basic message is the same. What is interesting, however, is what those who witnessed the resurrection firsthand were told to do afterwards. In every gospel they were told to go and tell what they had experienced. In Matthew it was Mary Magdalene and another woman named Mary. The angel said to them, "I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; he has been raised. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead." In Mark's gospel it was not just Mary Magdalene and Mary, but Mary Magdalene, Mary, and another woman named Salome. In Mark's account an angel instructs the women to go and tell the disciples and actually tells them to mention it to Peter specifically. In Luke much the same thing happened. Luke doesn't give any names of the women. He just said that the women found the tomb empty and after receiving instructions from the two angels, they went and told the eleven disciples and all the rest. In John's gospel the story is a little different. In John's version Jesus himself appears to Mary Magdalene and says to her, "Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

In every single account of the resurrection, while there are various differences as to who was there and this and that, they all stress the importance of sharing the good news. That brings us to our text from Acts this morning. The book of Acts tells the story of the early church and how it all developed. In this tenth chapter Peter is speaking to a group of Gentiles. That, in and of itself, was a miracle because at the time it was unlawful for Jews to associate or visit with Gentiles, especially on matters such as this. But God had paved the way for this to happen by appearing in a vision to a man named Cornelius. Cornelius was a centurion in the Roman army and he

ended up working things out to where Peter could stand in front of the group and share the good news. How many of you have endured long sermons in church? How many of you have endured long, boring sermons in church? How many of you have endured short, boring sermons in church? I have always had the belief that a preacher or any other speaker for that matter, should say what he or she has to say as completely and concisely and as efficiently as possible, and then sit down. My preaching professor in seminary once said the following to a student who had preached a sermon in front of the class: "Except for what you said and how you said it, I thought it was a good sermon." Well, if Peter were in the preaching class I think he wouldn't have drawn that kind of criticism from the professor or anyone else because Peter had something to say and he said it well. Listen to this sermon. (Read Acts 10:34-43)

There it is! There is the gospel! There is the good news! Right there in the middle of the book of Acts. Did you catch the part in the sermon where Peter said, "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as the judge of the living and the dead?" I realize many of you are visitors today. Perhaps you are family from out of town or maybe you are coming to church because it's Easter and that is what you do on Easter – you go to church. Even if you are not all that religious you go to church on Easter, or at least think about it. If you are visiting our church today I wanted to fill you in on something we are doing at our church these days. At the beginning of every worship service we make a simple statement, "Raise your hand if you invited someone to church this week." We do this not to pat ourselves on the back or put up a sign outside the church that says, "Over 100 invited this week!" We do it to remind ourselves of what it is Jesus wanted us to be doing in the first place, and in case you are wondering, it is just what we heard from Peter. That is exactly what Jesus wants us to be doing and not by accident it is exactly what our world needs to hear. They don't call it good news for nothing. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus God did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

In Auschwitz, that horrible Nazi prison camp, there is a cell of a Roman Catholic priest named Father Kolbe. He had done something incredible with his life, even in that terrible place where so many innocent people were murdered by the Nazis. The Nazi captors had a way of deterring escapes from the prison camp. If someone tried to escape they would randomly pick six other prisoners to be hung. While that deterred many escapes, there were still attempted escapes. On one such occasion six

March 23, 2008

men were picked to be hung and as they stood there on the scaffold with ropes around their necks, something incredible happened. Father Kolbe asked if he could say a few words. Pointing to one particular man, he said, "He's from my village. I know him. He's a good man and he has a wife and several children. On the other hand, I am a priest. I am not married and I have no children at all. I do not have a family that needs me. Let me be hung in his place." Father Kolbe took the place of the man and was hung in his place.

The family of the man that was spared because of Father Kolbe's sacrifice eventually moved to Auschwitz so they could regularly come to the cell and place flowers there to show their gratitude for the man who sacrificed for them.

God has given us so much and has sacrificed so much through Jesus. The least, the very least we could do, is share his love and message with others.

Tony Campolo told a made-up story that describes Jesus returning to Heaven after his life on earth. The angels gathered around the Lord to find out about all the things that happened on earth. Jesus explained to the angels how he lived among the people, shared his teachings, expressed his love, died on the cross to atone for humanity's sins, and was resurrected to declare that the new Kingdom is at hand.

When he finished telling his story, one of the angels asked the Lord, "What happens now?" Jesus answered, "I left behind a handful of faithful men and women. They will tell the story! They will express the love and grace! They will spread the Kingdom!" "But what if they fail?" asked the angel. "What will then be the plan?" Jesus answered, "There is no other plan!"

Maybe the most amazing thing about the resurrection is not the resurrection itself, but that God has left it to you and me to share with others.