

Mouth and Heart

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 April 2011

Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, you've gathered us together today and we pray that you would send your Holy Spirit into our hearts, search them and make them new, giving us new joy, new hope, new love, new affections, even for the risen Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Amen. Please sit down. Well, it's great to welcome you today, to add my welcome to Dan's, this wonderful day of celebration of the resurrection of Jesus.

And we're going to look at this little passage back on page three on your bulletin. So if you'd like to just put that in the pew in front of you so you can keep your eye on it.

If you don't trust the preacher, you can open the Bible and check the words really are the words of the Bible. And I want to focus on the two middle sentences, 9 and 10, which read, If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For with the heart one believes and is justified and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. And the very obvious question that we ought to ask this morning is, how is that remotely relevant to life in Vancouver in 2011?

[1 : 37] I mean, here we are celebrating something that happened 2,000 years ago. What's it got to do with the global financial crisis? Or earthquakes in Japan?

Or the murder of 88 protesters in Syria yesterday? I mean, there does seem to be a definite uptick of disunity, disintegration and insecurity, doesn't there?

I mean, here we are in Canada in a federal election. We don't seem to be able to elect a simple majority. And we're cynical about promises and words, words, words.

They're just socially constructed meanings. And all indicators are that North Americans and Canadians feel insecure about the future.

Come on, preacher. We need something solid. We need something relevant that will make a real help and a real difference. I mean, hardly anybody believes the resurrection.

[2 : 37] How is it going to help? And I just want to make things worse for you. You should know that the thing about the resurrection is that it was far more unpopular, unwanted and uncongenial when it first happened than it is today.

Of all the things Jesus did in his career, plenty of them were disturbing, troubling. But in the Greek world of the first century, there was a fundamental axiom of life.

Dead bodies don't get resurrected. In the arts and in the theatre, in official documents, resurrection was officially rejected and repudiated repeatedly.

In Eskiles, Humanities, Apollo speaks to the Athenian high court and he says these words, I quote, Once a man has died and the dust has soaked up his blood, there is no resurrection.

And the view at every level of society in Greek culture was that death cannot be reversed. Once you've gone to the underworld, you cannot retrace your steps. You can't raise dead bodies.

[3 : 46] And more than that, you wouldn't want to. Because after this life, we become spirit shades and reanimating a corpse would be a most horrifying thought to the Greeks.

They repudiated. And in the Jewish world, although the thinking was different, the conclusion was the same. The general belief was that at the end of the world, God would raise Israel on that last day corporately together as one.

That the creator would reverse death, but it most definitely could not happen in history. What God could never do was to raise one individual before that day.

It's utterly impossible. It's why the disciples, the closest followers of Jesus, did not expect, they never knew that he was going to rise from the dead, despite the fact that Jesus told them repeatedly that he would.

So I just want you, I mean, I want us to understand the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is an absolute contradiction and reversal of Greek philosophy, of Jewish spirituality.

[4 : 58] God could not have done anything that's more opposed to expectation and belief. And I think the resurrection, it does, it constantly shatters the mental map that we make of the world.

It shatters the map the Greeks made and that the Jews held of the afterlife. It shatters any idea, for example, of the immortality of the soul, that we'll be floating around on clouds like angels in disembodied spirits.

That's false. It shatters the idea of karma and reincarnation. And you see, if it did happen, if Jesus did rise from the dead, it overturns all the big questions and all the big answers, doesn't it?

I mean, who am I? Where am I going? Why am I? What should I be doing? Where do I come from? That is why I just, we can't talk about Jesus' resurrection this morning from a safe distance, as though you and I are detached observers.

If the resurrection happened, it means at the very least that God has a claim on this world and it means that God has a claim on you. So I want to look at these two little phrases at the centre of Christianity and just see if there's any relevance in them.

[6 : 20] If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. With the heart one believes and is justified.

With the mouth one confesses and is saved. In the Greek, in the original, when it says raised from the dead, it literally reads, raised out from among the dead bodies, out from among the dead ones.

