

**I. Intro.: (walking around) Already spoke a "Happy Easter!" so let me add a hearty "Happy Spring Break!"**

**A. And what could be better during a break from school than a pop quiz?**

1. For the sake of our guests this morning and for those of you who were "sleepwalking with Jesus through Holy Week" during the six weeks of Lent, the Gospel of Matthew was our source for accompanying Jesus in the events of Holy Week
2. Therefore today on Easter Sunday, we're also hearing the story of Jesus' resurrection from the Gospel of Matthew
3. Now those of you who've grown up in church all your life may think you know the resurrection story very well. But do you? Do you know the resurrection story as it's told just in book of Matthew?

**B. There are several elements of resurrection story only found in Matthew and not the other Gospels ... Can anyone name some of them?**

1. *Solicit responses ... invite opening in Bibles ... easier if any of you carry around something like this big book I bought in seminary: Synopsis of the Four Gospels*
  - a) An **earthquake**
  - b) **Angel** is not inside the tomb, but sitting on top of the stone
  - c) Only mention of **guards** being at the tomb, authorized by Pilate
  - d) One more: the women are instructed, "**Do not be afraid**" (in fact, they hear these words twice, once from angel and once from Jesus)
2. For some of you these are nothing more than interesting factoids that make little difference for your faith.
3. For others they may be stumbling blocks to your ability to believe this story at all (*return to pulpit*)

**II. So let's start by naming a reality that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, sometimes gets in the way of Easter: **The stories in the Bible do not always agree****

**A. That is simply a fact.**

1. If you're inclined to pay attention to such things, and you start comparing the resurrection stories in the four Gospels, you will see that they do not agree in all their details.
  - a) Some people tend to get hung up on details like "Exactly how many women went to the empty tomb—1, 2, 3, more?"

b) If your mind tends to think scientifically, then you've probably had questions like this before about Bible stories

2. For other folks who have grown up hearing all these varying stories, they figure the truth is a melting pot of blending all these details together because, they argue, if they're all in the Bible, they're all true, right?

a) Personally, that approach doesn't work so well for me and here's why ...

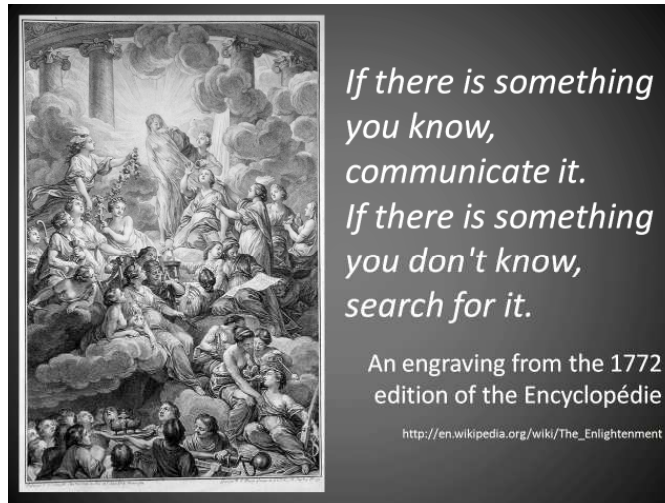
***b) The truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ does not stand on whether all the recorded details happened literally or not***

c) To expect them to do so is to ask the wrong question, based on a well-meaning but inappropriate approach to the Bible

## **B. We are all heirs of the Enlightenment , which some have called the Age of Reason**

1. The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Western world ushered in a reliance on reason, rather than tradition and faith

a) That approach is summarized in an engraving from a famous French precursor to encyclopedias that we know today:



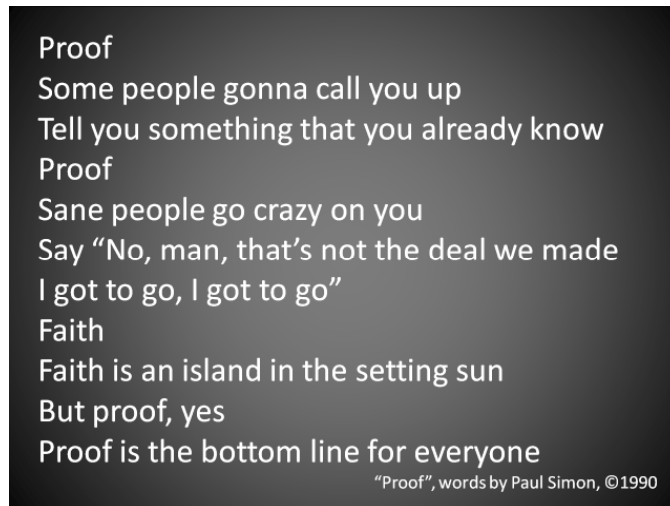
b) In North America, we are so steeped in scientific assumptions and explaining and reasoning things out, that we hardly know how to step out of those assumptions even when we want to

c) Sometimes we forget that the scientific thinking and worldviews that we take for granted did not exist in Jesus' day ... they have only been around for the last 300 years or so

