



The Gospel Is Not Always What You Think By Rev. Greg Ehler



In a sermon from July 1, 2001 entitled “Arguing about the After-life,” Dr. Timothy Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, New York, spoke about the nature of the gospel and how the religious leaders of Jesus’ day did not understand it. Preaching from Matthew 22:23-33, Dr. Keller spoke about how the Sadducees and Pharisees came at Jesus from two different angles but both missed the point of Jesus’ message.

The Sadducees’ approach to the Hebrew Bible was highly limited. They only considered the first five books of Moses to be worthy of attention and didn’t consider Isaiah, Jeremiah or other key books of the Old Testament as authoritative.

In the midst of enjoying lives of educated aristocrats, they were above “blind faith” and didn’t believe in the resurrection or miracles. They were more open-minded, relativistic and “liberal” in their thinking.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, were religious rule-keepers. They took the Old Testament scriptures very seriously, to the point of developing hundreds of

laws that created a buffer from immorality. They were conservative, moral and dutiful in their religious traditions.

The amazing thing about Jesus is that He angered both groups of religious leaders. When the Sadducees heard Him, He sounded to them like a conservative. When the Pharisees heard Him, He sounded like a liberal. But Jesus wasn’t a perfect tightrope walker between two polarized opposites. Jesus revealed to these religious leaders that their perspectives were not nearly radical enough.

On the one hand, the Sadducees tended to downplay the importance of the moral law. In a sense, their emphasis was on a more relativistic view of truth and a more inclusive view of God. They did not believe in the wrath and judgment of God.

On the other hand, the Pharisees seemed to overemphasize the moral law, making it almost impossible to be an insider. Jesus showed them that they were both wrong. Jesus showed the Sadducees that God was way more loving than they could have ever hoped, but He showed the Pharisees that it is way harder to live in accordance with the law than they ever imagined.

Jesus’ life, message, death and resurrection demonstrate to us that the gospel is something

completely different than the perceived “extremes” of liberalism or conservatism. When the Sadducees heard Jesus, they thought they were hearing a Pharisee, and when the Pharisees heard Jesus, they thought they were hearing a Sadducee.

But Jesus is more extreme than either of these polarities at the same time. His love is more abundant and extreme than the Sadducees had in mind and His righteousness is more demanding than the Pharisees could bear.

Whether we tend to be a people who resonate with God’s promises of justice, mercy and kindness to the poor or His words of judgment, righteousness and moral standards for individuals, we must recognize that He is more than both at the same time. The nuclear reaction of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that, although we were sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8) and that He has come to bring good news to the poor, outcast and prisoner. “What does this have to do with the after-life?” you might ask. You’ll just have to listen to the sermon. Go to www.redeemer.com and go to the sermon store. Let me know what you think.



Good Grief, Good Mourning By Rev. Lana Roberts

Being with our congregation in the weeks since Jamie's passing has been both a privilege and an education. One thing has come through loud and clear, and that is the way each person's experience and processing of grief is unique.



It's true that people are reporting some experiences in common — fatigue is a theme I'm hearing frequently. And it sounds as though some people are processing in similar ways. But we're still, each one, in a slightly different place. As we grieve together and mourn our loss, we'll need some resources to help in all the ways and places we find ourselves.

I am convinced that the vast majority of our grieving and mourning will happen in the course of unstructured time with one another. It is natural and healthy that we turn to those closest to us. Our families and close friends, especially others who share the same loss we are grieving, are God's good gift to us.

And we may move outward from there, to others whom we feel are trustworthy. The elders, deacons, pastors and other staff members are ready and willing to lend an ear, or a hand, if there's something we can do to help you

in your processing. God has equipped the body of Christ to minister to one another, and we are "bearing one another's burdens" when we listen, share stories, and "talk Jamie" together.

Some will need the assistance of counselors or therapists who can come alongside with specific training and experience. If you think that you may be one who needs such help, please reach out for it. We have a number of mental-health professionals in our congregation who will do their best to help connect you to appropriate care.



There are some other resources that we know of and would like to point you toward. First, over a period of time, we will offer a variety of classes related to grief processing during the education hour.

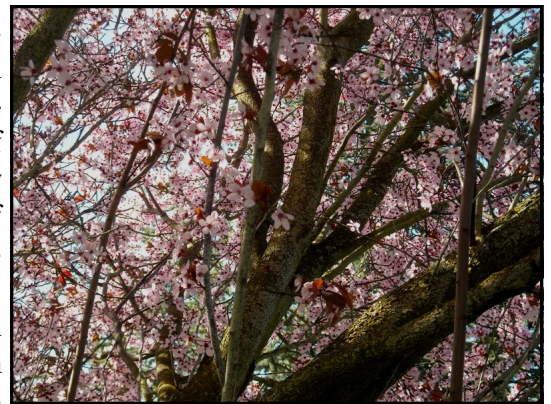
Please keep your eye on what's happening in Room 102; come in and take advantage of whatever seems helpful to you. If a book would help, Dr. Chris Rosik has recommended *Good Mourning, Getting Through Your Grief*, by Alan Hugh Cole, Jr. I purchased a copy, and am finding it readable,

comprehensive and helpful. There are other resources available. We'd like to share them with you.

Because of the nature of grieving in such a large group of people, we'll be moving at a measured pace. The only way for a big group to stay together is to move more slowly, or more quickly, than some would be comfortable with.

