

Note: So, on Easter Sunday, I had a sore throat from a combo of GA pollen and a cold. I limited my speaking in the service, knowing I only had about 5 or 6 minutes of voice to deliver a message. I stood and spoke the following without reading the notes, preaching straight from the heart, and when I got to what became the ending, my voice suddenly gave out. I squeaked a faint, "Amen!" and stepped out of the pulpit.

Below is a verbatim of the sermon preached on Easter morning. All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and a gentle Congregation.

"The Heart of the Matter"

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Mark 16: 1-8 Acts 10: 34-43

The Heart of the Matter

One lovely day St. Peter is at Heaven's Gate.

There is a knock on the gate.

He opens it and there is Bubba.

He is about to welcome Bubba into Heaven when Bubba suddenly disappears.

No sooner had St. Peter closed the gate when there is another knock.

He looks out and sees Bubba again.

St. Peter is about to welcome him to Heaven when he suddenly disappears, again.

Then a third knock.

This time St. Peter reaches out and grabs Bubba, who immediately starts to fade away.

"Wait a minute!" said St. Peter. "Are you playing games with me?"

"Noooooo!" his distant voice replies. "I'm in an emergency room, and they keep resuscitating me!"

St. Peter went back to business.

Then he noticed someone whom he had not seen before.

How could someone get into Heaven without going through the Gate?

Then he saw another new soul. And another. And another!

More and more souls were in Heaven whom he had not welcomed.

He walked around the wall and discovered a hole.

Next to the hole was a stooped-over figure helping people inside.

St. Peter tapped him on the shoulder.

He stood up. It was Jesus Christ.

“I am so sorry, Peter,” He said. “I know these people are sinners and lost. But, these are my friends, and I want them in!”

Then St. Peter remembered what he had told a family of sinners and the lost, that God loved them, that **“I truly understand that God shows no partiality.”** Peter said that to a family whom his own people would have preferred he not talk with. Peter remembered that he had sinned and been lost as well, and that Jesus had forgiven him again and again and again.

God’s love is freely given and offered to one and all.

God’s forgiving grace is freely given and offered to one and all.

God’s renewing, restoring, recreating power is freely given and offered to one and all.

Peter made such a statement to anyone and everyone who would listen
because he had experienced the forgiveness of God.

Personally. Profoundly. Perpetually, again and again and again...

Peter learned that not only is forgiveness healing on the inside,
it is catching. Contagious. Infectious.

You can’t keep such joy and relief to yourself.

When you know you have been forgiven, truly forgiven, unconditionally forgiven,
life opens whole new possibilities.

You feel like you can walk on water to rescue a soul in need.

You start to imagine you can share a loaf of bread and feed a hungry world.

You have the audacity to fantasize returning to damaged relationships
and saying, “Peace! God’s peace I give to you. I am so sorry.”

The Heart of the Matter

I saw my mother break the law when “Love Story” was in theaters.

The film came out in 1970.

“Love Means Never Having to Say You Are Sorry”

was the film’s tag line, which appeared on posters and billboards
plastered across the city.

This 10-year-old could not walk twenty feet
without having that message in my face.

One afternoon Mother and I got off the subway at the 103rd Street Station.

Next to the token booth was an eye-level billboard for “Love Story.”

Mother paused. Why? I knew she had seen it before a million times.

She walked over to the film poster.

She pulled a No. 2 pencil from her purse.

She lightly drew a single line through the word “Never.”

She wrote one word above it in her lovely cursive handwriting: “Always”.

“There,” she said, “Love means always having to say you’re sorry.

Now it’s right.”

We headed up the stairs to the street level.

After this fourth grader got over his fear of his mom being arrested for vandalizing,

I had a new insight into forgiveness and love and relationships.
If you are going to love someone, expect to always say you are sorry.

“Love means always having to say you’re sorry.”

The Heart of the Matter

Jesus was on the Cross when He said,

“Father, Abba, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Jesus modeled that if there is no forgiveness, there is no resurrection.

If there is no forgiveness, there is no resurrection.

If there is forgiveness, there is resurrection.

If there is no forgiveness, there is no Christianity.

If there is forgiveness, there is a Christian religion that has meaning and depth.

If there is no forgiveness, there is no relationship.

If there is forgiveness, there is a relationship

that is healthy and healing, reconciling and uplifting.

When you practice forgiveness, true forgiveness, unconditional forgiveness,
life opens whole new possibilities.

You feel like you can walk on water to rescue a soul in need.

You start to imagine you can share a loaf of bread and feed a hungry world.

You have the audacity to fantasize returning to damaged relationships
and saying, “Peace! God’s peace I give to you. I am so sorry.”

Amen!

Communion Invitation

A man’s life on earth was about to pass away. He lay on a hospital bed in a sterile room. His breaths were growing more and more shallow. He was the patriarch of a large family; he had walked on earth for many a year. His progeny had gathered, surrounding his bedside, quiet and solemn. He could see their faces, read their worries and grief. He was sad because he knew they were at odds with one another. Trust had been broken; relationships damaged; harsh words spoken. Forgiveness seemed to be in short supply. Incapable of speaking, he caught the attention of the adult daughter who stood nearest to him, and indicated the cup of water on the table. She picked it up and offered him a sip. He shook his head, no, and indicated for her to drink. Slowly, unsure as to why, she took a small sip. He nodded, then indicated for her to pass the cup to her brother by her side. The father indicated for the son to drink. He nodded and

indicated for all of them to drink from the same cup. As they sipped and passed the cup around the family, it dawned on them what their father communicated without saying a word.

Love one another.

Forgive one another.

Hold and care, protect and liberate, see and cherish one another.

Do this in remembrance of Him, the One who loves you, for ever and ever.