2. How far has our contemporary world taken to heart the lessons from the Age of Reason?

- a) One of the greatest singer/songwriters of the past 50 years is Paul Simon. I love so many of his songs. But he doesn't share my fundamental faith perspective
- b) His 1990 song, "Proof" has a very catchy Brazilian sound and probably speaks for many secularized people in today's cynical world where the bottom line is all that matters

Part of lyrics from "Proof"



**C. The fact is that the Bible and other ancient sources do not answer our rational questions in the way our scientifically-oriented minds want them answered**

1. The Gospel stories were written to be *signs* of the life-changing resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead
2. They cannot function as *proof* in the modern sense of that word, because they weren't written to be scientific proof to compel our faith
  - a) If you're looking for "proof," nothing you find in the Bible can compel you to believe that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead by the power of God to be Savior and Lord of the universe
  - b) And nothing I say this morning can prove that point, either
3. But the Gospels were written to proclaim Good News (that's what "Gospel" means)
  - a) They proclaim the good news of the "truth" of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
  - b) It's just that this "truth" lies at a different, spiritual level than what science can prove

There is a truth that we know and live by faith ...  
 a truth that requires believing eyes to perceive it ...  
 a truth that must be lived and felt ...

a truth that cannot be held to the rigors of modern science and does not claim to explain everything that science explains

- c) These two kinds of truth are not incompatible in everything, but they are also not interchangeable ... the language of faith can never fully accommodate the language of science and reason
- d) The mystery of the divine will inevitably take us to places where the demands of the laboratory and logic cannot go

**III.** As a minister of this good news of Jesus Christ, I too am called to bear witness that **the death and resurrection of Jesus (whether provable or not) is the ultimate reality that matters**

**A. What we celebrate on Easter is the biggest deal of all big deals**

- 1. What God did through Jesus' victory over the powers of sin and death makes all the difference in what life itself means to us
- 2. It makes all the difference for how we live life
- 3. I like how James Krabill from Mennonite Mission Network put it in his book *Is it insensitive to share your faith?* (Good Books, ©2005)

*The earthly life of Jesus, his ministry, death, resurrection, and return to heaven, together constitute the single most important event of all time, the event by which all history is divided and all other events are defined and understood.* (Krabill, p. 26)

**B. Within a year or so after that first Easter, the apostle Peter was standing before a Roman army officer named Cornelius who had been told in a vision to send for Simon Peter**

- 1. Peter also had had a vivid vision that told him that Gentiles were no longer to be excluded from receiving God's good news
- 2. So the moment of truth finally came
  - a) Cornelius gathered his family and close friends in order to hear whatever message this Peter fellow had traveled 35 miles to bring
  - b) What would Peter say to a prestigious non-Jewish leader who was interested in God but knew nothing of the way of Jesus?
- 3. Peter summarized the meaning of all of Jesus' life and ministry, culminating in these words, that ...

*[Jesus] is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.*

**C. This morning on Easter Sunday, 2013 I want to leave you with 3 simple statements**

- 1. I believe Jesus Christ is the central figure of all human history

2. Because of his resurrection from the dead by the power of God, I give him the central place in my life as Savior and Lord, and I invite you to do the same, as already witnessed Daniel and Jordan doing same.
3. I cannot scientifically prove the truth of either of these first two statements, which may cause some people in today's world to dismiss them.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

**A. So how can I as a 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian live within this paradox** of a scientific worldview that wants to explain everything, and religious faith that knows it cannot explain everything?

1. If I tried to offer one final all-inclusive answer to that question, then I would have already given in to the scientific reasoning side of the paradox
2. In fact, there is no single answer that neatly ties up all the loose ends of such a question
3. Living in and managing paradox is one of the most essential skills for anyone in today's confusing times, especially anyone drawn to the spiritual side of life that reason alone cannot satisfy

**B. But I will offer you one possible way to stay in this paradox, on Easter Sunday of all days**

1. Two weeks ago in the second service we received Phil and Rebecca Ramer as members of this congregation, and in her personal sharing, Rebecca gave us a remarkable gift that I find just perfect for Easter
  - a) Rebecca acknowledged how she tries to hold Christian faith together with the intellectual doubts and questions she also entertains
  - b) At the same time, the witness of the caring Christian community she has found here at Waterford has been a sheer gift of God.
  - c) Then she shared a gift with all of us: a short but meaningful quote from Thomas Merton that gives her encouragement in this paradox between faith and reason
2. I'd like to close this message by sharing that gift again, only this time I'll share the rest of the quote, as she passed it along to me. I'm very grateful to Rebecca for this little gem. I consider it my "ode to Easter faith in a cynical era"

"The fire of a wild white sun  
has eaten up the distance  
between hope and despair.

*Dance in this sun, you tepid idiot.*

*Wake up and dance in the clarity  
of perfect contradiction."*

• Thomas Merton

**C.** It is my conviction that, in a cynical and increasingly secular world, on this most Christian of all holidays, **the risen Lord does indeed invite us to wake up and dance!**