



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EASTER SERMON
4-20-14

One day Satan was feeling particularly feisty and challenged Jesus to a contest. Satan said that they would duel each other by writing the first story of creation on their computers. Whoever finished first would get to write the entire Bible in the way they wanted. Jesus agreed to the challenge and both began to type furiously in front of their computers. Suddenly, a flash of lightning streaks by them, a crash, thunder, the electricity goes out and the world goes dark. A moment and then all is restored – the light and electricity return and both restart their computers. With a howl and a wail, Satan finds his computer is blank. Jesus however is smiling- because- JESUS SAVES!

JESUS SAVES! I have not spent much time in urban areas or traveling in the south, but I hear that one can find signs, paintings, billboards that announce that Jesus Saves. I do have a vague memory of a mission building in downtown Chicago with Jesus Saves painted on the wall. Jesus saves. It seems like a Jesus Saves kind of day, doesn't it? Easter Sunday.

A day of salvation. A children's banner at a church in Nebraska declares: "Sing Alleluia – Jesus lives again and so will we! And so will we. Do you consider yourself as saved this morning?"

I don't hear the word salvation used much these days or hear much talk about being saved. I even went and looked up the word salvation in the dictionary this week just to make sure I had an accurate understanding of this concept. The dictionary told me that salvation is the saving of man from the power and effects of sin, liberation, deliverance from danger and difficulty, an experience determining the soul's redemption.

I think that as a human race we want to be saved. We want to be rescued and delivered from sin and danger and difficulty. We wish to be redeemed and liberated. Yet have you ever wondered about how this might happen? This is a morning celebrating the resurrection – the return to life of a dead and crucified Jesus Christ. We shout – Alleluia, Jesus lives again and so will we. How does that work for each one of us?

Now I'm figuring that as thinking human beings you don't want to be fed pablum – you know mushy cereal like when I just say to you – Jesus saves you end of story. And you, you want to know how. How am I saved? How does or can Jesus save me? So – I'll tell you some possibilities to consider.

I have learned four separate teachings/theologies about salvation or the fancy word is atonement. How are we humans made to be at one with God? Briefly – just see which idea you like best or which speaks to you. And actually they all have worth.

The classic teaching is that in Jesus the sinful history of the world is made right. Basically, Jesus becomes a ransom to pay off Satan from the evil that entered into the world through Adam and Eve. The wound of sin is healed and we can follow in the footsteps of Jesus and be thankful that the ransom has been paid.

The Latin theology is that Jesus was the perfect sin offering. That God sent Jesus to be the perfect sacrifice. No more does one have to offer sacrifices of animals or other offerings, we are restored because the death of Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice and we can live with gratitude for that gift.

The Humanistic idea is that Jesus is the example of a perfect human life and his life and teachings move us to be moral human beings and seek to live the way of life demonstrated by Jesus.

And finally, the Christus Victor view is that the death of Jesus was a consequence from the way fallen human beings live when they are caught up with power, violence, and evil. God and Jesus knew his mission on earth would end in suffering and violence but that the resurrection would show to all people that nothing, nothing can defeat radical, life-changing love. Evil and death with never have the victory – only Christ. Sing Alleuia, Jesus lives again and so will we.

To our death he offers life. To our evil he offers love. To our sins he offers forgiveness. In our anguish and chaos he offers prayer.

Salvation is about how when we surrender to God's grace, we are changed into new people. Salvation is whether our face is turned towards God or not. It is our orientation. When we give ourselves to God's love, God gives us new life. Jesus's resurrection is a transformation of everything we thought was rational and immutable. It's an invitation into life-giving ways of being in this world, an invitation to spend a lifetime discovering new ways to live anchored in a living hope.

Salvation comes from the Lord, the creator of heaven and earth. Salvation comes from a Jesus who rose victorious from the effects of evil and death. Salvation is accepting the love that saves us from our fear and liberates us into living gloriously. Salvation is a process happening each time our soul responds to the divine with a Yes. Let there be salvation over and over, forever.

Sing Alleuia, Jesus lives again and so will we.

Thanks be to God.