Sermon: April 12, 2009 --- Easter Sunday

"Easter goodness & baseball practice"

I often wonder ----- does what we talk about here on Sunday … does it make a difference, when you go about your life tomorrow and the next day???? If what we believe here on Sunday … well, if it doesn't impact the "real world" in which you live everyday … then we shouldn't be here.

Jesus lived … he taught and he shared … he had this incredible ability to connect with the hearts and souls of those around him. Those who feel "outside the box" … those who feel left- out ---------- he was able to help them discover how important & special they are … like there is a place for them in this world!!

And then: *Jesus died.*

He was killed.

People like me go to seminary … talking and studying about the "meaning" of Jesus' death.

The bottom line???? -------- Jesus was killed because he was too good!! … too nice … too caring.

He was just too good of a man!! He loved the un-lovely. He cared for sinners. He reached-out to those who weren't religious or "church-goers."

CHURCHES AND RELIGIONS … they like to "control" people.

If you want to get married here or have someone baptized …this is what you have to do!

Want to be a member? ---- here are the rules.

We do it, too … with our jobs, families, kids. We like to be in control.

And then someone comes along who "challenges" us … to be a bit more open, more fair and forgiving … and often we don't like it.

It is interesting … in life … there are just some folks out there who can't stand goodness … and decency … and kindness. And then … when they come face-to-face with raw goodness … they try to tear it down.

THE MESSAGE OF EASTER IS CLEAR ----- ***there is power in goodness.***

It's interesting. On the first Easter … the women go to the tomb … to anoint Jesus' body.

The stone is rolled away … and a young man is sitting where Jesus' body is supposed to be. The women are terrified … where is Jesus' body?

The young man (actually, an angel) replies ------ HE IS NOT HERE!! GO, TELL THE DISCIPLES --- HE IS RISEN!!

Maybe it's not so different than the next time I go to visit my mom's grave. When I get there … a little kid is making sand-castles where she is laid. WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? … I ask.

The kid responds ----- well, your mom isn't here.

What do you mean????? ---- I was here when she was buried 23 years ago!!

Then this "little angel" tells me what I really should already know: *Go home. Talk to your wife and kids and grand-kids … share stories about your mom, share her spirit … she is everywhere ... in the very air you breathe … she is not here … she is inside of you!!*

These 3 ladies discover what they should have known all along. Yes, Jesus died … but the very essence of who he is … his spirit and goodness ---------- it's alive!!! … now, go spread the good news.

The ladies are afraid … this isn't what they expected. But they eventually discovered:

the tomb is empty … but my heart is full!!

So often in life … we focus on the EMPTY TOMB.

We dwell on what we don't have … we focus on what we are not.

Maybe it's easier to "anoint" what is dead … than to proclaim a message that's very much alive.

One of the things I like about this time of the year … well, people start coming outside.
We've spent too much time inside ----- getting pale and a bit puffy … IT IS TIME TO COME OUT!!
This is why I love city parks. Whenever we visit our "city-kids" … we love to stop at a city park … sit on a park bench … and watch kids playing basketball and baseball. There is so much energy in the air.

Yesterday I visited a suburban park … right here in Orland.
I am there for little league baseball practice … "the pinto division" … 7-8-9 year olds.
It can be fun … it can be painful … depending on who you are watching.

I'm watching this one young boy. He's wearing his Paul Konerko jersey … perfect-fitting baseball pants … new spikes … batting gloves. Every pitch from the coach ------ a line drive to left field!!
His young-chiseled- athletic-looking 29 year old dad cheers him on.
There is also the young kid who is picking grass in the outfield.
He swings at the ball time after time … and, as a dad, you pray for a miracle, and hopefully some contact with the ball.
He finally connects …the ball dribbles foul … but the coach tells him to run anyway. Instead of running to first base … he runs to third … all the while, pretending to be an airplane.
I think to myself: I've had root-canals that are less painful!!

I think of Easter Sunday.
I watch the coach. I listen to his voice. I think of the song we just played for the children's sermon:
"There is something I like about you."
I marvel at this man's patience … his decency … the smile on his face & the smiles on the faces of all the kids. .
He treats every kid as someone special and unique … and indeed they are!!
It's in moments like these … where seeds of goodness and grace are planted.
It's easy to focus on the "empty tomb" -------- what kids can't do. But when your heart is filled with the spirit of a "humble carpenter" … well, you bring out the best in those around you.

On my way home … I'm thinking about an 18-year-old young man … whose funeral I had last week.
I remembered all the pictures ---------- his goodness of spirit, his child-like innocence.
For a while … all that "goodness" got buried in his battle with drugs.
As we laid him to rest … I'm thinking of the empty tomb. I'm sure for his family and friends … the tomb does feel empty. But -------- EASTER IS FOR THEM, TOO.
This young man's spirit will forever be "in the air." And forever ------ there is hope for those who love him.

It's grounded in a humble savior-carpenter … whose tomb was empty …
and whose spirit grows each day.

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