



A Note from the Pastor's Corner

Another Lenten season has just about run its course. Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday have passed; Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunrise Service followed by breakfast in Fellowship Hall and then our Easter cantata yet to go; and then - what? Plant peas in our garden, think about what you'll do for Mother's Day this year, and plan your Summer vacation?

What we just observed and celebrated should mean something more than just another set of events on the church calendar. Even for those who have observed the Lenten season in some special way with some form of focus for their spiritual life – the effect of the Easter event on us should have some kind of energizing impact. It should mean something more than just dyed eggs and a ham dinner.

If you're not sure what I'm talking about, I ask you to pay close attention to this year's Easter cantata, "Jesus: The Resurrection." Towards the end, the lyrics say, in essence, "When my life was darker than I could have ever imagined, I received a love and a peace that I could not have imagined. So I will not be ashamed to show others the way."

I don't know about you, but to me, it sounds to me like it's talking about that dreaded "E" word. You know the one I mean – "Evangelism!" Now that's a word that would make most people run in the opposite direction – and I understand why. Truly, I do. The pictures I have in my mind whenever I hear that word are of street preachers pointing the bony finger of condemnation, or of people going door-to-door, two-by-two with a Bible, a few memorized verses to quote, and asking whoever answers the door if they've been saved. It doesn't matter if they'd been taking a nap, baking a cake, or watching an SU basketball game. They're expected to give thoughtful reply to "Have you been born again, my friend? Are you *sure*?"

Now, I'm not saying those methods don't work. They do – but not very good. They hardly ever get the results the evangelizing person is shooting for. Pretty much, all they do is push people away. And what we *should* be interested in is attracting people, not repelling them.

From how I read the Gospels, the church has but two imperatives: the evangelical imperative and the social justice imperative. For the most part, the church has allowed the government and para-church organizations to do the social justice work. And it has handed the evangelistic work to the 'professionals'. Even so, there are churches that are very involved with the social justice mandate. But when it comes to the evangelism – well, most churches hardly even talk about it.

But, if the new life we have received from God through our Jesus-connection truly is the best thing that has ever happened to us – and I will say without hesitation or doubt that is true for me – then why is it that we're not sharing *that* with family, friends, and others around us? I mean, we eagerly talk about the latest fad diet we're trying, or the great day we had ice fishing, or the terrific game the Philadelphia Eagles played. But pretty much, we're quiet about the experience that changed our whole life. Just think of all the people whose lives could be so much different – just like ours – if only someone would ... "Hey! Not me! I'm talking about someone else. Maybe the Billy Graham Crusade will come to Syracuse again and we can sponsor an ad in the paper." And so it goes.

On Saturday, April 17th, we will conduct an evangelism workshop in our Fellowship Hall, starting at 10:00. But it's not going to be about door-knocking techniques or the most effective way to argue with someone. In fact, it's not going to be about how to walk up to a perfect stranger and put them on the defensive by asking them – well, you know, *that* question.

Why is this so important? You hear the news; you know about the home foreclosures, the lay-offs, the plant closings, and the evaporated retirement accounts. Look around. I haven't seen such despair, fear, brokenness, lack of security, helplessness, and hopelessness – not to mention the seething anger and hatred – in all my life. People are really hurting and they're looking for – for something, anything that will bring them a sense of inner peace, of wholeness, of meaning, and of hope.

Will they find it in overeating? They haven't yet. How about in over-spending? That's never worked. Maybe if they try escaping with a needle or crawling into a bottle. That only takes a person in the opposite direction. If they look to the government will they find their help there?

"I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from Yahweh, the Maker of heaven and Earth," psalmist in Psalm 121. That's fine for people who have already had a life-changing experience with God. But what about those who have not – and don't realize that our God is not a God of condemnation but a God of love, of transformed lives, and of second chances? What about them?

Mark your calendar now, in ink, in the box for April 17th: "E-Day – 9:30 – Fellowship Hall." See you there . . .

Grace and peace, Pastor Bud