

“No Foolin’”

I Corinthians 15:1-20

Series: Grace Week 1. The Grace-Shaped Life

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Easter Sunday April 1, 2018

I usually start sermons off with a joke but what I have to say today is no joke. For a long time it has been my policy to stay away from any political comments. But I cannot stay silent and watch our government sell out to corporations. Naming rights of stadiums is one thing. But this is outrageous. Have you seen this full page ad in the Philadelphia Inquirer?

In an effort to help the national debt, Taco Bell is pleased to announce that we have agreed to purchase the Liberty Bell, one of our country's most historic treasures. It will now be called the "Taco Liberty Bell" and will still be accessible to the American public for viewing. While some may find this controversial, we hope our move will prompt other corporations to take similar action to do their part to reduce the country's debt.

Selling our national treasures to the highest bidder is offensive beyond belief. I am speechless. The only thing I can say is: APRIL FOOL!

The truth is – this ad did appear in the Philadelphia Inquirer, New York Times and other papers on April 1, 1996 as a publicity stunt. Thousands called the National Park Service in Philadelphia demanding to know why they sold the famous Bell. A spokeswoman said, “We were shocked. We had no idea this was happening. We are getting hammered with phone calls.” They held a news conference to say, “The Liberty Bell is safe. It's not for sale.” Even the White House press secretary got in on the joke saying “We'll be doing a series of these deals. Ford Motor Co. is joining today in an effort to refurbish the Lincoln Memorial. From now on it will be called the Ford Lincoln Mercury Memorial.”

Today, April Fool's Day, has witnessed many pranks through the ages. A website called “The Museum of Hoaxes” lists the top 100 April Fool's Hoaxes.

- 1998 Burger King advertised a Whopper for left-handed people where all the condiments were rotated 180 degrees. Thousands of lefties showed up to “have it your way.”

- 2010 An online retailer sold Canned Unicorn Meat, which it described as "the new white meat" and an "excellent source of sparkles." German customs officials actually halted shipments because of a law against importing meat of "rare" animals.
- 1992 National Public Radio reported Richard Nixon is running for President again. People hear Nixon say, "I'm still not a crook." The voice was impersonator Rich Little.
- 1976 Astronomer Patrick Moore announced at 9:47 am all the planets will line up causing earth's gravity to change. If you jump at that precise moment you'll float. Hundreds report feeling this strange sensation. One person hit her head on the ceiling.

Well two things that don't often line up are April Fool's Day and Easter. The last time was 1945. This year you'll have to watch out for pranks such as an Easter egg hunt with no hidden eggs, a colored egg that's raw, a hollow chocolate bunny filled with hot sauce.

Some people, however, feel every Easter is April Fool's Day. They say the greatest hoax in history is the Resurrection of Jesus. The disciples, they argue, fooled billions into believing a dead man came back to life. Such criticism is not new. Decades after the Resurrection the Apostle Paul wrote,

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. (I Corinth. 15:12-15)

The Resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the Christian faith. If He did not rise then Christianity is just another hoax. Yet if Christ did rise from the dead it makes all the difference in the world. This one event changes your destiny and your eternity.

Critics say, **The Disciples Fooled Us**. It was a carefully-crafted conspiracy. Steal the body and proclaim the Resurrection. This was the first charge made by the chief priests.

When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So the soldiers took the money and did as they were

instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.
(Matthew 28:12-15)

There was a conspiracy but it was concocted by those trying to hide the Resurrection. How do we know the disciples didn't fool us? One of my college professors, a Rabbi, unknowingly taught me the greatest proof of the Resurrection. He said 1st century Jews believed the Messiah will live and reign forever. The death of a leader proves he is not the Messiah. A hundred years after Jesus Simon Bar Kokhba successfully drove out the Romans and ruled a free Jewish nation for three years. The leading Rabbi Akiva proclaimed him the Messiah. Yet the Romans eventually killed Bar Kokhba and crushed the rebellion. This proved, my professor said, he was not the Messiah. Every time a pretend Messiah dies, so does the movement.