All those who have died, have been buried, have been burned, have been lost at sea. Here is one body, one person from amongst them who has been raised.

The door of death has been broken open and a new thing has begun, which is the foretaste of the great resurrection in the future. So that Jesus' resurrection from out of the dead is the beginning of the resurrection for the dead.

What we celebrate today is not just doctrine. It's something that happened, something that profoundly affects every one of us, something confronting and outrageous.

[7 : 30] And what that verse says to us is that on the day that God raised Jesus from the dead, in a massive act of honouring and delegation, God appointed Jesus Lord over all.

And I know the word Lord sounds a bit like a four-letter word today, but it's not a feudal title of repression. It is a personal name.

In the Old Testament, when God revealed his personal name to Israel, it was the name Lord. And now in raising Jesus from the dead, God the Father gives to Jesus his name, Lord.

It's absolutely breathtaking. The man, Jesus, who walked in Palestine, who was persecuted and preached, who was hounded and healed, is now appointed the ruler of all things.

And God's commitment now is that every living creature will bow to Jesus and confess that he is Lord of all to the glory of the Father. Okay, you say?

[8 : 39] All right, I'm with you so far. How is that relevant? What does it mean for us? And I think we could lock the doors here and safely spend a century and never really plumb the depths of this, but in this passage, the Apostle Paul tells us three implications, three very simple implications of the resurrection today that change our relationship with ourselves, with one another, and with God.

Firstly, it changes my relationship with myself because the resurrection is the basis of true integrity. Just look back down there, sentences, verses 9 and 10.

Do you notice the shape of those four lines? It goes, mouth, heart, heart, mouth. Because real Christianity is the mouth and the heart together, not the mouth without the heart, not the heart without the mouth, but the two in harmony.

And the thing about the heart is that it's completely hidden. I can't see into your heart and you can't see into mine, thankfully, or else you'd never listen to what I was saying.

One of the most potent forces of disintegration in our lives and in our families and in our cities is the distance between my heart and my mouth.

[10 : 11] I mean, we hardly ever say what we mean or mean what we say. We become very good at saying one thing while thinking the opposite. We're so good at pretending and deceiving others that we hardly notice that we're doing it.

I mean, I can say very nice flattering words to you and in my heart despise you. I can get five gold stars for respectful speech but ridicule you in my heart and all the time loving it.

Nietzsche's picture of words was this. They're like coins that have had so much use. They've been rubbed smooth. They've lost their faces. They're no longer good for currency. They're just metal.

It's hard to stand behind our words. I mean, it's a hard thing to speak the truth from the heart, isn't it? It's a fearful thing to say to another person who you really are or what it is you really love or what it is you're pursuing, who you really think is Lord.

It's much easier to use words as tools of self-protection. You know, Ernest Hemingway said, all I want to do, all I have to do is to write one true sentence, the truest sentence I know.

[11 : 33] And one of the implications here in verses 9 and 10 is that the resurrection has the power to unite us and integrate us with ourselves in a way nothing else has.

This is salvation, to confess that Jesus is Lord with your lips and to believe in your heart, deep in your heart, that God raised him from the dead. It is the truest thing you could ever know, it's the truest thing you could ever believe and say.

And I know it's dangerously specific but Christian faith is not a vague sense that God is there, it's not a general sense all will be well, it's not even being a spiritual person, it is believing in your heart God raised him from the dead and confessing with your lips that Jesus is Lord.

This is a heart and mouth issue. The heart is the core of who we are, it's what makes you, you. Because Christianity is not a front porch religion, there's no such thing as a casual Christian, it's heart work.

And I was reading the papers over Easter time and the big emphasis in the newspapers on Easter is the biology of hope or the psychology of faith as though what's really all going on is inside me and the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead is completely irrelevant.

[12 : 58] The Christian faith is not primarily or merely a psychological thing, it's not a kind of optimism on life. It is opening our hands and receiving what God offers as a gift, a new life, a new heart, a new hope, which is much, much, much more than Hemingway hoped for.

