



March 31 & April 1, 2018
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April Fool

Mark 3; 1 Corinthians 1

Welcome to Easter at Chapel Hill! The day that changed the world...forever! Whether you are a regular or brand new to us, you are so welcome! If you are a Jesus-follower, you wouldn't be anywhere else. But if you are a skeptic or doubter...you might be a little confused as to why you showed up. Well, I believe you are here by divine appointment! The Spirit of God invited you personally and the great news is, you said, "Yes!" I've been praying for you for a long time...I don't even know you but I've been praying that God will open your heart to hear these things in a way you have never done before. Pray.

This is my 31st Easter at Chapel Hill and this is the FIRST time that Easter has ever fallen on April Fool's Day. And since that won't happen again until 2029, I couldn't pass up the chance to make something of it.

When I was studying in Scotland back in the '80s, I discovered that British newspapers love to print prank stories on the 1st of April. I remember one piece trumpeting the fact that an Italian farmer plowing his fields had unearthed the missing arms of the Venus De Milo. Another reported that Queen Elizabeth was drilling for oil in the backyard of Buckingham Palace. Then there was the English farmer who was breeding six-legged lambs in order to increase his profit margin. But my favorite was the article reporting that the annual spaghetti harvest in Italy was producing a bumper crop. Switchboards were flooded with calls from tourists who wanted to go visit the world-famous Italian spaghetti farms.

Foolish, right? So... what does that have to do with Easter? Well...Jesus of Nazareth was considered by many to be a fool...or even worse. After all, he claimed to be the Son of God. And he said a lot of things that went directly against the culture of his time. Even those closest to Jesus began to wonder if he might be...crazy. Listen to this story from Mark's gospel, (ch. 3) about the early days of Jesus' ministry.

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.....Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

Jesus was like a rock star. He performed great miracles of healing and even had evil spirits collapsing in his presence! The huge crowds were so eager to touch him that he had to preach from a boat in the Sea of Galilee to keep from being crushed. A rock star! But did you notice that when he returned to his hometown Nazareth...when his own family heard what was going on...they tried to kidnap him and take him into hiding because they thought he was crazy! Imagine that! Jesus' own people...his own family...thought that he was nutso.

Of course, speaking as a parent of a slightly nutso daughter, I can relate. Rachel was in South Africa on a mission recently and sent this video to me...not to her mother, mind you...only to me. And moms, I think you'll see why!

That is the tallest bungee-jumping bridge in the world. How many find that a little crazy? How many think it's great? (Since I jumped out of airplanes at her age, I can't really talk.) But it's not as crazy as it might appear. Rachel investigated the company; she knew that thousands of others had taken the leap and lived to tell about it... and after careful consideration, she decided that the thrill was worth the risk.

Every person ought to make the same assessment of Jesus Christ. Most people choose just to hold him at arm's length; they never give him a chance. They think religion is a bunch of silly superstition...and that this idea of a man rising from the dead is...crazy. Maybe that describes you! To choose to believe in Jesus...to entrust your life to him.... seems as wacky as throwing yourself off a tall bridge tied to a rubber band. You prefer the "real" world...the world you can see and smell and taste and touch and test.

But let me ask this: is your world any less crazy? Really? The apostle Paul once wrote these words:

"No one should deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks he is wise in this age, he must become foolish so that he can become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.... (I Cor 3:18; 1:18)

Paul is saying, "Be careful about closing your mind to the message of Jesus. It might seem outlandish, but the more you examine it... the more you examine the power it wields in the lives of those who trust Jesus...the more you find that the wisdom of the world is not all it's cracked up to be."

Here...you be the judge. The wisdom of this world says that you are what you possess; the things you own define you. The wisdom of the world says that whatever is going on inside you, you must appear to have it all together. Don't you let anyone see your insecurity or inadequacy. And if you can't mask your pain, numb your pain with alcohol or drugs or sex. The wisdom of this world says if someone wrongs you, get even! Otherwise, you will appear weak and invite other attacks. The wisdom of this world says that, in spite of massive evidence to the contrary, humans are basically good; if we have enough resources and education, we can count on each other to do the right thing. THAT is a summation of the wisdom of this world. And as Dr. Phil would ask, "How's that working out for you?"

If THAT is what defines worldly wisdom, then the message of Jesus is indeed foolish. Because Jesus says, "I know you are hurting inside but I love you and can take away your guilt and pain." Jesus says, "I know the world tells you to hate your enemies but I tell you to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; it is the only way to real peace." Jesus says, "If you aren't careful, your possessions will possess you...and you will become bitter and selfish and fearful." Jesus says, "Death does NOT have the last word. I do. Because I have overcome death. If you believe in me...if you trust me...I will lead you to life...abundant life forever."

Forgiveness, love, generosity, peace, selflessness...that message does seem foolishness to this world. But tell me, as you look at the headlines...terrorism, gun violence, sexual abuse, poverty, greed, divorce who's the fool? We have never been more prosperous, more powerful, more educated as a nation... and yet millions of us experience emptiness and pointlessness and hopelessness in this life. Does that describe you? Behind your lovely Easter garments ...are you hiding things you would never want those around you to know?