We want to offer opportunities that will be most helpful. You can help us by letting us know what you think might be helpful to you or your friends. Do you need more opportunities for prayer? A better understanding of what scripture says concerning grieving? Would it be helpful to have more information about depression or some other mental-health issue? Do you need some one-on-one time with someone, or a small group that meets several times?

We know the needs will change with time, but want to meet you where you are now. We are on a journey together, one that will carry us down a long road.



The Lord is with us and will guide us as we rely on Him, and as we reach out to one another to give and receive the love of Christ. The first step is to acknowledge our grief to each other; the rest will come as we walk together.

Deep and Wide By Marcie York



A phrase caught my eye recently in a little book I keep in my office. It is titled *Kids Say the Cutest Things About Love*, by Dandi Daley Mackall. Mackall compiled the thoughts of 4-8 year olds throughout our nation on the subject of love. In answer to the question, “What is love?” one child responded, “It’s kind of like ‘like’ but with capital letters, L-O-V-E.”

I have been reflecting on that phrase and I wonder what capital-letter love looks like. That question sends me back to my little book to glean from the simple yet profound insights of children. Here are some of the things I have learned. “Love is what makes you smile ... It’s that first feeling you feel before all the bad stuff gets in the way ... It’s very warm and soft, without pointy edges ... Love always feels like forever.” And from one sage little mind, “You’re going to have to ask my mom because she really knows a lot about it.”

These children also hit it right on when asked where love comes from. “God made it up from nothing ... Love comes from people’s hearts, but God made hearts.” God is the source of capital-letter love because He is love (1 John 4:16). Oh how that calms our hearts and gives us hope!

This Lenten season we have chosen to meditate upon and maybe even memorize Paul’s beautiful prayer for the church in Ephesians 3:14-21. We had no idea when we began how much we as a church family would need these words, but God knew, and His Spirit impressed them upon your church staff.

The loss of our Jamie has catapulted us out of comfortable, small-letter love for God and for one another, hasn’t it? We are in a great state of hunger and thirst for righteousness, and have a desperate need to lean into God in new and deeper ways. How comforting it is to have the picture of God’s love described in Ephesians 3:18, so wide and long, so deep and high that “knowing” this love surpasses all knowledge (verse 19).

This, my brothers and sisters is capital-letter LOVE and we pray for one another that out of His glorious riches we will be rooted and established in it. We also pray that we will grasp the unstoppable extent of it, until we will all know it experientially.

All this is in order that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God! When one child was asked to describe love, he answered, “Love is so, so big you can go to the basement ... to the attic ... or outside your house and IT’S STILL THERE!”

There was a child born in a village in England in 1834 who loved poetry and music. As an adult he became a merchant in London. His name was Samuel Trevor Francis and in a time of deep sadness

and loneliness, he wrote these words;

*O the deep, deep love of
Jesus, vast, unmeasured,
boundless, free,
Rolling as a mighty ocean,
in its fullness over me,
Underneath me, all around
me is the current of Thy
love,
Leading onward, leading
homeward to Thy glorious
rest above.*

On a cold, winter night, his faith wavering, he walked the streets of London. As he crossed a bridge and looked down upon the churning waters below, he had a choice. He could focus on the turmoil in his heart or he could listen for the whisper of God in his soul. He chose to hear God’s reassuring words and wrote this hymn as a response.

I face that same choice today — to focus on my inner turmoil or let myself be swept into the unstoppable love of Jesus. I keep hearing that old children’s song, “Deep and wide, deep and wide, there’s a fountain flowing deep and wide.” These are simple lyrics that remind us over and over that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Hallelujah! Sing it with me, “hmmmm and wide ...”



FIFUL Block Party

April 8, 2010

5:30 to 8:00 p.m.

1727 L Street

For more information, please call
443-1175

FIFUL, sponsored by InterVaarsity's Christian Fellowship, is the Fresno Institute for Urban Leadership. The Block Party is a fundraiser and introduction for the Randy and Tina White Leadership Training Center Project.



In September 2009, FIFUL initiated the Leadership Training Center Project to acquire and rehabilitate 1719 L Street.

Our purpose is both concrete and symbolic: we are committed to the restoration of our community and its people.

COME JOIN US
Lives will be changed.
Cities will be transformed

Deadline Information

The deadline for the May Challenger is Friday, April 23 at 5 p.m.

Please contact Daphne Saul by calling 252-4064, or e-mail her at daphne4926@sbcglobal.net. You may also leave articles in the newsletter box in the church office.

The deadline for “A Place for You” is each Monday at 5 p.m.

Please submit announcements to: Cheryl Eaker at 485-6460 or staff@fpcfresno.org and put Cheryl Eaker’s name in the subject box.

First Pres Challenger

April 2010
(USPS 572-240)

Published monthly by
First Presbyterian Church
1540 M Street
Fresno, CA 93721-1277



Contact Information

staff@fpcfresno.org
559-485-6460

For Your Information

He Is Risen, Indeed!



Maundy Thursday Service

April 1, 7 p.m. Come hear our Easter Choir, and celebrate the Lord’s Supper together.

Easter Sunday

April 4, identical services at 8:30 and 11 a.m.
Joyful music led by the Easter Choir. Easter message by Rev. David Abdo.

Return service requested

First Presbyterian Church
1540 M Street
Fresno, CA 93721-1277
559-485-6460
Fax: 559-485-1538