It's more than my own private, personal, psychological integration. It's not just something inside me, it's the shattering reality of the resurrection and the lordship of Jesus Christ outside me that enters into my heart with inside me and then combines the two and makes harmony, giving us new desires and new decisions.

it unites our hearts to something solid and eternal, a lord that will never let us down, a lord who is eternally, wonderfully, kind and beautiful, the one we most desire, the one who's most reliable, who promises to enter our hearts and to make them new with a new life, bringing our mouths and hearts into harmony.

And I just point out this is a million miles from mere intellectual ascent. Christianity is not a cold and bloodless religion.

We're not Stoics, even though we're Anglicans. If Jesus, if God raised Jesus from the dead, God is not calling us to stop our desires or to lessen our desires but to redirect them and to increase them to the one who really only truly deserves our affection and our love, the risen Lord Jesus.

[14 : 41] That's why it's a good thing that we're going to finish our service by singing the Alleluia chorus together. Sing it up. So that's the first relevance. The resurrection is the key to personal integration.

The second is with respect to other people. The resurrection is the basis for true human unity. unity. You know, there's a whole industry dedicated to finding some form of human unity, biological, ethical, political, social.

We've got to find some desperate common denominator that we can gather around before it's too late. If you know the one thing that ruins all human unities, it's death. It's the great separator, the great divider, the great leveler.

And I think every human has this sense that we were made for something more than this. And there's a wonderful book called The Undertaking by a funeral director, Thomas Lynch.

He has a chapter on caskets. I read these things. I recommend them.

[15 : 51] He says this as he finishes his chapter, in even the best of caskets, it never all fits. All that we'd like to bury in them, the hurt and the forgiveness, the anger, the pain, the praise, the thanksgiving, the emptiness, the exaltations, the untidy feelings when someone dies.

Do you see, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead opens a unity for humanity that transcends and exceeds any biological or political or social unity. The resurrection unites heaven to earth, eternity to time, God and humanity, my present and the future.

It creates a unity that cannot be destroyed. I look down at verse 12. Please. for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek.

The same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. Perhaps the most basic doctrine of the Bible is that there is a God, there is a God, one God, creator of heaven and earth whose name is Lord.

And if this God has given his name to Jesus, it means that Jesus Christ is Lord of every single human being without distinction. It doesn't matter who you are, where you come from, what your background is.

[17 : 14] The most unitive and human thing that you can do is to confess Jesus Christ as Lord with a renewed heart. And here is the thing, that in the resurrection, God offers us a human unity that is both above us and outside us, as well as within us.

Transcending psychology and chronology, but transforming us inwardly. This is something we deeply desire for.

You will have read in the papers in the last months that Europe is largely giving up on multiculturalism. And after years of training our children in inclusivity, diversity and pluralism here in Canada, we still basically function as a society on the basis of inequality.

One of our sons, when he was younger, played baseball in grade two. And the teacher's rule was that every game would be a draw. And it worked for a while. The problem was that in that year the children learned to count.

They played a team one day and the other team didn't get one single person home across home plate, whereas my son's team got a dozen or so. And when they all gathered after the game finished and the teachers announced that it was a draw, the children were confused and then they were enraged and distrustful and they thought this is ridiculous.

[18 : 47] But you see, if Jesus Christ is Lord of all, there can be no distinction before him. The last time in this letter Paul used that phrase, there is no distinction, he then said, since all have sinned and lack the glory of God.

Which means it doesn't matter how law-abiding and upright and ethical your life, there are two things you share with every other human being. You lack the glory of God, I lack the glory of God, we cannot do anything to get it back, but Christ offers to restore to us this glory.

And since he is Lord of all, verse 12 says, he bestows his riches on all who call on him. God alone is the source of true wealth. Here are riches that are not going to depreciate.

True wealth, true love, true life. God is rich, we're told, in mercy, he's rich in kindness and wisdom. These are the riches that Jesus abandoned at the first Christmas in Bethlehem.