Jesus' disciples know this. Every time Jesus predicts His death, they refuse to believe it because it goes against what they were taught about the Messiah. When He dies they all run away. They even scoff when Mary Magdalene and the other women report His Resurrection. So why, when their Messiah dies, does the movement not die? Why does it grow explosively? And if it is a hoax, why are the disciples willing to give their lives for it?

A moment ago I mentioned NPR's trick about Richard Nixon. One of Nixon's Watergate conspirators, Chuck Colson, was transformed by Christ and started a prison ministry. He said,

I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world-and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.

Well then maybe **The Disciples Were Fooled**. Perhaps it was a hallucination. On April 1 2007 Dan Baines posted on his website an 8-inch winged creature he claimed was a mummified fairy. The image went viral. The site received tens of thousands of hits. Some claimed they found

a similar creature. Yet even after Baines admitted it was hoax many refused to believe him. They said he was trying to cover up the truth. So now he sells “Make your own mummified fairy kits.”

Hallucinations do happen. Often we wish to see someone so we do – usually it’s a vague impression. Yet hundreds of disciples saw a solid 3-D appearance of Jesus. Paul says,

He appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (I Corinthians 15:5-8)

Amazingly, the one who is writing about the Resurrection is the very person who tried with all his power to stop it. Paul hunted and condemned to death Christians for being liars and heretics.

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. (I Corinthians 15:9-10)

This was no hallucination. Paul did not wish to see Jesus. Yet he, like over five hundred disciples, ran headlong into the living real Risen Jesus. This was more than something He saw on the outside. This changed Paul on the inside. What happened? Grace happened.

Grace can happen in you. That’s the best news of Easter. **You Don’t Have To Be Fooled.** When Jesus burst out of the tomb He unleashed a tidal wave of Grace. What is Grace? The word falls frequently from our lips. The IRS gives a grace period. The gymnast vaults with grace. The politician falls from grace. We say grace before meals. My Mom’s name is Grace. We use the word so much in church I doubt we realize how powerful Grace is. Simply stated, Grace is a gift, in this case, God’s gift of Jesus. His death washes away all our sin. His resurrection opens the door to eternity. Through Jesus we can have pardon for the past, peace in the present and the promise of eternal life in the future. All this is freely given to us. That’s Grace. It has the power to unmask all the forces trying to fool you. Grace tells you don’t be fooled by

- Fear which whispers “You’ll mess up,” “You’ll never measure up,” “You’re time is up.”

- Guilt which points its finger and says, “You deserve to be punished.”
- Shame which shrouds you with the feeling you are worthless, a mistake, a reject.
- Self-pity which moans that nobody appreciates you, understands you, loves you.
- Ego which pushes you to prove yourself, promote yourself, please yourself.
- Anger which shouts, “Don’t forgive them. Get back at them and make them pay.”
- Pleasure which seduces you with empty promises and endless addiction.
- Death which says “Live it up. Grab all you can. Once you die, you’re done.”

Grace says, “They are hoaxes and lies. Don’t listen to them. Don’t be fooled by them.” These screaming voices are the diseases which kill you soul. They separate you from God and sever your relationships. We are powerless to stop this soul sickness which the Bible calls sin. Yet we try. And others fool us into thinking we can.

Recently someone tried to play a trick on me. The large oak tree in my backyard may be afflicted with a disease called bacterial leaf scorch. A tree service came by and told me he could treat the tree and it would only cost me a \$1,000 a year. So understandably I called for a second opinion. That arborist told me, “If it has that disease there is no cure. These treatments may temporarily hide the symptoms but the only thing they alleviate is money from your bank account.” There are many authors and authorities who advise us to try this new method, practice this ritual, say these special prayers, follow this plan and it will cure you. Yet the best they can do is treat the symptoms. For sin, there is no earthly cure.

