

**“What future do we claim?”**  
*Building up trust through love, as people of faith*

**April 6, 2008**

*Text: 1 Peter 1:17-23, Luke 24:13-35*

I.

I don't know about you, but from where I stand, these are exciting times to be alive. We live in compelling times.

Put another way, there's a lot at stake in these times.

To begin with, there's the economy. People are hurting ... all over ... unemployment is up to 5.1%; 80,000 jobs were lost in the last month, a staggering total.

And let's tell the truth, friends. This is NOT unrelated to the rising price in gasoline and to the shocking cost of the Iraq war, which shows no end in sight. GET THIS: we spend 12 billion dollars a month on the war in Iraq. This, in a war that was supposed to be financed by Iraqi oil.

Added to this, of course, is perhaps the most riveting presidential primary (no matter how we feel about it) in our lifetime. Every day, it seems, there's some new poll out trying to tell us something we may or may not want to hear about ourselves.

People are engaging in conversation about topics that we don't usually talk about—like race and gender. Just two days ago we commemorated Martin Luther King, Jr., on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his assassination, one of the darkest days in our history.

After forty years, we're reminded that we've come a long way ... to the point—even—where an African-American is a viable candidate for the highest public office in our land. At the same time, however, we're reminded—as some of the nasty talk radio shows attest—that we still have a long way to go. But the point is: we're on the way.

These are testy times ... challenging times, when we're nudged—each of us—to consider **what kind of a future we want to claim?**

Make no mistake about it, friends, we can choose.

II.

Keeping all of this in mind, the other day, my niece sent me an email that listed 45 things (*teachings* or *insights*) some wise person had learned about life. Things like,

- Life isn't fair, but it's still good.

- When in doubt, just take the next small step.
- Pay off your credit cards every month.

Number 38 on his list (they were not listed in any particular order) was, *All that truly matters in the end ... is that you LOVED.*

My guess is that—for everybody here this morning—we know this to be the case. That all that truly matters, as we live out our lives, is that we LOVED.

Amidst all the challenges of our times—the staggering economy, the ongoing war, the riveting (and tiring) election campaigns and all the conversation that is flowing out of them; in the grip of all of this, all the really matters ... is that we LOVED.

1. Loved the conservatives and the liberals.
2. Loved the Iraqis and the Iranians; and the shia and the sunni.
3. Loved the Israelis and the Palestinians.
4. Loved all people of God's creation ...
  - no matter the color of their human skin.
  - no matter the religion of their mind and spirit.
  - no matter the income level or position of power and influence.

### III.

Perhaps the most powerful lesson of the Easter experience is that the future we claim overflows with LOVE. That's what it's all about.

In a real sense, who would have thought? On that darkest of Fridays, when all seemed lost. One by one, the disciples had abandoned him. How Jesus must have felt there on the cross, *my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

Many theologians and believers, through the years, have reflected how these grief-stricken words—unveiling the most excruciating moment of human despair imaginable—comprise a launching pad for faith.

Why? Because even out of the depths of forsakenness, God comes. And—CHECK IT OUT—after all of this ... his sense of abandonment, his excruciating suffering, Jesus returns to the disciples. He comes back to them to love them still.

He appears to a couple of his disciples on the Emmaus Road ... and patiently, explains everything to them.

Easily, and with good cause, he could have gone elsewhere. He could have concluded—in his resurrection life—not to ever see them again. After all, they'd left him—all alone—to die—all alone.

But, you see, the point of it all, is that LOVE rises up through all the messiness, through all the darkness, the cynicism, the endless negativity, and says, YES to life. And YES to the future.

#### IV.

***What future do we claim*** as Christians, as people of Easter faith? We claim a future that is totally understood and defined by love.

God loves us ... whether we deserve it or not. God loves us. Certainly, that's the BIG PICTURE conclusion of the Bible.

Because, you see, without even noticing, *love builds up trust*. If we want people to trust us, we first have to love them and care for them; we have to respond to them with kindness and compassion. In this same vein, if I want you to trust me, as your pastor, I need to first seek to care about you and to reach out to you with love and kindness. All of our relationships are like that.

In our family life, with blended families, for example, or in our relationships at work, trust doesn't just come, in an instant. It builds up over time ... as we love one another, show kindness and compassion to one another; as we care for one another, are tolerant of one another and as we forgive one another.

It's all part of the love ... that, over time, builds up trust. ***What future do we claim*** as Christians? We claim a future that seeks to *build up trust*—day by day—by reaching out to one another in love

#### V.

1 Peter talks about this. To begin with, 1 Peter is a letter sent to encourage the early Christian communities who were going through tough times. They had all sorts of challenges to contend with.

1 Peter's point is—hey—trust God! The same God that raised Jesus from the dead. Trust in the timeless and radiant goodness of the God who—through God's unimaginable grace—worked through all the darkness and messiness of Jesus' suffering and death and *lived, still, in him and through him*.

It's *in him* (in Jesus)—who was faithful until death, who suffered and died—it's *in him* that we have trust in God. It's in him that we have *genuine mutual love*, 1 Peter says.

*So, love one another deeply from the heart ...for you have been born anew, not of perishable but of unperishable seed ...through the living and enduring word of God.*

Friends, that's the future we claim.

All around the world ... starting with our immediate family ... and then moving out to our extended families ... to our friends ... to our acquaintances ... to the stranger. Our mission, our purpose, as Christians, as human beings, is to *build up trust through love as people of faith.*

## VI.

The future we claim is the future that includes every human being ... because we know that *there but for the grace of God goes any one of us.*

The future we claim is the future that includes every nation and ethnic group ... because we know that only when there is peace with justice everywhere, can there be peace with justice anywhere.

Our future as a nation is NOT America as *empire*—functioning unilaterally, disdainful of the different structures of the international community—but America as leader ... appealing to the high ground of our most noble ideals, seeking to bring about a more perfect union.

The future we claim is the future of all religions, not because we agree with them, but because we respect the freedom of religion of all people. There are parts of Islam that I struggle with; but, so what? There are over one billion Muslims in the world with whom I need to uncover common ground.

That's the future we claim.

A world where we quit trying to bring each other down, looking only for the worst, the lowest and the things that divide; but where we try—day after day—to *build each other up.*

That's the future we claim.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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