

Easter 2013 - Easter is Hard News

March 31, 2012

Good morning! My name is Pastor Kurt. Welcome to Faith Church on this beautiful Easter morning. I will give you one guess what we will talk about this morning. The resurrection!

Our text for this morning is 1 Corinthians 15:1-14. If you didn't bring a Bible, simply concentrate on listening to God's Word as I read it.

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 1 Corinthians 15:1–14 (ESV)

There is one big idea these verses convey. It is the one thing I want each us to walk away with this morning. That is, *the Christian faith is first the announcement of a historical fact before it is a belief about life.*

The Christian faith, at its core, is about history. Everything else Christians' believe comes from this. This is absolutely critical to understand. Let me explain why.

This morning, I will back up this claim from the Bible then show how this applies to life.

Preaching is announcing news not philosophy.

In verse 14, our text said that if Christ was not raised, our preaching is useless. Let's begin by looking at the word *preaching*. The word preaching conjures up different images in the mind. When some of us think about preaching, we think about a pulpit. Maybe you think of somebody pounding their fist on a pulpit. Some of us think about someone who wears a tie or a robe.

When Paul uses the word *preaching*, the Greek word has an entirely different connotation. The Greek word means to herald. In the ancient world, a herald was a news announcer. The Greek work for *preaching* has a different meaning from the Greek word for *teaching*. The Greek word for *teaching* dealt with the proclamation of a philosophy, a way of thinking. The Greek word for *preaching* is the announcement of news.

To understand the difference, we need to understand the way the news media worked in the first century. There was no CNN, ABC or MSNBC. There were no iPhones and was no Internet. In that day, the news media worked through heralds. They ran into town and cried out the news of the day in the public square. Sometimes they would post an announcement on a public board in the center of town, then they would cry out the news of the day.

Not only is the way news was delivered different, the kind of news preachers delivered was different. To understand this difference, we need to understand the difference between what journalists call hard news and soft news.

Soft news are the heartwarming stories and consumer tips in the newspaper. For example, they are articles titled, “Experts reveal how to handle stress” or “Be careful when you throw away fluorescent bulbs, they contain more mercury than you think.” Soft news is heartwarming stories or advice on life. The key thing to remember about soft news is that *soft news is news you don’t need to know*. It is soft news.

Hard news is different. Hard news is news about significant events that we need to know. It is news that affects our life and community. Hard news is a country declaring war. Hard news is planes flying into the World Trade Centers. Hard news is Paul Revere riding to Lexington proclaiming, “The British are coming!” Hard news is news we need to know. Hard news is news that changes our lives.

Today, when we look in our newspapers, we have hard news and soft news mixed together. I usually read USA Today on my phone. One section is news about the world; others tabs are on sports, lifestyle and travel. They are soft news sections.

In the first century, a preacher ran into town and he only announced hard news. It was information people needed to know. You didn’t have a herald run into town and say, “Now for the style section of our proclamation. Let me tell you what colors the women are wearing in Rome this fall.” They didn’t run into town and say, “Now for a few bits of advice about what the stoic philosophers in Athens are saying about handling stress.”

Paul, and the early Christians, said the news about Jesus was preached. They ran into town, like the heralds of old, and reported the news that the tomb was empty. Christ rose from the dead.

They were not teachers proclaiming a philosophy saying, “We are Christians. We are here to give you a few tidbits on how to enjoy a stress free work environment.” They didn’t run into town and proclaim, “And now, to tell you how wearing power colors can lead to success in business.” The Christians were preachers. They were news reporters. We had a hard news story to tell. The tomb was empty. At its core, the Christian faith is not based on a philosophy of life. It is a news report about something earth-shattering that happened in history. It is a news report that needs to be proclaimed. It is news that affects everyone.

Hard news is what sets the Christian faith apart from every other religion.

This is what makes the Christian faith so fundamentally different from every other religion. All other religions are about how we can live better, how we can be one with the universe, and how we can deal with our problems. All the other religions are soft news. They are rooted in the advice of self-proclaimed philosophers. Christianity alone is the one religion in the world that begins and ends with hard news, the world-changing fact of history that the tomb is empty. Jesus rose from the dead, literally. He talked with scores of people after he rose. That affects you and me. It changes everything.

One thing I should address is there are, unfortunately, a growing number of churches that fail to make this distinction. In an effort to make the Bible more

palatable, they sanitize the Bible of the miraculous. They claim to be modern and sophisticated. They believe the ancients were simply dumb barbarians who added the miracles stories hundreds of years after the life of Christ to sensationalize history. They believe the Christian faith didn't start with miracles. They don't believe the Christian faith started with an empty tomb. They claim it started out as a philosophy.

This flies in the face of all the historical evidence. In addition, once you think about it, you realize it destroys the heart of the Christian faith itself.

