

CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH

Rev. Fred Weimert "An Idle Tale"

April 4, 2010

This is Easter Sunday, the day of resurrection...
but it is more than that...

This is Easter Sunday, April 4th.

April 4th is one of those days
that stands out in our national memory,
because it is the days
when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
was assassinated
back in 1968.

I remember that date pretty well,
because it was my senior year in college.
The Tet offensive in February of 68
had heated up things in Viet Nam War,
and then Dr. King was murdered
and things heated up in American cities...
riots here in Baltimore
and many other cities.

The future looked pretty bleak
for people just getting out of college.
Most young men were getting drafted,
so you could be pretty certain
that if you didn't have a deferment
you wouldn't get a good job.

I was working on getting into officers candidate school
in the Navy and Air Force,
but so was everybody else...
and it didn't look good.

So after my graduation,
Which took place three days before Robert Kennedy
was assassinated,

I went back home to Buffalo...
to the security of my family...
to work unloading trucks for Sears & Roebucks
which I had done the three prior summers.
and to wait to hear from Officer's Candidate School
or my draft board...
but also to play golf with my dad and his buddies...
some of them were very powerful people
Bob Rich of founder of Rich Foods
Bill McInnis CEO of Viking Tools

Hyde CEO of Mentholadum
 Doctors, Lawyers, Bankers...
 With houses in Buffalo
 Summer homes
 on the Canadian lake shore.
 And winter homes in places like...
 Palm Beach and Naples FL.

Powerful people
 movers and shakers...
 I wasn't aware of it at the time,
 but years before
 Poet Vachel Lindsay,
 who had also attended Hiram College
 60 years before me....

Lindsay wrote a poem which opened:

*Within the town of Buffalo
 Are prosy men with leaden eyes.
 Like ants they worry to and fro,
 (Important men, in Buffalo.)
 But only twenty miles away
 A deathless glory is at play:
 Niagara, Niagara.*

My father's golfing buddies
 were later versions of those same Buffalonians,
 They were power people...
 They did important things
 said important things...
 and I knew
 from being around them and talking to them
 that they had little use for
 Dr. King or African American people...
 Little people who when they spoke...
 were full of "idle tales"...
 nonsense,
 humbug.
 To those important men from Buffalo,
 the life
 and thought
 and even the death
 of such people was of little import.
 I doubt most of them had ever heard of people
 like W.E.B. Duboise,
 or of the Niagara Movement.
 They did know Niagara Falls...
 You could see it from the first tee
 at the country club,

in fact your first tea shot
 would be best if a player
 were to line up with the 'Falls'.
 However, the date April 4th would mean little to them...
 But Easter would have...
 and it is Easter,
 And we do need to hear the Easter story...
 even though it is
 a couple of thousand years old
 and we have all heard it before
 But it is Easter
 and this is how Luke tells the story.

Luke 24: 1-12

*But on the first day of the week,
 at early dawn,
 they came to the tomb,
 taking the spices that they had prepared.
 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,
 but when they went in,
 they did not find the body.
 While they were perplexed about this,
 suddenly two men in dazzling clothes
 stood beside them.
 The women were terrified
 and bowed their faces to the ground,
 but the men said to them,
 "Why do you look for the living among the dead?
 He is not here, but has risen.
 Remember how he told you,
 while he was still in Galilee,
 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners,
 and be crucified,
 and on the third day rise again."
 Then they remembered his words,
 and returning from the tomb,
 they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.
 Now it was Mary Magdalene,
 Joanna,
 Mary the mother of James,
 and the other women with them
 who told this to the apostles.
 But these words seemed to them
an idle tale,
 and they did not believe them.
 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb;
 stooping and looking in,
 he saw the linen cloths by themselves;
 then he went home,*

amazed at what had happened.
Here ends the reading.

Did you hear what Luke said
 about how the disciples received the report of the women...
But these words seemed to them
an idle tale,
and they did not believe them.

