

“SoulQuake”
Palm/Passion Sunday
Matthew 21:1-17
March 16, 2008

There are lots of things in life I don't understand.

Why is it eggplant if there is no egg in it? Why is it hamburger if there is no ham in it? There is neither pine nor apples in pineapples. Why are they French fries if they don't come from France? Is sweetbread sweet? Or meat? Quicksand isn't. Boxing rings aren't. If the plural of tooth is teeth, why isn't the plural of booth beeth? If a vegetarian eats vegetables, what does a humanitarian eat? Why do noses run and feet smell? How can a slim chance and a fat chance be the same? Why isn't a wise man and a wise guy the same thing?

Why do we park on driveways and drive on parkways? How can a house burn up and burn down at the same time? How can you fill in a form by filling it out? And you start a watch by winding it up, but end a sermon by winding it down.

A cowboy told a friend about going to church for the very first time. He said, “I rode up on my horse and tied him to a tree in the corral.” A friend corrected him by saying, “You don't mean the corral, you meant eh parking lot.” The cowboy replied, “I don't know, maybe that's what they called it. Then I went through the main gate.” The friend said, “that would be the front door.” Cowboy says, “Well anyway a couple of fellas took me down the long shoot.” The friend said, “You don't mean the long shoot, you mean the center aisle.” “Ya, I guess that's what they called it. Then they put me in one of those box stalls.” The friend was getting flustered, “No, not a box stall. You mean a pew.” The cowboy says, “Ya now I remember. That's what the lady called it when I sat down beside her.”

There are a lot of things in life I don't understand. There are things about God and faith and church I don't understand. I try to make some of the parts I do understand as simple as I know how for other people – who like me may be trying to understand. I stay away from words like “justification,” or “sanctification” or “substitutionary atonement.” I have a fairly good idea what some of those words refer to – but instead of going to all the trouble to explain them, why not just use words people use in ordinary, everyday life in the first place.

To me it's easier anyway – instead of talking about “substitutionary atonement” and leaving everyone lost, then having to retrace your steps and explain what you were trying to say in the first place – why not just say “God loves you so much that He sent Jesus to take away your sins, and show you how to live a great life.” There now, isn't that easier?

I don't understand the fickleness of this world. How people can change their mind from one minute to the next. How you can be a hero one day and a goat the next. (unless you did something to make a goat of yourself. Maybe we should have started with the concept of a mule there, instead of a goat.)

A friend of mine was telling how his son and daughter in law came home from the wedding of a friend absolutely stunned. As the bride and groom stood in front of the church, and family, and friends, the groom made this vow to his bride: “I will take you as my wife as long as love

lasts.” The daughter in law asked her husband, “Did he really say that?” So they listened intently to hear what the bride had to say, and she vowed: “I will take you as my husband as long as love lasts.” Well, maybe it is honest, but it is sure a shaky way to start a marriage. I don’t understand that.

Something I don’t understand in the stories of Jesus, is how the religious leaders were always out to get Him. Here was a guy who did wonderful things for people, helped those who couldn’t (or wouldn’t) help themselves, told the truth, showed people how to live a great life, healed people who were sick, loved God. Gave up his life for them. What’s not to like there? I don’t understand that.

Boy you think you have life up and down. Consider the last week of life for Jesus. Hailed in a great parade on Sunday. Beaten, whipped and put to death by crucifixion 5 days later. I don’t understand that.

In one of Charlie Chaplin’s great silent films, he plays a prisoner being transported to jail. But the boat he was being transported on crashed. At the beginning of the film Chaplin is sitting on the beach looking at the clasp around his leg attaching him to the ball and chain. The whole film shows him relating to his ball and chain and attempting to escape it.

First he tries to humor it. He thinks, “When its guard is down, I will dash away.” So he makes little jokes to accomplish this purpose. He walks the length of the chain and falls in the sand.

Scratching his head, wondering what to do next, he decides he can just outsmart it. He gets up and tries to walk away, and again falls in the sand.

Now, he becomes more thoughtful. His next strategy is one of reason. He will talk to it, reason with it. But down he goes again.

Finally, at the end of his patience, he pretends the ball and chain are not there. He kicks sand over it, and for a while it looks as if his problem has gone away. Thinking his problem is solved he strides to the end of the chain – only to go down again.

At this point, the insight finally dawns on him. Like a light turning on in Chaplin’s head, he realizes that he cannot solve the problem alone. In the last scene he is seen looking upward in hope of rescue.

That is our story, isn’t it?

Have I told you about a friend of mine who was preaching during Lent at the church of another friend. One evening he read the story of the crucifixion of Jesus. As he read, a baby in the congregation began to scream and cry. Finally the embarrassed mother got up to take her child out of the room so as not to interfere with the service. As he came to a close of the reading Wes remarked something like this: “This is the first time I have ever read that scripture and had some one break out crying.”

Jesus turned over the tables in the tabernacle. But more so Jesus turned over the tables, caused an earthquake, in people's lives.

We are in serious trouble when Jesus no longer causes earthquakes in our lives. When he no longer stirs us, challenges us, confronts us, changes us, irritates us, makes us uncomfortable.

When we come to church only to be comfortable, only to continue everything as it has been - we are in really serious trouble.

I've always liked that line about "comforting the afflicted, and afflicting the comforted." If there is nothing life-changing about our faith, it can get boring real fast.

I like struggling with issues with other people. A couple of you have thrown questions and thoughts at me through e-mails, and gotten answers back. I get a kick out of that. By struggling with your questions and other people's statements, I find my own mind and understandings challenged. That's one way to keep it on the growing edge. There is nothing worse than a boring faith.

That is one of the big problems facing the church today. As societal issues come up for the church, people rush off the grab Bibles and find their favorite verses to justify their own previously held position on the topic. Rarely do people sit down with their Bible anymore and seriously grapple with the issues. We go to the Bible to support our point of view, rather than to find God's Word for us. We crawl into our bible to be comforted, rather than open our Bible to be instructed.

"You can't go to the cross with just your head and not your heart. It doesn't work that way. Calvary is not a mental trip. It's not an intellectual exercise. It's not a divine calculation or a cold theological principle.

It's a heart-splitting hour of emotion.

Don't walk away from it dry-eyed and unstirred. Don't just straighten your tie and clear your throat. Don't allow yourself to descend Calvary cool and collected.

Please ... pause ... look again.

Those are nails in those hands. That's God on that cross. It's we who put him there. Peter knew it. John knew it. Mary knew it. They knew who really pierced his side. They also somehow knew that history was being remade.

That's why they wept. They saw the Savior.

God, may we never be so "educated," may we never be so "mature," may we never be so "religious", that we can see your passion without tears."

(Max Lucado in "No Wonder They Call Him the Savior")