Let me show you what I mean when it comes to the Easter story. They do not believe Christ literally rose from the dead. They do not believe it was so literal that if you had a video camera you could catch it on tape. No, they believe only the principle of Easter is true. Doesn't nature itself teach us that after winter comes spring? Doesn't nature teach us that after a plant dies its seed goes in the ground and up comes new life? They claim that the resurrection didn't literally take place, rather it is just the principle of the resurrection that is true. After winter comes spring. After the rainclouds comes the sun.

What have they done? Think about this. In an attempt to sanitize the Christian faith, they changed the heart of the Christian faith. They changed the Christian faith from a hard news story to a soft news story. They lost the distinctive idea that Christianity is first and foremost a news story about something that actually happened in history. The tomb was empty. It is only because something happened in history that we have hope in the face of death and we have comfort in our times of despair. This is the one thing that sets the

Christian faith apart from every other faith in the world. Every other faith is an unproven philosophy. Only the Christian faith is about an undeniable historical fact first, then how we live second.

Maybe some of you came this morning looking for a soft news faith. You want teaching that is about handling worry and how to live a stress-free lifestyle with a little Christian flavor sprinkled in.

While there is nothing wrong with wanting to see our faith connect with our lives, everything about the Christian life that changes life begins as a hard news story. The tomb is empty. It is only after the hard news facts, that we find the life-changing faith.

Paul says, because Christ was raised, it then changes everything. It changes the way we handle stress. It changes the way we face death. Christ's resurrection is the source of our hope in hard times. It is our comfort in times of trouble. If Christ was not raised, as a literal historical fact, then all of our preaching is useless.

The Christian faith was always shared as facts of history before a philosophy of life.

If you study the way Paul preached, you see there is consistent way he presented Christ. He did not approach people like a philosopher trying to give them heartwarming advice. He approached them like a herald who proclaimed life-changing facts. Then, because the facts are true, he told people how it changes lives.

Paul said, "Here is the evidence."

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 1 Corinthians 15:3–7 (ESV)

Scholars believe the letter of 1 Corinthians was written no more than 20 years after the resurrection. Paul said, “This is the way we preach everywhere.” Hard news. Christ literally rose from the dead. Here are some of the witnesses: Peter, the twelve and 500 people. Check out the historical facts. Call them up. Friend them on Facebook. Message them on Twitter. He doesn’t come in with soft news saying, “I have some recommendations on how to handle a stressful work environment” or “Here is the new way to appear more confident in public.”

Paul said, “God, in the person of Jesus, lived a literal human life with real flesh and blood. He literally died on a Roman cross. The tomb is literally empty. He literally appeared to scores of people. Since the facts of history are true, that means there is hope for the future when life is tough. That means our sins will be forgiven if we place our faith in Christ. That means the spirit of God will come into our lives and change us. In other words, because the historical events literally happened, it changes everything. Paul went around heralding the news of a literal event of history, the empty tomb. He talked about literal eye witnesses and gave out their business cards so people could contact them to verify the facts.

Paul sharing Christ in front of Agrippa and Festus

Let me give you another example. When Paul was a prisoner in front of Agrippa and Festus in Acts 26, he explained the Gospel to them. He was talking about Christ's death and resurrection. Festus said to Paul, "Your great learning has driven you mad!" I love Paul's reply. Paul said, "I am not insane, most excellent Festus, but what I say is true and reasonable. King Agrippa from Palestine knows about these things because they were not done in a corner."

He turned to Agrippa, who was Jewish, and said, "Tell him the truth. These things actually happened. I am not insane." The tomb was actually empty. There are 500 people running around who saw the risen Jesus at one time. Talk to them. People don't have hallucinations in groups. You have scores of eyewitnesses. You have hard news facts. Christianity is spreading like wildfire because of the news. The authorities tried to find a body; they couldn't. The Jews can't deny the facts. After being confronted with the facts of the resurrection, King Agrippa said, "Do you think you can convince me to become a Christian in such a short time?" Paul said, "Short time or long time, it doesn't matter. King Agrippa, look at the facts."

Other religions are not based on a historical fact with scores of eyewitnesses.

How does this compare to the other religions of the world? First, they are based on soft news. They are opinions on how to live life. They are not based on world-changing historical events. Second, the religions of the world are not based on scores of eyewitnesses but on one individual who asks you to take their word for the truth.

For instance, Joseph Smith, the head of the Mormon church said, “Jesus appeared to me and told me I was the head of a new religion. Nobody else saw it. You’ll have to trust me.” Mohammed said the same thing. Check out the religions of the world. They all start with one man saying “God appeared to me and me alone. You have to trust me on this one.” Christianity is based on scores of eyewitness accounts who met a resurrected Jesus at different times and places.

Paul said every other religion started with one person. Every other religion started out as a philosophy on how to live life. Every other religion started out as soft news, it was in the style section of the paper. That is not Christianity.

Paul is an example of somebody who was convinced by hard news.

Paul himself is a perfect example of this. Paul saw Christ before his crucifixion. Paul heard Christ preach and watched him perform miracles. Paul was absolutely sure Jesus was an impostor. Paul gave his life to exterminating Christians because, at first, he was convinced Christianity was a bunch of soft news from the style section.