Grace is God sending His Son to rescue us from the scorching disease of sin. Paul says,

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (I Corinthians 15:3-4)

When Jesus died on the Cross He took all our sins upon Himself. When Jesus rose on Easter He proved He defeated the disease of sin for us. That's Grace: more than we deserve, greater than we can imagine. Easter means we don't have to be fooled by fear, guilt, shame, self-pity, anger, ego, desire and death anymore. Grace says you can be free. Grace says sin is not your master. Grace says death is not your end. Like Paul we can laugh at death and say, "Death is swallowed up in victory. "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?...Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Corinthians 15:54-57) Grace tells you, when your days on earth are done, you have a home with Jesus waiting for you.

But even more, Grace tells you Jesus wants to make His home in you now. If you let Him, Jesus will come in and renew, rehabilitate, renovate your heart. Max Lucado writes,

Grace is God as heart surgeon, cracking open your chest, removing your heart – poisoned as it is with pride and pain- and replacing it with his own. Rather than tell you to change, he creates the change. You might call it a spiritual heart transplant.

Tara Storch understands this miracle as much as anyone can. In the spring of 2010 a skiing accident took the life of her thirteen-year-old daughter, Taylor. What followed for Tara and her husband, Todd, was every parent's worst nightmare: a funeral, a burial, a flood of questions and tears. They decided to donate their daughter's organs to needy patients. Few people needed a heart more than Patricia Winters. Her heart had begun to fail five years earlier, leaving her too weak to do much more than sleep.

Taylor's heart gave Patricia a fresh start on life.

Tara had only one request: she wanted to hear the heart of her daughter. She and Todd flew from Dallas to Phoenix and went to Patricia's home to listen to Taylor's heart.

The two mothers embrace for a long time. Then Patricia offered Tara and Todd a stethoscope. When they listened to healthy rhythm, whose heart did they hear? Did they not hear the still-beating heart of their daughter? It indwells a different body, but the heart is the heart of their child.¹

And if you accept God's gracious gift of salvation, when the Father listens to your heart, he hears the still-beating heart of His Son.

¹ Max Lucado, *Grace: More Than We Deserve/Greater Than We Imagine*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012) p. 8-10

Today you can let God give you a spiritual heart transplant. Today I invite you to get to know Grace from the inside out. Begin by committing or recommitting your heart to Jesus. Then join us each Sunday this month as we discover just how amazing Grace is.

Early this year I received a call. “Doug, would you come to the hospital? Ellsworth needs to make a decision about hospice and he’d like to talk with you.” Ellsworth and Joann Faust have been members of Woodside since the 70s. Es, as most people knew him, was a renaissance man – brilliant, logical, warm-hearted. He served in West Germany with US Army Intelligence and his career was in Chemical Engineering. He loved his family, gardening and a good joke.

Yet what he faced now was no joke. The doctors told him there was nothing more they could do. Was he now willing to enter hospice, to prepare for the end of his life? With his face toward the unknown, it’s not surprising that one so curious about life might wonder what lies beyond death. He asked me deep and probing questions such as “Where is heaven?” and “What’s it like?” Then he asked, “How do we know there is a heaven?” As a scientist I knew he wanted evidence. Well, the evidence we have is an eye-witness – the only one who completely died and returned to tell us about it: Jesus.

Then came *the* question: “How do I know I will have enough faith to get there?” I said, “That is the best news of all. None of us has enough faith or good deeds to earn entrance to heaven. Yet it does not matter. What matters is God loves us so much He sent His only Son to give His life for us, to set us free and to bring us home. Es, it’s not what we do for God that matters. It’s what Jesus did for us that opens the way to life. That’s Grace. Accept His free gift and place your life in His hands.” That satisfied the questions of this brilliant man. There in the hospital room, Es took my hand and Joann’s and offered his life into the hands of our loving Savior. The word Renaissance

means “rebirth.” Three days later Ellsworth Faust, this Renaissance man, was reborn into the Kingdom of our Lord. He went home.

If you want to give your heart the Christ, then join me in saying, “He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!”