

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Date: Easter Sunday - March 31, 2013
Sermon Title: The Gospel According to Bill O'Reilly
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe

LITANY

David: The Gospel According to Peter, disciple of Jesus:

Reader: "You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."

David: The Gospel According to Martha, sister to the risen Lazarus:

Reader: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God."

David: The Gospel According to the Woman who met Jesus at the well:

Reader: "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! Could this be the Messiah?"

David: The Gospel According to Pontius Pilate:

Reader: "This man is innocent. I can find no case against him."

David: The Gospel According to the Roman soldier at the foot of the cross:

Reader: "This was a righteous man. Truly, this man was God's Son."

David: The Gospel According to Thomas, no longer doubting:

Reader: "My Lord and My God!"

David: The Gospel According to Mary Magdalene, the first witness to the Resurrection:

Reader: "I have seen the Lord!"

David: And the Gospel according to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, who encountered the risen Jesus as he walked beside them:

Reader: 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?'

David: Today our voices join with theirs.

Reader: Today we too proclaim: My Lord and My God, you are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. You are alive forevermore.

David's Introduction:

This is going to sound like an obvious and silly thing to say, but we don't like things to be dead. We all look forward to spring because we want our backyards and flowerbeds and vegetable gardens and front lawns and dogwood trees to spring back to life! Even our culture and our language are constantly refuting death. We have all these vampire movies and Zombie TV shows. We hear talk about the "undead," and studies of "near-death experiences."

In sports, when our teams and favorite players come back from a bad game, a bad season, a bad decade, we describe them as "coming back from the dead," "coming back from the grave," we talk about "resurrected careers." And when we talk about teams playing badly, we say, "They look dead out there."

I was thinking the other day ... the Cubs haven't won a World Series in over 100 years, and yet their fans will fill Wrigley Field game after game, hoping ... Our own local Mets and Jets have fallen on hard times, so I realized you can't be a Cubs fan, a Mets fan, a Jets fan, and not believe in resurrections. That's what makes you a fan.

My friend Butch Trischman takes me to a Yankee game every year. I saw him just this Thursday, and he said with great enthusiasm, "David, you're ready, right? We're going to a game!" Now, we both know this year the Yankees don't have any hitting or any pitching or any fielding, and their best players are all over 90 years of age. But we're ready and hopeful. That's faith. You either believe the dead stay dead, so you give up, you stay home, you don't go to a game or church. After all, what's the use? OR you believe there's still hope, still life ahead, despite the seeming reality. Fans, true

fans, prefer to see things hopefully. We look for evidence of life, we put that together with our hopes, and we dare to see more life down the road. That's faith.

Alida's Introduction:

The Bible tells us "For Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruit of those who have fallen asleep." (1 Corinthians 15:20) Jesus is the first fruit. The first sign of Resurrection, the first example. Not the last. Not the end. Not the only one. He's the model for the rest of us. Showing it can be done! Jesus even said, talking about us, talking about you, "Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing." In fact, wait! There's more! Jesus says, "If you have [faith], you will do even greater things!" (John 14:12)

Greater things! So, yes, we believe in resurrection, resurrection in things large and small, personal and cosmic, up in heaven and right down here on earth. We believe in resurrection.

Today, in our brief Easter messages, David and I will tell you simple stories like parables from daily life like those Jesus used to tell. They'll show why we believe in resurrection and in greater things.

"The Gospel According to Bill O'Reilly and Don Imus." Seriously? That's my Easter sermon title? Really? Absolutely! Now, bear with me. The following is a pretty accurate summary of their discussion on the "Imus in the Morning" radio show on Wednesday, March 13. O'Reilly has written a new book about Jesus, and they were discussing it. So I was driving up Rt. 8 near the Massachusetts border, where the road is all windy and curvy, and I'm trying to follow their conversation on the radio. I've got a pad of paper on the steering wheel, a Pilot pen in my right hand; I'm steering with my left hand, all while trying to write down what they said. Because it was good! And here's that conversation:

"The Gospel According to Bill O'Reilly." Imus starts off, "Do you believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God?" And O'Reilly says, "Yes, I do. Look at him. Look at what he did. There's nobody else like him in the history of the world! He's the only person to so dramatically change the world without any structure whatsoever. Anyone else who really affected the world had some sort of

structure — an army, a government, a nation, a religion. With that structure they did big things. But Jesus didn't have any structure. Jesus had nothing. He was dirt poor, walking around Galilee in 100-degree heat. That's it!"