Maybe this foolishness called Christianity deserves a second look. But where's the proof? Where's the proof that Jesus is real and that what he offers is any better than what the world offers? Well, there's actually a great deal of proof. Did you know that the documentation supporting the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most well-attested account in ancient history? Billy Graham once said, "There is more evidence that Jesus rose from the dead than there is that Julius Caesar ever lived." But really, the greatest proof of who Jesus is not what happened 2000 years ago...it is what he is doing today...to transform the lives of real human beings, one by one. It is the first-hand testimony of what happens when people decide that the "wisdom" of this world is foolishness...and dare to take a chance on a different way.

We have a course in our church called "Alpha." It is a safe place where people gather around a meal and ask questions about God and faith without fear of looking foolish. Where they are free to admit that life as they are living it...life as the world tells them to live it.... leaves them longing for something more. One such young man is Colin. [LINK](#)

"There was always that longing for something else, that craving for something else...you know that deeper feeling that I'm talking about?...there were so many times that I felt lost and didn't know where to turn...and just felt alone." I wonder how many here tonight/today would...if they were really being honest... would say the same the same thing? You might great on the outside but inside you would say, "I have a LONGING...a CRAVING for something else."

Jesus once said, "I came that you might have life...and have it abundantly." Would you say that you are living an abundant life? A life of love and joy and peace and purpose? Are you living that kind of life?

And what about when this life is over? Are these few years on earth really all there is? Stephen Hawking died two weeks ago. Professor Hawking was a physicist and an atheist. He once said, "There is no heaven or afterlife... that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark." Was he

right? We breathe our last here...and that's it? Or...is there more? Billions of people over 2000 years have believed there is more.

Two Sundays ago, just before first service, a man named Glen had a massive coronary and died right here in church. It was obviously very disturbing. As music played quietly we prayed and waited as the medics cared for Glen and then took him out.

When I finally stood up, every eye was on me. Here's what I said: "This has been a sad...and glorious morning. Sad because it is shocking, obviously, to have a loved one die in church. But it also glorious. Not for us, but for Glen. He got up this morning and came to church to worship God. He had no idea of HOW he would be worshipping God! He breathed his last on earth...in a church...and opened his eyes to look upon the face of Jesus. And now he is worshipping God like never before... face to face...surrounded by the saints... singing with the angels in heaven. This is what Easter is all about! We are people of the empty tomb! We believe that Jesus was victorious over death. He still is. And if that is true, what might be a shock for us this morning... is glorious for Glen. If you love Jesus, can you think of a better way to go than dying in church?"

Later that day, Glen's daughter was paging through his Bible and found these words written in Glen's hand in red ink and circled so that no one could miss them: "I'll see you in heaven." What a comfort that was to her! "I'll see you in heaven!" And he will. Glen loved Jesus... and he knew exactly where he was going when this life was done. How about you? Paul wrote "...the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is God's power to us who are being saved."

How crazy is it that God would send his son to earth to save us? How crazy that Jesus healed and cast out evil spirits...and yet, the world hated him? How crazy that Jesus allowed himself to be executed on a cross even though a legion of outraged angels were ready to rescue him? How crazy that his sacrificial death can pay the price for every wrong thing I have ever done? And how crazy that a dead man comes back to life? How foolish all this seems to the world, this gospel of weakness that is made strong; this gospel of death that is made life. Foolishness to the world; so crazy. But those who take a step of faith discover that it is so real and so good.

I would prefer never to lose another worshiper during church. But that moment was a reality check for every one of us. Because it reminds us that one day, every one of us will breathe our last and find ourselves standing before Almighty God. We may avoid thinking about it. We may buy into the Hallmark Channel version of American religion that says everybody goes to heaven. But are you sure of that? If that moment came for you right now, would you bet your life on it? And is that life you are betting the life you dreamed of? The life you long for?

Colin walked into Alpha apparently having everything going for him. And yet he was empty. And in his emptiness, he found Jesus. How crazy would it be if you showed up here for an annual religious ritual...and discovered that Jesus is real...and alive...and loves you... and wants to forgive you. How crazy that Jesus offers you the kind of life you have never known... a life of love and peace and purpose ... in THIS life...and in the life to come. Maybe it's not so crazy after all. What do you have to lose?

Think about your own life. Are you living the dream? Is it what you longed for...or did you hope for something more? Have you lived foolishly? Hiding who you really are; pretending to be someone else...exhausted by the phoniness. And when you think about the life to come, are you certain where you are going? What if all of this Easter stuff is true? What if Jesus is real...and alive...and exactly who he said he was? Exactly who billions have believed him to be? What if he can forgive you and heal you and fill you with a sense of purpose and destiny like you've never known? Not only for this life...but for the life to come?

He can do that. He will do that if you invite him to. It takes a leap of faith...like Rachel from that bridge...but Jesus can be trusted. If you are ready for more...if you long for forgiveness and peace and certainty...would you pray this prayer with me? "Jesus, the life I'm living now seems foolish. Wasteful. I am tired of it and long for something more. I am willing to give my life to you. To follow you. Please forgive me for the ways I've broken your heart. Please fill me with your Spirit. Please make me new. Please give me a life worth living. And thank you for loving me and doing this."