The very important Disciples/apostles
 received the women's report
 as an **idle tale**
 This is the only time that this Greek word
 was used in Christian scripture...
 and my dictionary says it can be translated
"idle tales, nonsense, humbug."

This word captures so well
 that first century feeling
 of the Disciples about women...
 and their place...

In spite of the fact that the Disciples
 had fled after the arrest of Jesus
 except for Peter
 who fled after denying Jesus...
 and maybe John, at least in his gospel,
 went as far as the cross.

But it was the women
 who went to the cross...
 followed to the grave,
 In fact had it not been for them,
 the Disciples may well not have know
 where Jesus had been buried.

And these who had gone early that Easter morning
 to prepare the body with the spices for burial
 now returned with this **idle tale** about a resurrection.

So typical of women...
 they can be so emotional
 so full of stories of...
"a deathless glory at play..."

The very idea...
 Get real!
 Third day or not...
 He's dead!
 We need to move on
 with our lives.

But it is Easter...
 and we've got to talk about something...
 even though our twenty-first century rational minds tell us

there's nothing to talk about...
 just idle tales of women...
 and a small group of simple and superstitious
 followers...
 with no place else to turn.

I remember a number of years ago
 a woman came to me,
 a member here,
 with one of those *idle tales*...
 Some of you knew her...
 Peg Bland,
 Nice lady, Floyd's wife.
 She seemed reasonable, rational,
 most of the time,
 but one day she told me this story,
 about her mother, Norma Derby.

Now, Norma Derby was one of my favorite people,
 when I first came to Calvary...
 Claris Crain may have written
 the history of this congregation,
 that many of you have read,
 But Norma Derby knew the unabridged history,
 and she would tell me about
 how things really happened.
 Who did what to whom...
 and who was related to whom.
 She was a little short lady
 not even five feet tall.
 With big round eyes,
 and frameless glasses...
 She use to remind me of an owl
 that was in a cartoon show years ago.
 And, like an owl,
 Norma was wise.

I never met her husband Austin,
 who had died before I came to Calvary,
 and I was sorry to have missed him.
 But for me one of the greatest tragedies
 was when Norma began to lose her memory.
 I lost one of my congregational guides.
 Peg and her husband Floyd took care of Norma
 when she could no longer be on her own.
 Peg's brother Bob helped out some,
 But his wife had mental health problems...
 In fact a year before Norma died,
 Bob's wife shot and killed him.

The family never told Norma about Bob's death,
 Because her dementia was so severe by that time...
 she hardly even spoke...
 and what she said made little sense.

But on the day Peg told me her story,
 She said the day before Norma died
 she had gone up to the back bedroom,
 to check on her mother,
 And Norma appeared to be in that space
 between life and death...
 and she was having a conversation with Austin
 and in the midst of it she said:
"Austin what's Bobbie doing with you?"
 How could she have known?

For Peg
 this was a sign of something
 beyond this life.
 and a sign that there are times
 when the division between
 this world and something more
 gets thin,
 translucent,
 transparent.

Our rational being might say Peg's story is just an **idle tale**
 a couple of women,
 in an emotionally charged moment.
 Maybe Norma could sense something wrong with Bob,
 in the same way a family pet senses such things.
 or we might say she was just remembering a time
 when Austin and Bob were together,
 at some moment in life.

But we don't know do we.

Easter stands as a challenge to our very worldly wisdom.

It says to us...
 that contrary to everything that we know to be true
 everything that we can prove to be true...

There could be something more,
 something beyond our knowing...

*"a deathless glory...
 at play."*

Do you remember James Earl Jones in the movie "Field of Dreams"
 when he was invited by Shoeless Joe Jackson,
 and the other long dead players,
 to go back with the team out into the corn field...
 Do you remember how he stood at the edge of the outfield
 with his back to the corn field

and reached in ...
and laughed...
that nervous uncertain laugh...
That laughter is Easter.
It is the promise that there is something more,
something totally beyond us...
and it calls us to live toward that unknown
with courage...
here and now...
even in the face of grave danger
and disappointment.
May we so live. Amen.