

“Lesson *Nine*: *THE Lesson for Eternal Life*”

Easter

Isaiah 65:17-25; Acts 10:34-43; Luke 24:1-12
(“*Ninth of Nine in the Sermon Series ‘Life Lessons from Luke’*”)

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April 21, 2019

From the Pulpit

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A communion meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister of First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Easter Sunday, April 21, 2019, 8:45am & 11am services, dedicated to my uncle The Rev. Dr. Clarence “Clip” Higgins on his 90th Birthday & to my son Luke Timothy Sitler Ahrens who inspires me each day and always to the glory of God!

“Lesson Nine: Life Lessons from Luke”

Isaiah 65:17-25; Acts 10:34-43; Luke 24:1-12

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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“Jesus Christ is Risen TODAY!”

This is our Resurrection Proclamation. It is what distinguishes us from all our sisters and brothers of all other faith and people of no faith at all. It sets us apart. On this day, we step into the reality that God chose to raise God’s beloved Son in resurrection joy! It seems simple and clear. We sing it. We say

it. We pray it. And yet, something inside many people tingles with disbelief. We are not sure it is completely true. The physical resurrection of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, believed (and yes, even questioned) – or all three for some – by Christians across the globe this day.

But we can agree on some things. We can all agree that **“resurrection is real.”** After all we have seen people counted out and declared “dead and gone” as others. Then, we have seen them rise again. They were not really dead yet. Surprise!

If you don’t believe me, you haven’t followed the news this week. On the first day of last week, Tiger Woods rose up from the dead of the Professional Golf world to win the Masters Tournament – less than two years after he told Jack Nicholas (the Patron Saint of Golf), “I am finished.”

This past Tuesday night, our Columbus Bluejackets, the odds-on favorites to be the first team eliminated from the Stanley Cup Playoffs rose up and swept the (Supposed) best team in the hockey world right out of Nationwide Arena. This Easter Sunday, we all can say together, *“Only God saves more than Serge Bobrovsky. Go Bob! Go CBJ!”*

Then after a Monday night fire devastated the 866-year-old Cathedral of Norte Dame in Paris, France and the world rose up to commit money to rebuild one of Christendom’s most amazing cathedrals by 2024. (Remember – it took 200 years to

build it the first time – almost the entire length of the Gothic period.)

Tiger. CBJ. Notre Dame. Here are three resurrection stories in three days just last week.

Resurrection is real. We can see it in life and the world around us all time. So, why do so many people have such a hard time believing that God Almighty can raise God's most beloved son from the grave?

I have a theory. I believe **IF** we give ourselves over to the truth of Christ's resurrection in the Easter Gospel story, **THEN** we will have to believe in something that we can't easily touch or see. We will have to believe that we can overcome things which appear to be insurmountable obstacles in our path. We will have to believe in something greater than ourselves, something more powerful than ourselves and more unbelievable than all the unbelievable stories we have collected and testified to all these years.

Simply put – we would have to believe in God! There, I said it. We would have to believe in God! And if we ALL believed in God - the world would change – for the better. **That's what I believe.**

When you see and experience the realness of resurrection, then you have to believe in and see the **“Resurrection Effect”** alive and well in this world. What is the **“Resurrection Effect?”** It

is the wave that follows a resurrection. It is the Spirit that blows in the tailwind of the unbelievable. It is the truth that emerges in the days, weeks and years after One Rises from the Dead.

Our first encounter with the Resurrection Effect is when the women leave the empty tomb and spread the Good News that Christ is Risen from the dead!

The Columbus Dispatch editorial writer, Mary Morgan Edwards gets the “resurrection effect” – at least a Columbus version of it. On Wednesday at 4:35am following the Bluejackets upset sweep, Mary wrote:

As the CBJ reached beyond the elusive hurdle of winning a playoff round, we realize we also can overcome psychological humps that threaten to hold us back. Our community pride and sense of identity is bolstered as the Blue Jackets attract national acclaim. Oh yeah, we're Columbus. We're more than you knew we were, maybe even more than we knew we were. And we're reminded of what we can do when we, too, stay focused on the goal and have fun reaching it.

We can save the Columbus Crew SC from moving to Austin.

We can transform previously forgotten areas of the city into desirable places to live, work and play. We can welcome 1 million new residents to central Ohio by 2050 in orderly fashion with new jobs and transportation options. We can fill today's gap of 54,000 affordable homes and lift

families from poverty to prosperity. We can help more babies celebrate their first birthday.

