

"Peace be with you." It's Easter evening, and the good news is getting around. The report from Emmaus is in – "He is risen! We knew Him in the breaking of the bread." Discussion ensues. Can this be true? It can't, can it?

Raw emotions confront resurrection reality. *Luke 24:36–39 (NRSV) While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."*

Resurrection reality comforts raw emotions. Resurrection reality transforms their reality. The disciples react based on what they know; they try to fit the resurrection into their frame of reference. "He's a ghost." Jesus meets them there and begins to teach them. "Look at me. Touch me. Ghost's don't have flesh and blood."

Christian conduct puts "flesh and blood" on the reality of resurrection. We confront the world with a new way of life. Our priorities are different. Our values are different. We are "children of God" and that makes us different.

It's not easy to be different. The pressure to conform is constant. Will we be "a sign, foretaste, and instrument" of the resurrection reality that is the reign of God, or will we go along with the ways of the world to get along in this world?

It's not easy, but we are children of God. Dare to be different. He's not a ghost; He is risen! In this world, in our lives, He gives us a ghost of a chance.

### ① The Priority of Love

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This is a confusing time to be a Christian in America. It's a confusing time to be the Church in America. It's confusing because familiar patterns of behavior are not resulting in the privileges and rewards we're used to.

Consider the most controversial athlete in American sports today. He's not Michael Vick, a convicted Federal felon for dog fighting. He's not Ben

Roethlisberger, a man who has settled out of court with a couple of women for his boorish behavior. No, the most controversial athlete is Tim Tebow; he talks about his faith; he prays in public; and he stirs public opinion like no other athlete.

Rick Warren suggests that this controversy demonstrates that America is becoming a post-Christian society. Religious behavior isn't being rewarded. It's being ridiculed. That's new. That's different. Our nation has changed.

It's a confusing time for us. The challenge that our Session wrestles with, that every level of church leadership is struggling with, is what do we do now?

1 John is helpful in this regard. 1 John was written near the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century to a church that was divided. Some thought resurrection reality meant that flesh and blood concerns didn't matter; other's (including John) thought that they did. Remember that right after Jesus appears to the disciples in Luke, He proceeds to teach them about repentance and forgiveness. He teaches about how they will live this resurrection reality in their flesh and blood, day to day activities so they'll have a ghost of a chance.

So what do we do? One option is to add our voice to the cacophony of angry voices. We can fuel the rage with our righteous indignation. But in the age of talk radio and 24 hour news channels, trying to resurrect the Moral Majority isn't going to get us far. There is plenty of fuel for the fire; righteous indignation abounds. And our heart isn't in it. Sooner or later, we'll come to lines we won't cross. We'll see the folks desecrating the funeral of a soldier with words that curse rather than comfort; we'll hear words and see actions that repel us. We may not know what to do, but we know *that* is what not to do.

We'll encounter the priority of love which is John's specialty: *John 3:16 (NRSV)*  
*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 1 John 3:1-2 (NRSV)*  
*See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we*

*will see him as he is. And of course, God is love.*

Think about the comments made about the mother we helped through Family Promise. They show the difference between Christian values and American values. They ask – why help her? Why should she have a second chance? We see a child of God. We see someone who’s made mistakes and needs some help to make it right. And we see the children. Society says, “leave them on the street,” but we cannot believe that Jesus would allow a child to be homeless. We cannot believe it, so we step up. We serve. That’s different.

These are confusing times. John offers us clarity. *Beloved, we are God’s children now.* God created us in love. God created us for love. God created us to love. When we love we have a ghost of a chance.

## ② A Ghost of a Chance

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If necessity is the mother of invention, then desperation is the wicked step-mother of inspiration. Normally (but as I’ve already indicated – Christians aren’t normal; we’re different.), we use the phrase “ghost of a chance” to mean “no chance.” We have no hope, but add in Luke’s account of Easter evening, it’s Sunday night and I need sermon title by Monday morning (and at that point I didn’t have a ghost of a chance) and voila! Desperation has done it again!

Easter invites us to look at “a ghost of a chance” in a hopeful way; it reminds us that we have a chance because of our risen Lord Jesus Christ. In particular, we have a chance to overcome the power of sin in our lives and in our world.

A writer for the online devotional – [www.d365.org](http://www.d365.org) put the challenge this way:

When we start out, it's easy to think that following Jesus is easy. We might have said a prayer, joined the church, or even been baptized by our favorite pastor. But the more we know of Jesus and the longer we try to live our lives serving him, the more we realize how far we miss the mark. None of us is fully the person we really want to be.

Missing the mark of God's best for us is what we call sin. Sin can be a scary word,

especially for those of us who have been around the church for a long time. When we hear "sin," we think of a description of ourselves as "guilty, bad, unworthy, or lost." While these words certainly have something to do with how sin changes us, they are not the whole story.

Talking about sin is ultimately meant to give us a deeper understanding of Jesus. When we tell the truth about our own lives, we are able then to see Jesus, in all his goodness, more clearly.<sup>1</sup>

Seeing Him gives us hope; hope that we have a ghost of a chance. John writes: *1 John 3:3 (NRSV) And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.*

John points us to a creative morality rather than a coercive morality. The Church isn't supposed to be society's moral watchdog. We miss the mark when we try to tell people what to do. We miss the mark when we try to compel people to do the right thing. We fail to be the "sign, foretaste, and instrument" of the reign of God that we are called to be when we become so concerned about sins that we fail to confront the Sin and Evil in our world.

We become "that guy;" "that gal" who sees our problem as an opportunity to let us know how wonderful they are. They tell us what we need to do. They tell us how they've done it. And they nag us to follow in their footsteps.

This is the trap we've fallen into. We have relied upon power – political, social, and economic power to impose Christian values on American society. But now, we've lost a lot of that power. It's not so easy to overcome the resistance to our moral rules. We cannot be society's moral watchdog. In this post-modern, pluralistic age where everything and anything is subject to question, every authority will be questioned, and when we demonstrate a creative morality; we have ghost of a chance of answering those questions.

Let me be clear: By "creative" I do not mean a wishy-washy, "you do your thing

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Evans Hagan, [www.d365.org](http://www.d365.org), April 19, 2012.

and I'll do mine," "live and let live" approach that denies there is such a thing as sin. Love is not license! Love does not leave us alone; it sticks with us even when we want to be left alone. Love never stops believing that we can change.

A creative morality seeks to show the way. We're not the moral authority; but we are a moral compass. We help one another find our way into becoming the new creation, the children of God we are. Instead of "one size fits all," we invite people to "be who they are." We point them in the right direction. In this view, sin is what is foreign to us. We are children of God and we seek to live into the vision of God we have in Jesus Christ; not because we must, not even because we may, but because it is the longing of our hearts. As Augustine put it so long ago, "Our hearts are ever restless til we find our rest in Thee." In the words of the old spiritual, "Lord, I want to be a Christian ina my heart, ina my heart. Lord, I want to be a Christian ina my heart."

Christian conduct puts "flesh and blood" on the reality of resurrection. We confront the world with a new way of life. Our priorities are different. Our values are different. We are the change we seek. We are "children of God" and that makes us different.

It's not easy to be different. The pressure to conform is constant. The pressure to play the role of moral watchdog that society has assigned to the Church is immense. Resist that temptation! We're more than that. We're more than another angry voice fueled by righteous indignation. *Beloved, we are God's children now. Peace be with you.* Be who you are! God created us in love. God created us for love. God created us to love. When we love we have a ghost of a chance. Amen.