Then Imus jumps in, saying, "Plus, Jesus was raised from the dead!" To which O'Reilly responds, "I don't get into that. I just go with what's written down, what he said, what he did, and the result. There's no one else even close."

I think that's amazing stuff. That's what they call in the business, an "unsolicited testimonial." I'm not an "unsolicited testimonial." You expect me to like Jesus. You come to church on Easter, you EXPECT the whole church to be pro-Jesus. You have lilies up here representing resurrection. You've got the choir celebrating Jesus in song. You've got hymns practically shouting, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today." Plus, I get paid to be a Christian! I'm supposed to think Jesus is special and unique and the Son of God, and all that. That's my job!

But Bill O'Reilly? And Don Imus? Bill O'Reilly is a political pundit, a popular historian, a TV talk show host. Imus is the original "shock jock" talk radio legend who runs a summer camp for kids with cancer. They're both cultural media icons. And yet their analysis of Jesus Christ is spot on.

Jesus is one of a kind. Even before being raised from the dead, even before we came to Easter, Jesus is one of a kind. He comes out of nowhere. He says things nobody's ever said before. He thinks things nobody's ever thought out loud before. He does things in a way nobody's ever done before. He treats certain people the way certain people were never treated before.

Probably the three toughest things for people to believe about Jesus are 1, the Virgin Birth; 2, walking on water; and 3, being raised from the dead. All supernatural stuff. That's what makes Bill O'Reilly my Easter theologian for 2013. He's saying before we even get to the supernatural and the miraculous, even before he walks on water, even without Christmas and Easter, Jesus is one of a kind.

Let me tell you a silly Easter story, sort of a modern-day parable. We just bought a used car, a Toyota Corolla with 7,000 miles on it. You're starting to laugh at me already, aren't you? An old used car with few miles on it is the standard joke, right? The salesman says, "This car is a gem! It just came in today. It was driven by a little old lady who used it to go to the store and back!" Well, we just bought a used car. It just came in that day, a real gem, driven by a little old lady who used it only to go to the store and back. That's actually exactly what the salesman said. And we believed it! You're already

snickering, I can tell. You're wondering how two educated, mature, worldly-wise people like Alida and me believe such a silly myth.

Well, actually, we have a well-thought-out reason. Our "silly myth" makes sense to us because we've bought four other Toyotas from the same dealer. Every promise they've made, they've kept. Everything they've told us has turned out to be true. We have a church friend who works there whom we trust. The service department has been excellent. Everyone has been gracious, patient, helpful, and forgiving of my stupidity. And so ... when, after all these years, they come up with this silly myth, this hard-to-believe story ... we believed it! Because everything that has gone before laid the groundwork for being able to believe the unbelievable.

The Easter resurrection of Jesus is our silly myth, our hard-to-believe story. It can't be. It doesn't make sense. It's impossible. For educated, experienced, mature, worldly-wise people like us to believe such a myth is plain silly. Yet, here we are. Here you are. Because. Because everything else about Jesus checks out. We like what he had to say. We like how he went about his business. We'd like him for a friend. We'd like to be the kind of person he'd like for a friend.

We like his methodology, his leadership style, the way he treated people. He wasn't top-down, bossy, judgmental, or rigid. And yet, he had high standards and great expectations of us. He actually believed in us, in you and me. At our Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services, we made the same point: how much you, as an individual, as a person, mean to Christ. We like that!

During Christmas, when everybody gets caught up in the tinsel and shopping, we often remind ourselves, "Remember the Reason for the Season," and that would be Jesus. Jesus, the "Reason for the Christmas Season." But you are the "reason for the season" of Easter. All that God does through Christ during Holy Week, from the foot-washing on Maundy Thursday to the Cross of Good Friday to the joyful triumph of Easter — it's all for us. We are the "reason for the season."

Christmas and Easter are the bookends in Jesus's life. Both hard to believe. Both impossible. Frankly, we're not here because Easter is believable. We're here because the rest of Jesus's life between Christmas and Easter — that's believable. That works. And therefore we have the courage to believe the unbelievable.

If anyone wants a ride in our new used car, I'll prove it to you.