

A LIFE THAT MATTERS

Isaiah 25:6-9
Mark 16:1-8

Faith Community
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Introduction

If you've driven through Florida after a horrible storm, you've seen them: thirty foot palm trees laying flat on the ground. They're tall, majestic, and often full of coconuts, but they're lying on the ground in the parking lot. At their base is a clump of roots pulled out of the ground. Sometimes it doesn't even take that big of a storm to knock them over. The wind blows the tree over because it doesn't have deep roots.

Some people say if you don't believe in God, then you don't have any validation for what is right and wrong. If you don't believe in a final authority, then who's to say that caring for others is better than just looking out for yourself – that charity is better than greed. By what standard do you say one opinion is better than another? Say someone believes getting what he wants for himself is more important than anything else. "If someone gets hurt, so what, I'm getting what I want." Another person says all people should share equally – we have to look out for each other. They're opposite points of view. Without an ultimate standard, who's to say one is better than the other? You have your opinion and I have mine. Without standards like the Ten Commandments, which come from the word of God, how can you say selflessness is any better than selfishness? What's your standard of truth? It becomes a difference of opinion with nothing to back it up.

But if you believe in God, the Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus as God's Son, then you have a final authority. You know the standards God has set for you. You not only know what you believe, but you know why you believe it. You have deep roots and are able to stand tall. No storm will knock you over.

I

When we live by Jesus values, our lives are pleasing to God. What we do, how we act is important – not just to ourselves but to the God, who gives us life. God cares intimately about you and me. When Jesus said God even knows the number of hairs on your head, he was using a clear image to express how close God is to us. I know, it's hard to believe, but God cares deeply and personally about you. The New Testament tells us that we are God's masterpiece, a little lower than the angels.

Isn't it incredible to know that the Creator of the universe and everything that's in it cares what you do with your life and how you treat other people? Can you imagine that you matter to the Lord of all existence, and that God cares about the choices you make?

II

If Jesus is God's Son and he rose from the dead on Easter morning then we have a standard for what we believe, and our lives have meaning. The final authority shows us how to live and

tells us that living faithfully gives our lives meaning. Jesus said, “I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly” This is a life filled with meaning. We know that we live for something real and important. We realize that we are living our lives and giving our selves to One who is far greater than we are. It is what the apostle Paul called, “The life that is life indeed.”

When we trust the God who raised up Jesus on Easter morning; we accept the values of Christ: compassion, forgiveness, hope, and sacrifice. We understand that we are to treat the lowly as we would treat Christ himself. “As you have done it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you have done it to me.” From this comes meaning in our lives. Meaning isn’t something that can be earned or worked for or purchased. It is a by-product of living faithfully. By following the authority of our lives, we discover meaning. Living in this way isn’t easy, and it isn’t always comfortable, but it is a life of substance.

III

You know in your own life that sometimes you do the right thing and you just feel better. You offer yourself and the reward you get back is greater than the gift you gave. A woman living in a retirement center goes each week to a school in Detroit to help tutor elementary school students. She gives a great deal, but she gets a lot back. She knows she’s making a difference, even if it is one child at a time.

Last December we went down to our cottage. I had a board meeting and Sheila decided to go into town to do some Christmas shopping. On the way she hit some black ice, slid off the road and rolled over. It was a serious accident and the car was totaled. But she walked away from that wreck.

We found ourselves in Ohio with no way to get home. We called car rental places but nobody was open on a Saturday afternoon. I discovered that you can’t drive to the airport and rent a car, you have to have come in on a flight. We had no way to get back home. Neighbors at the cottage told us to take their car. I said, “But we can’t get back here for at least a week – not till after Christmas for sure.” He said, “That’s OK, we can get by.” When I went over to pick up their car I was thanking him profusely for making this sacrifice so we could get home. I thanked him again and again until he said, “Stop.”

“What?”

He said, “Sometimes when you go to bed at night you want to be able to say, ‘I did something today. I made a difference today.’”

That’s what it means to live a life of meaning. You’re able to say, “I did something today. I did something that matters.”

Conclusion

Because Jesus was raised from the dead, your life has meaning. The ultimate authority tells you that it matters that you are faithful; it makes a difference that you are honest; how you treat

people counts to the One who created everything. Living faithfully produces a life filled with meaning. So that you can live without regrets and celebrate your relationship with God.

Everything I've said today presupposes the core meaning of Christ's resurrection: that Jesus was raised from the dead and conquered death forever. Because God raised up Christ from the grave, God will also raise us up. We will spend eternity with the God we love and have been faithful to, and our relationship with God will be even closer.

We don't just live for the afterlife, we live to serve God in this life.

Author Frederick Buechner says it so well, "The proclamation of Easter is that all is well...Love is the victor. Death is not the end. The end is life, His life and our lives through him, in him. Existence has greater depths of beauty, mystery, and benediction than the wildest visionary has ever dared to dream. Christ our Lord has risen."¹

One Sunday morning a ninety year old woman took my hand and squeezed it and said, "At my funeral – whenever that happens – I want you to tell people clearly that I went in joy. I have lived such a good life and I have been blessed so many times, that when I die, I will go with joy." I said to her, "Isn't it wonderful that you can say that. It is an indication of your faith and your relationship with God that you will be able to celebrate going to be with God in the end. But don't be in any hurry. We want you here and we need you with us!"

To me that epitomizes living the Easter life – confident of eternity with God and living a life of love and meaning here and now.

Amen

¹ Frederick Buechner, *The Magnificent Defeat* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), p81.