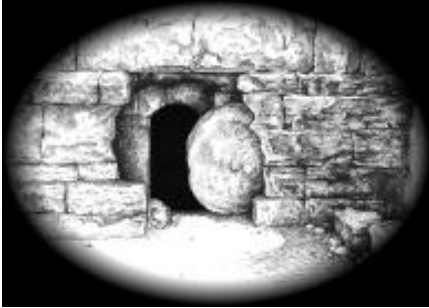


E-Series

Easter and The Father



16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. —**John 3:16-18**

Many of you have commented on your delight at seeing new connections between the Gospel of John and Genesis. There are so many of them. But, I want to lift up another one that I mentioned on Easter Sunday.

Yesterday I mentioned Rob Bell and the "principle of first mention" (Velvet Elvis, p. 156). One of Bell's examples is John 3:16 and the first mention of the word "love" in the Bible.

You might be surprised at where the word love first occurs in all of Scripture. It's not until Genesis 22. You would think that it would have been earlier, in the story of Adam and Eve, or maybe Noah and his wife. No. It's not until chapter 22.

It's the story of Abraham and Isaac. You remember the story. Abraham had a very hard time ever having a son. He and Sarah prayed for a child. They begged for a son, but for a long time, they couldn't conceive. Then, finally, when they were way up in age, they had Isaac. And the first time the word love is used in all of Scripture was when God told Abraham, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, go to the region of Moriah, and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering." Abraham, take this son, whom you love, and kill him. That's the first mention of the word love.

Of course, God stops Abraham before he actually kills Isaac, but it does make you wonder: Does John have in mind the story of Abraham and Isaac when he writes those words, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son?" Does he have in mind the tremendous pain and agony that Father Abraham must have been going through when God told him to kill his own son?

On Good Friday, a good number of us gathered for worship and meditated on Jesus' seven last words from the cross. I was really struck by one of them in a new way. From the cross, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Now, I have always looked at these words from Jesus and thought about what terrible agony Jesus must have been going through. He cries out in fear, in pain, in agony, and in anger at God, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And, I've always thought that to be a great comfort. If Jesus felt fear, pain, and anger, if Jesus could scream toward the Father in heaven, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Then maybe it's okay when we do too. Maybe Jesus understands that.

So, I've always sort of looked at that moment and these words from the perspective of the Son, hanging there on the cross, crying out for his Father who won't answer him back.

But this year, I saw it a little differently. I don't know if it's because I now have a son of my own, or what, but this year I thought about that moment from the perspective of the Father. I thought about how that might have been. To see your son in pain and agony, to see him overtaken by fear and suffering, to hear him cry out to you...I wondered what must that have done to the Father?

Recently, I think I've told you that I watched the movie *Fireproof*. It was a good movie about marriage, and there were some very moving parts in it. Heather cried pretty much the whole way through.

And I pick on her a lot about this sort of thing. She'll cry in a movie in a minute.

Not me. I'm controlled. Many times, stoic. I don't cry that easily at all. Or, at least I didn't, until I had children and my dad died. Since those three events, it seems like I cry a lot easier.

But not at movies. Because I realize: This is Hollywood. They are playing on people's emotions. They're *trying* to elicit these responses. Well, I'm not falling for it.

All right. I'm going to admit it: *Fireproof* got me. It got me, but not in the same scenes as most other people. The scene that got me was when the main character, Caleb, who is a firefighter, and his crew responded to a house fire. They get to the house and it's fully involved, flames are leaping out of the roof. The owners of the house, a man and woman are in the yard, and they're begging the firemen to hurry. Caleb, asks them, "Is anybody inside?" The father says, "No, my daughter is next door playing with the neighbor's kid."

At that moment, the neighbor's kid comes running over, screaming. His daughter had gone home already. She was inside the house.

As soon as those words fell on the ears of that father, he took off running. And, I was with him. My insides were churning. My heart was racing. He took off after his daughter. But before he got to the door, one of the firefighters tackled him.

I'll just have to tell you. In that moment, I wasn't controlled or stoic. I sat straight up on the couch, about to burst, and I said, "Shoot."

I know that the firefighter was doing his job. I know that it would have been dumb for the father to go in. He didn't have an oxygen mask. He didn't have the fire retardant suit. He didn't have an axe or any of the equipment that they had. But what he did have was love. And *nobody* is going to go after your child like you would.

So I blurted out, "Shoot." Heather said, "What?!"

I could barely tell her. But, if my little girl is in a burning house, and somebody tackles me, they'd better be ready for a brawl. Because I would stop at *nothing* to rescue her. There's absolutely nothing I wouldn't do.

I thought about that on Good Friday. Jesus, hanging, suffering, dying, cries out to his Father, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It had to be ripping the Father's heart out. In fact, it was literally ripping the Trinity apart. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ripped apart by death.

I know the Father had to take off running. But he was tackled. "For God so loved the world..." He was tackled by his love for us. And God, the Father, watched as his son died.

But, see, this isn't just any Father. This is the same Father who said, "Let there be light," and his Word made it happen. This is the same Father who just said the Word and created the sky and the land and the moon and stars. This is the same Father who took a handful of dirt and breathed his breath into it and made it live. So, this Father has brought forth light of darkness before. This Father has spoken life into existence before. This father can move mountains. Do you think one little stone rolled in from of a tomb is going to keep him from getting to his Son? You can't hold this Father back. On Easter morning, God, the Father acted. He threw that stone out of the way. He ran to his child, breathed life, resurrection life, into the Son, and once and for all made a statement for all of us that the reign of sin and death is over. Nothing can hold him back!

Here's the great news: **He's our Father too! And you can't hold him back!** Thanks be to God!

Reveling in the Resurrection,
Pastor Michael



Time to Shine in 2009!