

Sermon: Easter Sunday, April 24, 2011

"St. Peter"

I get a bit sentimental on Easter.

I'm out back this morning ----- really early, really dark. I'm standing by Patrick Mackey's tree and brick ...
and suddenly the tree lights up!@!@!

I'm by Jude's mom's tree ... I remember it being 3 feet tall ... now it reaches into the sky.

I sit on Jim Emme's bench ... and then his entire family shows up at the 7:00 am service.

I think of the gospel lesson this morning ... Mary going to the tomb. The stone is rolled away ... and she's afraid.
An angel is there ----- "MARY, BE NOT AFRAID. JESUS IS NOT HERE ... HE IS RISEN."

I look at my mom's brick ... then my dad's tree.

I see the tomb ... I see the tree.

I see the tomb ... I see the brick.

I see the tomb ... I seen an angel.

I hear the words: "Don't be afraid. Jesus is not here. He is risen."

But ... honestly ... I am afraid.

Oh, there's the "big stuff." I'm afraid for our country. We are so divided. We have the greatest country in the world ...
so much freedom ... so much opportunity. Why can't we come together and be civil when it comes to governing this
wonderful land of ours?? I'm afraid for "Joe's Company" serving in a small village in Afghanistan.

I'm afraid for kids in Libya ----- wouldn't they enjoy sitting up here ... in freedom ... celebrating life
without fear of war and turmoil?@!! I'm afraid for a mom in Inglewood ---- wondering if her son can walk home
safely from school.

My fear can be personal, too. I'm afraid for my kids and grandkids. I so much want them to live in a world ----- free
of prejudice and war. I'm afraid of cancer and Alzheimer's. Every time I forget something (which is becoming more and
more often) ... every time I feel like I "don't have it together" ... I worry that I'm not a quite the person I used to be.

When I pick up a basketball and think of what "I used to be able to do" ... I can get a bit afraid inside.

I want my family to be ok.

I want to leave something behind ... so their world can be one of goodness and love.

I walk into church this morning ... I hear the words: "He is not here ... he is risen."

THAT'S IT!!

My dad is not out there ... Jude's mom is not out there. My bro' is not out there.

They, like Jesus ----- are risen!!

They are in the very guts of who I am ... they are in the very fiber of my journey through this world.

They are in the air I breathe ... in the wind at my back.

They are in the flowers and trees ... in the soil I walk on.

Their spirits are alive ... always with me.

Yes, I am afraid ... at times.

Afraid of what I don't know ... sometimes afraid of what it do know.

It's ok. If you are not afraid ... you are not human.

BUT: I DO KNOW THIS:

Jesus is alive.

He is risen.

And ----- I don't ever have to be afraid of being alone!!

Anyway ... I wanted to do a little "something special" for the kids' sermon today. After all --- it's EASTER.
Now ... if I was any kind of a minster ... I would have gone to the family Christian book store and got them something like
a cross ... a traditional symbol, reminding them of today.

But ... NO!! ----- I went to a sporting goods warehouse ... PALOS SPORTS in Alsip ... and I walked through the front door ... and I was in **BALL HEAVEN!!!**

I look around ... balls and "athletic stuff" all over the place. I feel like I am 20 years old again!@!!

I tell the lady at the counter ---- I need 70 balls ... all shapes and sizes ... all different colors ...

She asks me ----- "What sports camp or school do you work for???"

I smile: "No ... it's for my church on Easter Sunday."

She laughs ... smiles ... and looks at me as if I am from another planet. Oh, well ... maybe I am ... but it's ok.

I pick out a bunch of different balls from their catalog. "Reverend ... they will be packed and ready for pick-up in an hour." 60 minutes later I'm there ----- two nice-sized boxes ... full of balls ... and I am on my way back to the church.

The boxes sit on the table for 2 days. Perfect: medium-sized balls in two boxes. I guess it's time to un-pack them.

You may not know it ... but I have a disciple named PETER ----- Pete Cargill is his name.

He follows me ... he helps me.

"Pete ... can't wait to show you what I have for the kids on Easter Sunday ... let's open the boxes."

With anticipation we open the boxes ----- and the balls????? ... THEY ARE ALL DEFLATED!!@!

I go into my closet ... get out my pump and my needle ... hand them to Peter:

"Have at it, my friend ... 70 balls to be blown-up!!"

Pete is a good disciple ... I know he will take care of it!!

I no sooner leave the church to make a hospital call ... and Peter gives Ed Steele ("Mr. Fix-it") a call:

"Hey, Mr. Steele ... do you have an air compressor???"

An hour later I'm back at the church ... the balls are all blown-up!@!!

We only have smart "apostles" working at our church!!

I look at these balls ... which I never imagined to be this big ... and I think to myself:

THAT'S IT!!

We live in a world that so easily deflates us.

What do I do when I'm afraid???? I crawl inside a box. I lock myself in the tomb.

I don't want to come out and face what lies ahead.

But ... outside the tomb is an amazing God ... who gives us a reason to live each day.

With hope. With goodness. With humble courage.

You know? ----- if in your lifetime ... you can INFLATE the spirit of just one other person ... then you are Jesus' disciple. If you can say something ... do something ... to breathe new life into someone who is hurting ... then you are Jesus' disciple. If you can take just one person who has "gone flat" ... and instill into

this person one reason to give life his/her best ... then Jesus says to you:

"YOU ARE MY DISCIPLE!!"

Like the angel says ... "JESUS IS NOT HERE" ...

He's "in here" ... in our **heartsong** ... right where he belongs!!

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