In Acts 9, the resurrected Christ appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus and literally knocked him down. Paul realized the resurrection of Christ is true. It is hard news. Jesus is alive. Paul met him. Christianity is not a home-brewed philosophy.

How does the hard news of the resurrection change everything?

If we understand the essence of the Christian faith is hard news first, then we can understand how it changes the way we approach life. For example, let's take the way we face death.

We face death with a difference because of the empty tomb?

In Acts 2, when Peter preached his first sermon at Pentecost. He proclaimed the facts of the risen Jesus. It was because Jesus beat death. It was because he conquered the grave that if we simply ask his death to be in our places for our sins, we will be united with him in beating death.

Think about this with me. Think about how fascinating this is. What beats death? We have seen nothing that beats death. Even rocks wear down to sand. Our universe continues to dissipate energy like a great grandfather clock that slowly unwinds. Only Christ beats the power of death.

I ran across this great illustration. I read Albert Camus books in college. The guy struck me as a great pessimist. In reality, apart from the hard news facts of the empty tomb, he is a realist. In one of his books he said, "Suppose I tell you I am going to kill you in 30 minutes." You would say, "Why not kill me now? Just get it over with." Camus wrote, "I don't want to be too cold about this. I at least want to give you 30 minutes to do something you enjoy, then I will kill you. I know you like your Hayden. Why don't you enjoy listening to Hayden for 30 minutes, then I will kill you." What will you say? "There is something about knowing I am about to die in 30 minutes that takes the joy out of listening to my favorite music." Then Camus said, "Don't you see, that is the situation every one

of us is in. We don't know when we are going to die but we are going to die.

How can you enjoy anything?"

This is why the resurrection changes everything.

Jesus said "...and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:26 (ESV)

..."Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" 1 Corinthians 15:54–55 (ESV)

Paul said the one thing that everyone fears is getting beaten. Death can reach into your life and choke you. It can reach into your life and destroy you. When sin's most powerful weapon celebrates its final victory, because our body dies, it is in that moment that Jesus grants us our greatest victory. Instead of death separating us from God eternally, at death, we are brought into the presence of God.

Jesus was raised in the middle of history in a real body. At the end of history, because of our trust in him, he will resurrect our bodies and give us resurrection bodies just like Jesus.

This is why Paul said Christ's resurrection changes everything. "Where oh death is your victory? Where is your sting? You can mock me. You can threaten me but death can't beat me." Paul laughed in the face of death.

We face everything with a difference because of the empty tomb.

Because the tomb was empty, and Christ promises to resurrect us, just as he was resurrected, death cannot threaten us. Some of us are consumed by worry about the future. Others of us are threatened by trouble. If you know the risen Christ is in control of world history and your history, and he loves you, plus

we know he promises to work everything in our lives for our good, even the bad things that happen to us, then why worry?

This past week, I talked with a friend who lost his job. That is tough news. The good news is he has nothing to fear. Jesus loves him. Jesus has not abandoned him. Jesus has a good plan for his life. The hard times he faces now will be part of what God uses to make him a better follower of Christ in his next job.

Application

Let me apply this to us this morning.

1. Christians don't have to live a joyless life.

Some of you are Christians. You are Christians that are plagued by doubt and worry. Some of you are desperately lonely, and you have no joy because life is tough. Why did the early Christians have so much more joy than we do when most of them lived in much tougher times? Were they made of stronger stuff? How is it that even though the world was on top of them, they felt they were on top of the world?

They looked at their troubles through the lens of the resurrection.

No matter what happened, they realized death could not hurt them. Even if they were fed to the lions, in the end, they won. Jesus beat death. They realized that if Jesus loved them enough to die for them, even when life was tough, because Jesus is in charge of everything, they could trust he knew what he was doing with their lives.

You see the hard news facts of the resurrection didn't lead to empty hope. It led to a confident hope they knew was true.

2. You don't need to be ashamed of your past to turn to Jesus.

Perhaps you failed Jesus terribly. You knew better but you walked away. You spat in his face again and again. This may be hard to believe but Jesus still loves you. He does. You cannot exhaust his love for you. You cannot exhaust his forgiveness. Who stabbed Jesus in the back during his hour of need? Who denied even knowing him three times after living with him three years. Peter! Who did Jesus forgive, restore and transform him into one of the great leaders in the early church? Peter. The resurrection is a fact of history. His inexhaustible love is true. Yes, Jesus will forgive you if you turn to him.

3. If you want something that changes your life, start with the only faith that starts with hard news evidence, not soft news opinions.

Lastly, I want to talk to those this morning who came expecting a few tidbits on a better life, a little soft news to make life better. That isn't the way the Christian faith works. Easter is hard news. It is hard news that changes things. It changes the way we face death so we face it without fear of a bitter end but the better end of seeing Jesus. It changes the way we face our worries and troubles. Jesus, who loves us so much to die for us, is in charge of world history and our history. He has a good plan for our lives. We can trust him.

Easter, It is a hard news story. That makes all the difference.



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