

“NOW THAT’S A GOOD RAISE!”

Acts 10:34-43

April 20, 2025

Easter Sunday

Reaching the end of a **job interview**, the human resources officer asked a young engineer fresh out of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, **“and what starting salary are you looking for?”** The engineer replies, **“In the region of \$150,000 a year, depending on the benefits package.”**

The interviewer thought for a moment and inquired, **“Well, what would you say to a package of five weeks’ vacation, fourteen paid holidays, full medical and dental, company matching retirement fund to 50% of salary, and a company car leased every two years? Say, a red Corvette?”** The engineer sits up straight and says, **“Wow!! Are you kidding?”** The interviewer replies, **“Yeah I am, but you started it.”**

When it comes to raises and salary negotiations, most people get a little nervous. Most employees like to hear they are receiving a bump in their paycheck or an increase in one of their benefits. Although, I am not certain every raise is a good one. For instance, if that rise in your paycheck bumps you into the next tax bracket you might actually be making less take home income. A good raise is one that places you in a better financial position. Sometimes, benefits are a better deal, because most are not taxed.

But this morning we are celebrating a good raise, although at first it didn’t start out that way. Luke writes, **“They put him to death by**

hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.” Now I don’t know about all of you, but that sounds like a pretty good raise, in fact the best raise in history because it changed life as we know it. It’s worth taking a peek at the benefit package that comes with it.

I. THAT RAISE...GIVES EVERYONE A RAISE

Both of my sons are teachers by profession. The nice thing about being a **teacher** in their states is that my sons never have to ask for a raise because they have a teacher union. That union representative meets with the school boards and negotiates raises and benefit packages on their behalf. Once there is an agreement, a contract is drawn up which usually lasts for a certain number of years. The blessing of this contract is that everyone gets a raise, usually according to a scale, and not just certain high achievers. This means there is a certain **no partiality** to the contract.

Peter says, **“I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every people anyone who fears him and practices righteousness is acceptable to God.”**

Understand, Peter is speaking in the home of a Roman soldier, a good man, but also a non-Jew or Gentile, one who represents the enemy and oppressor of Israel. But Peter receives a vision that sends him to the house of Cornelious. What’s interesting is Cornelious also receives a

vision to send servants to Peter with an invitation to his home. In their culture the Jews and Romans did not visit in each other's home. That would be a sign of acceptance. Yet here they are. Why? Because the risen Christ raises everyone up. Don't miss the irony here. Just a few weeks prior to this, Peter was terrified that a Roman centurion like Cornelius would find him hiding and nail him to his own cross, just like Jesus. Now they were dining together, partying like it was the dawn of a new creation.

“**Jesus Christ is Lord of ALL**”, Peter proclaims. Because of God's unlimited dominion and nature everyone is invited to the blessings of Christ, no matter what nation, what color, what language, what gender, what denomination, or what culture. The love and grace of God are not just for a chosen people, **but for all people**. It is only sinful human nature that attempts to limit the raise, and in doing so we deny the message and power of the resurrection. When death is defeated, so are the barriers between people and between people and God. And because Peter and Corneilus are willing to cross the boundaries of culture, the Holy Spirit falls upon them all, thus confirming God's will. **No partiality** means everyone gets a raise and we cannot truly celebrate and be embraced by Easter until that message is received and acted out in our lives.

II. THE RAISE...RAISE OUR SIGHTS FOR GOODNESS

When I was in Boy Scouts I went to a weeklong summer camp. We slept in tents, cooked our own meals over the campfire, and learned new skills. Canoeing, lifesaving, cooking, whitling, and First Aide which at

camp came in handy more often than you think. One of the skills I was introduced to **was archery**. To tell the truth, archery never became my talent. Although, I did learn to wear a protective forearm shield. Getting snapped by the bow string your smarts.

The bows at Camp were nothing fancy, and in fact, rather rudimentary. But I did learn one important lesson. **In order to hit the target one had to aim high.** An arrow loses momentum the further it goes so it drops in flight. Arrows actually fly on an arc. If you don't account for that arc, you'll never hit the target. Aim higher than you think by raising the bow.

Peter said, "...how Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. All the prophets testify about him, that everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

The ministry of Jesus raised our sights by showing us that God's plan for the world is for our good. Jesus lived his life proclaiming peace, doing good, healing sorrow, forgiving sin, and uplifting the marginalized. He shows us that God's intention for the world is not hate, division, war, poverty, debilitation or dehumanization. It is not retribution, greed, destruction, or injustice.

God loves us and his desire is to abundantly bless, bring wholeness, and reconcile all people with himself and each other. Jesus raised our sight for goodness.

But through the resurrection Christ raises our sights even higher. **“They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, BUT God raised him on the third day...”** The resurrection tells us that even the awfulness of death and the all the evil powers of this world cannot defeat the goodness of the Living God. Evil does not rule the day, God does. Raise your sight and look to Christ your savior.

II. THAT RAISE IS PROCLAIMED...NOT EXPLAINED.

In **“Preaching on Easter Sunday isn’t about convincing people,”** Jim Friedrich talks about the entrance to Jerusalem’s **Church of All Nations**, next to the Garden of Gethsemane. There is a sign warning every visitor: **NO EXPLANATIONS INSIDE THE CHURCH.** This was intended to discourage talkative tour guides from disturbing the church’s prayerful ambience with shouted lectures, but it has always struck me as very good advice for preachers on Easter Sunday.”

Luke writes, **“He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.”**

Easter Sunday is for proclamation, not explanation. We **Preachers** want to talk about the resurrection, especially on Easter Sunday. We **Theologians** want to explain the resurrection, so it makes sense. We **Apologists** want to prove and defend the resurrection from those who would challenge its validity. While there may be a place for all those

things, perhaps what God wants us to do on Easter is experience the resurrection.

What I like about Mark's Gospel is the fact that the oldest versions end at verse 8. **“So they (the women) went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”** Easter wants us to be amazed, awed, and perhaps even a little afraid, because resurrection has consequences.

It's not death that we celebrate on Easter, but rather death's destruction. It's not spirituality that we behold; it's the physical reality of a human body that was once dead now being alive. It's not a sentimental metaphor, but a historical truth claim that we must deal with today — a truth that, if we really believe it, will shake us out of our complacency and complicity with death and cause us to reorient toward the life we were created to live from the beginning.

The central question of Easter is not **“What happened to Jesus way back then?”** but rather **“Where is Jesus now — for us?”** Easter becomes not a matter of our questioning the resurrection but of allowing the resurrection to question us. Easter isn't something we remember. It's something we live and breathe and proclaim because it raises in us a living hope that can never be taken.

Now that's a good raise! The question, as with all raises, is what are you going to do with it? Amen.

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

Sunday, April 20, 2025

Second Scripture Lesson

Acts 10:34-43

³⁴Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality,

³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.

³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced:

³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree;

⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear,

⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.

⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be To God.