He was truly rich, but he became poor, and he died and he rose again so that we might become rich, that he might share all the riches of God with us. And again and again and again in this passage, we are told it's for everyone, it's for all, it's for any who call on the name of the Lord.

[20 : 03] So I say this, the Jesus is the real key to unity in the deepest sense, but not in a simplistic sense. He's the key to unity in our families, in our cities, in the world, not just a unity based in DNA or common aspirations, but the unity of a new humanity, a family that is eternal, with new hearts under one Lord.

So that's a second implication. resurrection. The first is the resurrection shifts our relationship with ourselves. The second is it gives us a new relationship with humanity.

And the third implication, which is the most important, is that the resurrection is the basis of true security with God. You notice those two verses we're focusing on 9 and 10 begin with a little word because.

So we just have to go back and let me read to you quickly verses 6 to 8. The righteousness based on faith says, do not say in your heart who will ascend into heaven, that is to bring Christ down, or who will descend into the abyss, that is to bring Christ up from the dead.

But what does it say? The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that is the word of faith that we proclaim. Sounds very complicated, doesn't it? It's very, very simple. There are two things you cannot do, we cannot do.

[21 : 29] We cannot climb up into heaven. We cannot buy ourselves, get ourselves into the place of God. We can't, with all our best minds and technology and medical know-how, make our way to heaven.

And the second thing we can't do is we can't bring the dead back to life. You and I can't go down to the place of the dead and bring back the dead. Every medical doctor and every hospital has a 100% failure rate in the end.

Or as the funeral director in the town when I was a teenager used to sign his letters, yours eventually. Although I did attend his funeral.

These two impossibilities, of course, are exactly what Jesus has done. That's why Paul takes these two headline moments from Jesus' career. His birth as a baby in Bethlehem and his resurrection back to heaven.

He came down from heaven for us. He lived a perfect, pristine life of righteousness, crucified, buried three days, raised from the dead. And now Jesus offers us that righteousness and all the riches of God.

[22 : 43] And you don't receive that righteousness from Christ by trying hard or pulling up your socks or getting a great moral record, but by faith in Jesus Christ. It's very simple. I think Christianity is absolutely unique amongst world religions in this.

Christianity is not about climbing up the spiritual ladder through enlightenment or reaching for zen or detachment. It is the acknowledgement that we can't, but that Christ has and we receive that by faith.

So when you front up to death on that day and you front up to God, it's either holding your own inadequate righteousness or you're holding Christ's perfect and pristine righteousness.

We will appear before Christ on the last day, either with Christ as our Lord or with something else as Lord. If you see the accessibility and the security of salvation, you don't have to go through moral heroics for God to accept you.

You don't have to climb up to heaven and raise yourself from the dead as though you could. You don't have to really achieve anything you have to receive by faith. And it's not far away.

[23 : 50] It's not something tricky or difficult. It is as close as my words are in your ears and in your heart right now. That's why we celebrate today remakes every mental and spiritual map.

In the resurrection, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has removed everything that we could ever be ashamed of. He offers us salvation, an actual rescue from sin and death in the future, demonstrated in the resurrection.

That's why the resurrection is a kind of time-shifting miracle. Instead of waiting to the last day to begin the resurrection, God has brought the day of resurrection back into our history. The last day has begun.

The end of history is present in Christ. God has demonstrably shown his power over death in that one man, Jesus. That's why the last verse of this little passage says, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

He's the Lord of all and he offers us integrity in ourselves, unity with one another and security with God. Through his death and resurrection, he's penetrated deeper into life and death.

[25 : 08] And he now holds out this gift in his hands to everyone and everyone who calls on his name will be saved. And so the question I finish with is this, have you called on him?

It's not complicated, it's just saying in your heart, it's just speaking to him by prayer. Have you asked him to share with you his righteousness, his riches, his glory, his goodness, his love?

He rolled back the stone. Have you rolled back yours? You believe he rose from the dead? Have you taken him as Lord? Because everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

So let's kneel and pray. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Okay, amen. Amen.

[26 : 30] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.