

March 27, 2016
Easter

How do you feel about this whole Easter thing?

Cartwheels and Koehler.

During the past few months I've been seeing a lot of cartwheels, simply because our youngest grandchild, whose name is Koehler and is in kindergarten this year, loves to do cartwheels. And though she's never taken gymnastics and is not really good at it, she loves to practice them in our living room, over and over again. First from the left side and then from the right. And sometimes landing it and often times not.

And to be honest with you, there were a couple of days this week when I actually thought it might be fun to bring in a mat for the beginning of our message, so we could have a few volunteers give it a try. (Ask a few people how long it's been, and acknowledge Gypsy)

And it might have been interesting. In fact, you should ask each other how long it's been since you last did a cartwheel or if you can even remember.... But how in the world you continue a sermon after that? And so instead, I just talked some of the members of our church staff into giving it their best shot. And we included some of those pictures in this morning's bulletin.

And one of the other things that I've noticed about Koehler is that on the days when she comes over to our house after school, along with her brother, every time I say: So how was your day? She always says the same thing: Amazing. And even when I give her a second chance and go, oh come on, how was it really, how was your day, and she will say it again: (Gesture) Amazing! Not just fine or good, but amazing!!

A Really Good Question

And to be honest with you, I've often wondered how Mary might have responded if someone said to her at the end of that very first Easter: So, Mary, how was your day? Can you imagine? For me it's kind of hard because I can't even imagine what I would be thinking or feeling.

For instance, would she think back to finding that empty tomb and then having that early morning conversation with the risen Christ and say: Amazing. Or Or, would she think back to that moment when she thought he was the gardener and then wonder to her herself whether or not that was "really" Jesus.

Which makes it a really good question. And so after all these centuries, and at this point in your life, if somebody were to ask you at the end of today, at the end of Easter 2016: So, how do YOU feel about (motion around) all of this? This whole Easter thing: Including the death and resurrection of Jesus. And his promise to help us live with power and purpose and peace. And the bible's description of how everything he went through was so that we could have a new and everlasting life.

Doubts and Questions and an Invitation

In other words, as you think about today's gospel and everything that Easter stands for... Has any of that at all been life changing for you? Or do you still find yourself sitting on the fence.... With more than a few reservations.

Which I can certainly understand because let's face it, there are all kinds of things about life that can cause you to doubt and question the reality of a good and gracious God who wants the best for us. And certainly the latest acts of terrorism in Brussels would be a timely reminder of that. And we will certainly continue our prayers for all those affected.

And of course, there are all kinds of things that can happen in our own lives as well that can cause us to doubt and question the reality of a good and gracious God. Like when you can't find work. Or when you get diagnosed with the kind of illness that will affect your health forever. Or when a loved one dies.

And yet, this church is filled with people who have experienced all of those things.... (Look at people directly and describe in general what they have endured) And yet in spite of all that pain and grief, we have also learned that "there is" a lot more to life than meets the eye.

Which is why at the end of this day, I hope you will remember that once again, God has invited you to trust his word and his promise that His love for the world and for you is far more powerful than even death.

My Own Faith Often Falls Short

And if there are days when you find that hard to believe, please know, that I don't always get it right. In fact, when it comes to walking the walk, there are a lot of times when I feel like our granddaughter Koehler doing cart wheels, sometimes getting it right, and a lot of times not.

Good News from the Bible & Martin Luther

But according to the bible and our own Lutheran history. There is a lot more involved here than you or me. Because, as Paul puts it in Galatians two, "It is no longer just you who lives, but Christ who lives within you!"

In other words, none of the things that we say or do together in the name of Jesus, depends solely on us. Because even when we do get it right, whether it's in our own personal life or together as a church, it is always through the power of God's spirit alive and work, within us and through us.

And that's why Martin Luther once described our faith as a living, daring confidence in God's grace, not in ourselves, but in God's grace, that is so great, that we have every reason in the world a person is willing to stake our life on it a thousand times!

Cartwheels on a Grave

And to give you an example of how that kind of faith can change the way you see the world and yourself and even death... There's a book called, Learning to Say Goodbye. And in it, the main character is a young woman named Liz, who used to do a little gymnastics while she was growing up. And nobody enjoyed watching her more than her grandfather.

But as time passed and after a good long life, the day came when his life here on earth, came to an end. And I guess it was like a couple of months after his death that she and her mother decided to go out to the cemetery to see him.

And after about a half an hour of reminiscing, with nothing more to say; they just stood there for a while, looking at his grave, when all of a sudden Liz gets this urge to do something that she hadn't done in a really long time. She did a cartwheel. That's right. She did a cartwheel, right over her grandfather's grave. And then another, and then another. And then another.

Conclusion

And of course, nobody knows exactly what God has in store for us after this life. And because of that, as our hymn of the day puts it.... We can only imagine. We can only imagine if we will dance for joy or maybe do cartwheels. Or perhaps sing Hallelujah while falling to our knees...

But this we do know: That in spite of all our doubts and questions. And in spite of all the tragedies and heartaches that are a part of this life: That the miracle of Easter is no less true!

And best of all, we don't even have to wait for heaven in order to experience the beauty and the wonders of his love. And we don't have to wait in order to know the joy and the power of his peace.

Because every time we do our best to follow him and to trust him and to share his love... There is nothing more real or "amazing" than hearing his voice and seeing his spirit alive and at work in the world and in your life too! Amen