

March 23 –Good News for You
I Corinthians 15:1-20

For those of you reading the chapter in Moore's book for your study, you will notice that the scripture reference is Matthew's account of the first Easter. I decided that it was a little strange to read the Easter story during Lent so changed the scripture to this one from I Corinthians where the Apostle Paul talks about that first Easter but more importantly, about the meaning of that event for each of us in our lives of faith. This, for me, is what is most important, especially when it is related to the theme of "When the World Takes the Wind Out of Your Sails." Today, let us explore the power of the Easter message for helping us in times of great difficulty.

The first thing we should hear is that evil is real. Now I am classifying as evil all those things that can and do suck the joy out of life. These can be the death of a loved one, illness, divorce, accidents - on up to the really negative or we could say evil things like being the victims of crimes of all sorts. When these difficult moments arrive it feels like evil has won. This is what the disciples were feeling after the crucifixion of Jesus. This man whom they had followed for several years, listening to him, learning from him and coming to a belief that he was the messiah had been betrayed by one of their own, arrested by guards of the high priest and executed by the Roman governor. All of their hopes and dreams had died with Jesus. On that Saturday they would have been numb with grief and confused as to what they were going to do with their lives. Yes, it seemed evil had won.

Most of us have experienced such moments where hopes and dreams have died and we are feeling overwhelmed by the realities of life and have little, if any, idea about what to do next. We have a friend whose daughter, a few years from retirement, went to work a couple of months ago and was called into the manager's office. With no words of explanation as to why, he told her that they no longer needed her services and to clear out her desk and there was a severance check waiting for her to pick up when she surrendered her keys upon leaving. Right now she doesn't have a clue as to the way forward. She would like to know why she was fired. All is darkness and confusion.

But, the Easter story reminds us that this is not the final answer. After the horror of Friday and the despair of Saturday comes the joyous new of Sunday. Evil had not won. The work of the betrayer had been set aside. The power of Rome and its vassals had been thwarted. This is a reminder to all of us that evil does not win, ultimately. We may not always, on this side of death, see resolution to our problems but that doesn't mean evil will triumph. Often positive things are happening, if not in our life, in the lives of others because of what we are facing and the way we are dealing with things.

The story I was telling you. Yes, the daughter is feeling really low, but her mom is seeing the positives in these events. You see mom has been going through some very difficult things health wise. She and her daughter have been living together, but very independent of each other. Just when mom needed a lot of help and to be transported to doctors and have someone cook the meals was when her daughter was fired. Her daughter is working at also seeing her firing as a positive instead of a negative. But this story is a reminder that evil times last for a moment and they do not triumph because God is with us and God's love will ultimately overcome either now or eternally.

The second thing the Easter message reminds us when "The World Takes the Wind Out of Your Sails" is that new life and new beginnings are always an option. When these times happen it is hard, at times impossible, to even think about next steps in life. Some people never get over such moments. They stay locked in the tragedy reliving it for the rest of their days. But we should hear a different message. We know that God is with us, that God loves us and we are an Easter people. That means that new life and beginnings are possible. Now the problem for us is that we don't always want new beginnings. When we have lost a loved one it is hard to pick up the pieces and go on. Some, emotionally, refuse to do so and languish in some kind of walking stupor for years waiting for their own deaths. Yet, if we believe the Easter message that our loved one has found eternal life, we know that they would want us to fully embrace life anew. Yes that life will be different and may be very hard but still we should see the new that is given us and live into it.

The other problem we have with new beginnings is that the path forward is not always what we want. We hear the words, when one door closes another opens. That is

fine if we like the room the new door is leading us into. But often we, at least at first, don't like the new beginning or direction. It feels like a dead end or that we or our skills have been rejected. We need to remember that we are not promised that the new beginning will necessarily be better than what we have lost. But it is there and if we but live into it with hope as Easter people we can sometimes be amazed at how it has the ability to heal our hearts.

I recall a man telling his story. He had to retire early from his job because of health issues. Soon thereafter his daughter moved home with her two pre-school children when she got a divorce. He was feeling really blue one day. He had tried to find some part-time work but no one was hiring. His once quiet home was in turmoil because of the grandkids and his wife had had to travel more with her job to pick up some of the financial slack. Life was not good and he felt it would never get better. That evening his daughter nervously asked if they could go for a drive as she wanted to talk with him privately. It seemed that her ex was not paying child support and even with her living at home she was finding it a stretch to pay hers and the children's bills and their childcare. Since he was at home all day would he consider becoming their full time caregiver? He was flabbergasted. He had never done much with the kids. That was something his wife had done. But, he had no job and his daughter was in need, so he said he would try it. For the next several years he took care of them and in writing said it was some of the most rewarding times in his life. It led to him volunteering at the YMCA after they were both in school because he had found he enjoyed being around children. There was a new beginning, one that he didn't want, but ultimately was rich and rewarding.

Finally, I have been saying this a lot, but it bears repeating. Easter reminds us that we never go through these difficult times alone. God's presence in our lives is a given. Jesus, in his farewell discourse to his disciples found in John 14 talks about how he will send the comforter, the Holy Spirit to be with us. This source of comfort and strength is something we forget, at least at times, when we have had the wind knocked out of us. We feel all alone. It is a scary place. I am sure the disciples felt that way on the Saturday after Easter. But God was with them. Even after the Easter event they were confused and scared. But with the coming of the Spirit, we call it Pentecost, they

were finally able to find the strength and assurance to move out from behind locked doors and take on the new beginning God had given them. We too are offered that same power.

Ultimately, the assurance of heaven robs the presence darkness of its power. When we hold on to the promises of Easter we no longer fear what the world can and does do to us, but instead embrace what God is having us do.

He learned he had terminal cancer. What would you do if you were in his shoes? What this man did was go to his minister. We think, that is a good thing. Ask for prayers for healing and for strength. No, what he did was go asking for information about a mission trip. He had always wanted to do this but work had kept him from it. Now, he had some good months left before his illness would make such a venture impossible and he wanted to fill this one item on his bucket list. When others were surprised that this is what he wanted to do with some of his few remaining weeks of life he just smiled and said that he didn't fear death but wanted to make the most out of life. This is the hope of Easter. We know of his decision because many of his family and church friends decided to go on the mission trip with him and write about it later. After his memorial service, a service filled with pictures of the trip and laughter and memories they remembered his zest for living. Death did win but life triumphed. We need to remember this the next time the "World Takes the Wind Out of Our Sails."