We can reduce differences that separate us by income, gender, politics and race.

*And we know this in a new way today because a bunch of tough guys on skates didn't listen to detractors or to the voices in their heads that said you've never done this before. So, as we cheer the CBJ through the coming playoff rounds, we're cheering ourselves, too. **We can do this.***

I love this. The “Resurrection Effect” is seen like this: “One Rises” ALL are challenged to rise as well. Translated to our context of faith it goes like this: “*Oh yeah, we're Christians. We're followers of the Risen Christ! We're more than you knew we were, maybe even more than we knew we were. And we're reminded of what we can do when we, too, stay focused on the goal and have fun reaching it.*

And guess what, as Christians who are part of the BREAD Organization, we believe we can house 54,000 people who live in poor/unaffordable housing conditions, and we believe we can offer new Americans who come our city sanctuary and hope and a new home; and we believe babies born in our community should live and prosper; and we believe that young people who face mental health conditions and the crush of life in our times should be medically treated and cared for and lifted up and loved. And we believe that elders in our community should be respected and honored and offered safe and affordable housing, health care in their days of dire need and all the standards of living they dedicated their lives to

make possible for all of us who are a generation behind them. We believe in Resurrection for all people from the depths, deaths, and difficulties of their lives. We Embody the Resurrection Effect – alive and well on this Easter Sunday.

If you share these beliefs with me, I invite you to join me and 3,000 others at the 2019 BREAD Nehemiah Action on Monday, May 6th at the Celeste Center at Ohio State Fairgrounds at 6:45pm. I will give you information to join us for our “resurrection effect” event!

There is powerful Truth in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. This Truth cries out to be heard. But, to get to the Truth of Resurrection means we have to overcome the culture of lies that is squeezing the life out of us. We are caught in a poisonous web of lies right now. David Brooks addressed this earlier this week in the New York Times. Brooks wrote, *“The whole country is in a spiritual and emotional crisis... College Mental health facilities are swamped, suicide rates are spiking, the repulsive behavior of our (nation’s leader) is tolerated and even celebrated by tens of millions of Americans. At the root of it all is the following problem: We have created a culture based on lies.”*

Brooks goes on to list five prevailing lies: in our current culture: 1. Career success is fulfilling. 2. I can make myself happy. 3. Life is an individual journey. 4. You have to find your own truth. 5. Rich and successful people are worth more than poorer and less successful people.

Brooks contends that a Culture of Truth is much different. First, career success does not alone guarantee peace and fulfillment. Second, making ourselves happy is the lie of self-sufficiency. Happiness is found amid thick and loving relationships. Third, life is never an individual journey. It is always related to others – whether you like it or not, we are in this together. Fourth, finding our own truth is the privatization of meaning. When we privatize meaning, we lose touch with who we are and where we came from. The truth is that values are created and passed down by strong, self-confident communities and institutions. It's a group process. Fifth and finally, Rich and successful people being worth more is a lie (he says this while celebrating people's successes in life!). The truth is that Every single person is beautiful and has great value in and of themselves. There is not a set of inner rings with high achievers and then everybody else further out.

In his new book, “The Second Mountain,” Brooks goes much farther. He admits that he lived the lies (that he now challenges) for much of his life. It cost him his marriage, significant and meaningful relationships with his own children and friends and much, much more. He lost track of Joy. In the past few years, it was Joy that called David to the second mountain of life. There he discovered that Joy gives Life. This is a truth which should give us all greater faith as we claim Joy at the center of our Christian faith.

Joy is everything. Jesus said it best to his disciples just before his death on the cross, “So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and we will rejoice. And no one can take your joy from you.”

So, as we come to the end of Lesson #9 of “Life Lessons from Luke,” we stand in the “Realness of Resurrection.” We are swept into the “Resurrection Effect” by changing what is unjust with beliefs and actions that bring justice to this world and to our lives. And we stand in the “Truth of the Resurrection” against the culture of lies in our times.

So, follow our God who raises His Son from the dead to bring hope and eternity to life! Follow the Risen Christ who once he is raised empowers his followers in the Joy of the Gospel to keep changing the world (his Resurrection Effect). Find the Joy of Life in Resurrection Truth then work each day to overcome the culture of lies and negativity which has begun to choke the life out of us. In Jesus, we are blessed to discover and recover eternal life.

Jesus Christ is Risen Today. Alleluia! Amen.

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