

RESURRECTION—Love's Great Reversal
Acts 10:34-43
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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/resurrection-loves-great-reversal/>

Have you noticed that sometimes it's the spiritually hungry outsiders who keep us honest? They help us clarify our message, help us keep it simple, and keep it sweet and keep it clear. Here is the way to God. Here is the way to forgiveness. Here is the way to life.

In today's text, we get to listen in on one of the first recorded sermons preached after Jesus' resurrection. Notice who the audience is for Peter's sermon. A godly Roman soldier (the average Jewish person would say, "That's an oxymoron!"). Imagine this. A Jew (Simon Peter) and his people have been under cruel Roman domination. To the average Jew, the Romans were considered filthy pagans. And a Roman soldier? Even worse. But Peter is preaching the good news of God's love, forgiveness and resurrection...to a Roman soldier! This Roman was known as a God-fearer. That's language in the Book of Acts for someone really hungry spiritually, someone who has started to really pay attention to God's way. Someone who so desperately wants to be in God's forgiveness family. Like some of you here this morning—hungry, longing, searching, aching to be in God's love.

Years ago, a Bible scholar by the name of CH Dodd identified what he called the kerygma, or the core message, of the early church's preaching. Here it is. 1) Jesus' life was full of good works, v. 38. 2) Jesus was crucified and then raised by the power of God, vv. 39b-40. 3) Eye witnesses verified Jesus' resurrection, v. 41. 4) Jesus was appointed judge of the living and the dead, v. 42. 5) Jesus offers forgiveness for all people, v. 43.

Note that this outline is almost exactly the outline of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the four Gospels. Here is the simple Gospel, with the simple Gospel invitation: believe and receive (v. 43). What's more, notice how this entire outline falls apart if Jesus is not raised from the dead. The resurrection is the center, the fulcrum, the pivot, the heart of this good news message of Jesus.

I'm going to go ahead and mention the obvious this morning. Did anyone notice? This year, Easter fell on April Fools' Day! The last time this happened, I was four years old (1956). It won't happen again until 2029 and then again in 2040. But then after that, not again this century.

Maybe Easter is the greatest April Fools' joke on Satan and on the forces of evil. Because in vv. 39-40, Peter preaches about God's love as the great reversal. Evil looked like it was going to win. Evil looked like it was going to carry the day. And then, v. 40, that small word: *but*. So important. But God had other plans. Love's great reversal. The resurrection of Jesus Christ reveals God's heart for us.

Despite all we see around us—cemeteries, cancer treatments, war, terrorism, hate—we believe in Christ's victory over death. Jesus is alive. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that death and evil are like vicious dogs tied to a chain. Lots of noise and the illusion of being in charge, but not so! [*The Collected Sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Isabel Best, p. 209].

I was recently driving somewhere with my seven-year-old grandson. He asked me how old his dad would be in 60 years. I said, "In his 90s". Before I get another word out, my grandson said, "And Papa, you'll be dead." Thank you very much. I should've stop the car and made him walk the rest away. But imbedded in this story is a sobering reminder. Christ has been designated by God as Lord and judge, v. 42. This life is not child's play. This life counts; it's the only one we get. And in 60 years, 100 years, we'll ALL be gone! We are made for eternity, somewhere. I'm thankful for love's great reversal, for life stronger than death.

And yet...and yet, for all that the New Testament says about how the resurrection of Jesus changes our next life, there is just as much or more about how the Risen Christ changes this one. Where there are addictions and destructive habits, emptiness, guilt and shame, absence of hope, anger, hate and fractured relationships, there is love's great reversal, the power of the Risen Christ. The same Savior who leads us victoriously into the next life is the one who can do the same in this one.

The only question is, do we believe this? Do we believe Jesus Christ is risen?