

Nonsense, You Get Eternal Life

April 4, 2010

(Easter Day – Year C)

Luke 24: 1-12

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Please be seated

I cannot tell you how glad I am to see all of you here this morning.
But, I am afraid that you might think that you have come to the wrong church this morning.

I am afraid that you might think that you are missing out on an amazing offer at a different church.

I say this because, last Thursday, I found out about the Easter services at Bay Area Fellowship.

Bay Area Fellowship is the largest church in Corpus Christi, a non-denominational church with several locations.

You see, Bay Area Fellowship also has satellite churches all over in South Texas.

Bay Area Fellowship has satellite churches in Kingsville, Padre Island and even just down I-35 from us in San Marcos.

And in order to attract new people to come to their Easter worship services today, Bay Area Fellowship is giving away merchandise to illustrate the free gift of Jesus Christ.

And I just don't mean that they will be giving away T-shirts and baseball caps.

These folks are celebrating Easter today by giving away 2 million dollars worth of merchandise, in the form of flat-screen TVs, skateboards, Fender guitars, and 15 cars.

That's right, even at the Bay Area Fellowship right down I-35 in San Marcos, they will be giving away 2 BMWs, several Audis and even a Jaguar.

(I noticed that they aren't giving away any Toyotas).

All locations of the Bay Area Fellowship are holding Easter worship services all day long today, at 8, 10, 12 and 2pm.

And if you don't walk away with any of the big ticket items this Easter, each and every Easter worshipper will receive a gift bag that includes \$300 in merchandise.

I am picturing that the worship down in Corpus and in San Marcos on this Easter morning will resemble a giant Oprah Winfrey giveaway show:

{using an "Oprah-style voice"}

Hello, people:

Happy Easterrrr!

And just because Christ is risen,

Everyone in the congregation today receives a free gift bag, filled with mine and Gail's favorite CDs and beauty products.

And on top of all that, people:

You get a car and

You get a car and

You get a car and

You get a car!

Now I first found out about these Easter worship giveaways at the Bay Area Fellowship because my mom called me on Thursday to tell me about it.

At first, I thought that it was an April Fool's joke.

I thought that it was nonsense that a church would celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ by giving away BMWs and \$300 gift bags.

However, just a moment ago, I stood in this center aisle and told you a story from the Gospel of Luke that many people would consider to be nonsense and an April Fool's joke.

The story of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, on the surface, seems to be nonsense.

In the Gospels, the women find Jesus' tomb to be empty and two angels in dazzling white tell the women that Jesus has risen.

Yet when the women tell this news to the remaining eleven apostles and to all the rest, they think that the good news seems like an idle tale, like nonsense.

To adult and rational minds, it is nonsense that Jesus would suffer, be crucified, laid in a tomb, and then be raised by God.

Yesterday morning, we buried Lucille Saunders in Oakwood Cemetery in a beautiful graveside service.

Lucille was one of the founding members of St. Alban's, who started this church in 1946.

Before the graveside service began, Lucille's casket sat perched above her open grave.

And two of her great-grandsons, who must have been about 7 or 8 years old, kept going over to the side of the grave and peering down and pointing excitedly into the hole in the ground.

With great concern and with enormous theological curiosity, they kept pointing into the grave and asking:

Is this the way?

Is this the way that Mimi is going to get to heaven, through this hole?

To most of the adults present, this question seemed like pure nonsense. How can anyone get to heaven through a hole in the ground?

And yet, I wanted to shout out at the top of my lungs:

Yes, yes, yes - that is exactly the way that Mimi is going to get to heaven.

Because the way to eternal life, the way to abundant life is through the cross, through the grave, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Yes, yes, yes - that is exactly the way we get to heaven because Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

At St. Alban's this morning, I am afraid that you are not going to receive
an opportunity to win a new BMW,
But you will receive the bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Christ,
the assurance of our eternal life.

At St. Alban's this morning, I am afraid that you are not going to hear
about a Jesus who gives us cars and boats and electric guitars.
But at St. Alban's, we profess this mystery: that it is in losing your life
that you find it, it is in giving that we receive and it is in dying that
we are born to eternal life.

At St. Alban's this morning, I am afraid that you are not going to get a
gift bag filled with 300 dollars worth of merchandise.
But you will receive this gift:
The nonsensical story of all time – telling us that it is through a hole in
the ground, it is through a cross, a grave, a tomb, that we receive
eternal life.

{back to "Oprah-style voice"}

*Therefore, people:
You get eternal life and
You get eternal life and
You get eternal life and
You get eternal life!*

AMEN.

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