

“Beyond the Limits”  
Pastor John Bronson

Phil. 2:6-411

April 8, 2012  
Resurrection Sunday

Order of Worship for 4/8/12, “Celebration of the Resurrection” 10:30 am

Some sort of special prelude would be great!

Welcome and Announcements:

Ministry Moment: (none)

Call to Worship: John 20:1-18 (leave off the last phrase, “...and that he had said these things to her.”)

From here on let's be creative!

“The Prayer Closet”

April 8, 2012

*“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”*

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

1. **Vance and Carol Johnson: Evangelical Theological college of the Philippines:** they ensure a strong and constant prayer covering; they are in open communion with the Spirit; the gospel prevails against false religions and superstition
2. **President Obama:** the Lord leads him and over-rides him when necessary; he comes to a true understanding of the role of Christianity in shaping the freedoms of our nation; the Spirit teaches him to love those freedoms
3. **OCS:** that faculty, students and administration will enjoy a relaxing week away from school; that more and more families will decide to enroll students for next year; constituent families will understand and respect school decisions and policies
4. **Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: Tye A. Turner, SM Sgt, US Air Force** (husband of Cathy Turner):
5. **Young Adult of the Week: Lukas Valadez,** (son of Robert and Toni Valadez):

“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Christian church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.” Amen.

You have a copy of that in your worship bulletin. I suspect that you recognize the words. They are a rendition of the “Apostles’ Creed”, one of the earliest summaries of what Christians believe. In our day there are many, many who say they are Christians but they really don’t know what they believe. The Apostles’ Creed [is] thought to have been developed around the third or fourth century. It is not by any means the earliest of the creeds whereby Christians thought to fix in their minds the kind of minimum necessary to believe [so that] they would be faithful to the God Who sent His Son to save them.

If you want to go to the earliest creeds you have to go to the Bible. Turn to Philippians 2:6-11. This little section in the letter that Paul wrote to the Philippians has long been recognized as a creedal statement built on a hymn that was sung widely amongst Christians in the birth of the church. This is what Paul wrote, beginning at verse 6 and on through verse 11. Paul says, *“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who – this is where the creed begins – though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* Paul’s exhortation, the message he was delivering to those Philippians, is that believers should adopt the attitude which the life, death and resurrection of Jesus fully embodied and demonstrated. That is why he begins by saying, “Have this mind in you. . .” This was based [on] what they believed to be true about Jesus, about who He was, what He had done, and above all, of course, [on] the glorious reality of His death and resurrection.

When you read the gospels you realize that Jesus had a very intense awareness of His own [impending] death. I am not sure for how long in His life He had that awareness. But we know that as you read the Gospels on three separate occasions He tells His disciples, “I know that I am going to Jerusalem and that when I get there I am going to be crucified and die.” Then He also told them that He would rise again from the dead. More closely related to our thoughts on this morning, however, is the comment that John records in his Gospel regarding Jesus on the night of His betrayal. Judas Iscariot, who was the one of the Twelve who betrayed Him, is still in the room with the other men. We read this in John 13:2-5. *“During the supper when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him”* We are told that as Jesus moved along one by one to the men He comes to Peter and Peter says “You’re not washing my feet!” Jesus says to Peter, *“If I do not wash you, you no part in me.”* Then if you know Peter, Peter shifts ground and says, “Wash me altogether!” But at the end of this episode Jesus again puts on His outer robe and then He gives this instruction to the disciples. He says, *“Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”* So Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Have this mind among yourselves.”

The simplest of all creeds is simply, “Jesus is Lord.” It was the creed, [or] if you will, the confession that got the first Christians into trouble with the Roman Empire. The Romans, if you know much about them in those ancient days, were entirely indifferent to whatever god someone chose to worship or whatever claims were made on behalf of that god. They didn’t care. But about one thing they did care; they were adamant no god, no deity, no authority could ever be given a higher honor or a greater allegiance or a more sure submission than to the emperor of Rome. They had a simple test. All that was needed was for each person to burn a little incense to Caesar and offer up a prayer to what they called his genius, which was another word for the spirit of the man. That was to acknowledge that he was the Lord of the empire. Perhaps those early Christians recognized how similar this was to the temptation [of] Jesus by Satan in the wilderness at the very beginning of His ministry. Luke records it for us in 4:5-8. *“The devil took Jesus up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, ‘To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me – just a little worship! – it will all be yours.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.””* And Jesus’ followers did the same, and like Jesus they paid with their lives.

Another creed in the scriptures is I Corinthians 15:3-4. This is a creed and you will recognize it instantly when I begin to read it and your ears are attuned to hear a statement of fundamental belief. Paul says this: *“For I delivered to you as of the first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. . . .”* Paul spends the entire rest of the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians talking about the resurrection and its centrality to what we understand to be true about God and what He has done for us. Then he ends his instruction, the very end of that chapter, longest one in the letter, verses 51-58, and you will recognize some of these words from what we sang this morning: *“Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Now here is the application. This is what we do when we know that this is true. This is how we organize our lives based upon the glorious reality of the certainty of eternal life through Jesus Christ. *“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”* So Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Have this mind among yourselves.”

