

Easter Message 2007

I always like to start the Easter message with a joke. This is a corny one, are you ready?

The story is told of a minister and a bus driver who both died and went to heaven. St. Peter met them at the pearly gates, and after checking them in, took them to where they would be spending eternity. First, they went to the bus driver's new place. It was large and beautiful, full of flowers and rich tapestries. St. Peter showed him his closet, which was full of only the finest clothing and the most luxurious fabrics. Leaving the bus driver, St. Peter and the minister continued on their way, but now to a poor, shabby section of heaven. It was crowded and the homes stood stark on the landscape. The minister was ushered into a small one-room studio, where everything was faded and worn. The minister, upon seeing his new home turned to St. Peter and said,

"I gave my life to preach the Gospel each Sunday and now I am sent to live in this squalor? And, how is it that this bus driver, who was the worse bus driver New York has ever seen, merits such luxury?"

"Well, it's like this," replied St. Peter. "While you preached, they slept, but while he drove, they prayed."

I hope that this morning you will not sleep as we gather together to rejoice in the resurrection and to celebrate as a community of faith what God has done in Jesus Christ.

Easter is an ancient celebration in the Church. Before Christians celebrated Jesus' birth, they celebrated his resurrection, for Easter, and not Christmas, is the focus of the Christian year.

That is because, in Jesus' death and resurrection, we are faced with the question that is the center of the human condition. It is a question we will ask ourselves in one form or another at some time. The question is this: Is God in the business of death or the business of life? In other words, *is death the end? Do the evils of the world* — whether they be racism or violence — *ultimately win? Or, do love and life have the final say?*

All throughout our scriptures—from the story of Creation to Israel's deliverance to the new heart spoken of in Ezekiel—God is in the life-giving business.

At Easter, the answer we receive when God raised Jesus from death to life is *no, death is not the end; the evils of the world do not ultimately win*. What wins, that is, what is the final word for us, is God's love.

But this may sound to your ears just a bit too much like good preacher-speak, which might be easily forgotten after worship ends. So, let me challenge you, in light of what God has already done through raising Christ, to ask yourself the question. *Are YOU in the business of life or death?*

Many of us are in the death business. We don't think about it in that way, of course. But the way we view the world and one another does say that we believe that

the negative of life has more power and more control than what is good and right.

One thing that happens when you choose to take Easter seriously is that you have to address your negative patterns and your focusing on the down side of things. That is a challenge for many of us, for while we cannot and should not adopt a Pollyanna attitude, we also cannot give up the victory of Easter and the life it offers to us.

What does it mean to be in the business of life? What does it mean to live out the message of the miracle of Easter? There are a couple things of I think of...

Maybe to be in the business of life is to give life away to others. Most of the time this is done in small ways, and in ways we may not even realize.

Richard Allen Farmer, a professor at Gordon College, tells this story: "When I was a youngster, probably in my 10th or 11th year, my grandparents brought us a small plastic cartoon projector as a Christmas present. Bringing a couple of reels of black and white cartoons, Pop taught me how to thread the projector. He patiently demonstrated how to bend the film around the sprockets and thread it into the take-up reel. After one demonstration, Pop said, 'Now you try it.' I threaded the projector correctly and I will never forget his words, 'I have the smartest grandson in the world!'

"Years later, I asked him if he remember that incident. He didn't, but I did! For all the years following that day until now, I have thought I was bright, skillful, teachable, quick to catch on. I would probably also have remembered if he had said, 'I have the dumbest grandson in the world.' And my life might have demonstrated my belief."

Richard Allen Farmers' grandfather was in the business of life, for in his small remark to his grandson, he showed not only his faith in him, but his faith in his future.

Are you in the business of life by sharing life-giving words with others? Are you in the business of life by building up others and supporting them by your actions and words?

Maybe another way to be in the business of life is to believe and live for the future. This may be a great challenge to those of us who are critically ill, those who are struggling personally and financially, and may also those who are in their golden years, but the future is where God calls us, even if we will not long be there.

A man was watching his 80-year-old neighbor plant a small peach tree. He inquired of him, "You don't expect to eat peaches from the tree, do you?" The old man rested on his spade, and he said, "No, at my age I know I won't. But all my life I have enjoyed peaches — never from a tree I planted myself. I'm just trying to pay back the other folks who planted the trees for me."

Are you in the business of life by believing in the future? What kind of legacy will you leave in your family, in your community, to the world?

Maybe to be in the life business means that we work on seeing through the problems to the possibilities, that we affirm a way, even in the midst of confusion or limitations. What is the situation in your life right now where all you see are the problems? Maybe it is in your marriage, with your kids, or with your job. It is so natural to fall into this, so easy to see the problems instead of the possibilities. But what if you refused to let the limitations define things? Are you in the business of life by focusing on the possibility instead of the limitations?

These are three things that occur to me as I work on living out the power of

resurrection and life. These three are simple ways we—alongside God in Christ—can be in the business of life. We can give life away to others, we can believe and live for the future, and we can see through the problems to the possibilities. If we do this, we practice resurrection. The truth is that God's will for us is not death, but life. That, my friends, is what Easter is saying to us. It is inviting us to choose the life offered in Christ and to leave behind our often death-affirming ways.

May you see the possibilities of this day and the new life it offers to you. May you choose to love, to give, to serve, and to be life-affirming. And may the power—made real among us in Jesus Christ and his resurrection on Easter Day—fill you with life.