It has been said that if Jesus in fact rose from the dead – which is not a disputed truth amongst us – but if He rose from the dead, it changes everything. That is Paul’s point, of course, to both the Philippians and to the Corinthians. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is so loaded in fact with implications for life that it is virtually impossible to put them all in words. At a stroke the parameters, the definition of what is real changes. Someone has also made this observation, that the majority of people lead lives of quiet desperation. Think for a moment of some people you know who perhaps are not worshipping today. Think of some people who have nothing to believe in except maybe themselves and the government.

Why would life, particularly in the United States for life is good here, why would it be a life of desperation? You and I both know that life is full of struggles and sorrows. The reality is most of us can handle the struggles: overcoming obstacles, things that get in the way, things that go wrong. We can meet those. It is the sorrows, however, that finally drain life of joy. Sorrow is the soul’s response to irrecoverable loss whether that loss is real or only imagined. For most of humanity the dreams of childhood are drained of the power of enchantment by the harsh realities of adolescence. What happens in adolescence? It is not just the chaos of conflicting desires and scarcely controllable impulses, but sometime in adolescence most children realize that their heroes are flawed, including mom and dad. Suddenly the nature of the world that they are living in is altered. It becomes problematic. Most of us recover from this [also]. However, the means for doing so are questionable: personal ambitions for a happy life, for wealth, for success, for fame, the pursuit of recreation, physical prowess, gaining knowledge,

scientific inquiry, travel: these are some of the ways in which people resolve that they will live life well. Only now, in distinction from the dreams of childhood, most people know they are working against limits. In effect, they are being chased by disappointment. We resolve to forget about, to not think about what is not wanted and concentrate on the good things. But only too quickly, one by one, people encounter again the harsh reality of life. Our anticipations are rarely met and there are many unforeseen difficulties which slow us down and can even throw us off course along the way. Soon we find that we are no longer running; we are walking. Indeed soon we find that we are no longer walking; we are plodding. Indeed at some point we begin to feel that perhaps we are stumbling along the way. As the cries of pain reecho in our souls and hopes collapse into disappointment so as the years add up our lives shrink as we surrender to the ever more tightly drawn limits which hem us in. Always, always there is before us the reality of death. You may think I am drawing an exaggeratedly dramatic picture. I would like to take you to visit John Barteck, who at this moment is lying curled in a hospital bed waiting to die. I have been by that bed many times, and I have seen in the eyes of those who gather round not the reflection of the man in bed, but the projection of the realization, “That is who I will be.” Of course!

Family members die; old friends die; the rich and famous, the powerful and exceptional, they all die. The fanfare of life grows muffled, and in some corner of our hidden thoughts we are sensible, we are waiting.

It does not have to be that way, and I certainly hope [that] many who are here today protest, not that you protest against the truth of what I have just said, because what I have just said is true. Rather [you protest] against the applicability of that truth to your situation. The weight of despair works cruelly on many and many make adjustments to evil they never would have thought possible. Those without hope are rarely noble-minded; they haven't the inner strength. But if Jesus rose from the dead, everything is different. At that moment we recognize that in Him we transcend the limits. The resurrection of Jesus changes the parameter, the definition of what is real. The resurrection of Jesus returns hope to the center of our lives. It does so not simply because time and space and the constraints of material scarcity no longer define our future lives. Beloved, merely to extend life under its present [conditions] works no kindness to us. The weariness which finally wears us down to sheer endurance is not in the first place physical; it is first of all moral and spiritual. We are drained of life by sin. You know, after the first parents, Adam and Eve, fell into sin, shortly thereafter God kicked them out of paradise. Punishment or mercy? O, [it was] mercy! Just think for a moment what it would be like to live for eternity with your least favorite relatives, and no hope of change. I know about holiday gatherings! Some of you are hoping I will preach until tomorrow: you won't have to go home and face them. “Hello! It is so nice to have you here! Are you still here?” It is no kindness to merely extend the length of life indefinitely. What is kind is to change the quality of life. That is the promise. That is the outflow of grace. That is what stirs us up and says, “I can be glad in the face of every adversity that may come.” Paul writes this, you see, to the Corinthians: *“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”*

*“Beloved...”* John says in I John 3:2-3, *“we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when [Jesus] appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”* On this glorious day in the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ my question to you is, do you have the hope that is uniquely ours thought Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me: It is a simple thing, our Father, a simple thing to receive the wonderful gift which you have given to us in Christ. That is to confess that we are sinners with no hope within ourselves, but to confess as well, Jesus has died for my sins that I, by living in Him, may change and have hope eternal. O may that be the confession of every heart and mind that has gathered here, and increasingly Father by Your grace throughout the circumference of the world. We give you thanks, Father. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.