

Easter Message

The measure of a good story has a lot to do with the timelessness of what it has to say to us about important matters of life and death. If there is a story that fits this category, besides the story of Jesus' resurrection, it is another story that you also may have heard before. It is a short story written by the Russian author Leo Tolstoy entitled, "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" The story is about a Russian villager named Pahom. At the beginning of the story, Pahom always complains that he doesn't own enough land. Eventually Pahom is able to buy some more land, which he profits from, and live a more comfortable life. However, he loves his land so much that he gets into arguments and alienates himself from his neighbours. So Pahom leaves and moves to a larger area of land that he can grow even more crops on and make more money. But this is still not good enough for him.

Eventually Pahom is introduced to a people known as the Bakshirs, who seem simple but they own a lot of land. Pahom wants to get as much land from them for as little money as possible. The Bakshirs say that Pahom can have as much of an area of land as he can walk around in one day for the sum of 1000 rubles. They tell Pahom he must start at daybreak, marking his route with a shovel along the way and if he reaches his starting point by sunset it will all be his. If he does not, he will lose his money and receive no land. Pahom thinks this is a deal of a lifetime as he starts out marking the land.

Pahom stays out as long as he can, but toward the end he realizes that he has gone a long ways and needs to hurry as he is going to get back to the starting point. So in order to get back by sunset, he runs, harder and harder, pushing himself to the limit. Finally he arrives just before the sun sets. The Bakshirs congratulate him but Pahom, exhausted from the run, collapses and dies on the spot. His body is placed in a grave that measures six feet by four feet, ironically answering the question posed by the title of the story, "How Much Land Does A Man Need?"

However, the thing we celebrate on Easter, is that when it comes to Jesus, in death he doesn't even need that small measure of space. Not a tomb or a grave. The gospel accounts of the first Easter like the one that Stew read for us this morning from Mark's gospel are there to remind us that even though Jesus died, and even though he was sealed in a tomb, the tomb and death itself could not contain him. Death was not going to be the final measure of Jesus' life. Death was not going to define him. As the women are told by this mysterious man who sits in the tomb, Jesus had risen. He had gone on ahead to Galilee. They would see him again there. What the resurrection of Jesus brings us to is the realization that there is a whole new system of measurement to consider. A system that changes the way we measure death and a life beyond life.

We humans we like to measure when it comes to life and how we live. We live in an age where many would agree with the Greek Philosopher Protagoras who said well over 2500 years ago that "Humans are the measure of all things." We measure all sorts of things don't we? Have you ever stopped to consider the ways in which you seek to measure the quality of life? Ways you have established in order that you can judge or somebody else can judge or define your standard of living.

We have a myriad of ways by which we measure. Decide what's mine and what's yours. Or decide when it's too much or not enough. It's been that way for a long time. Some of the most common items archeologists recover from excavations are instruments and items that were used to measure, like scales, sets of weight and coins. Currency or money is probably the most popular way we measure things (for some it's the only way.) Just think of all of the different kinds of currencies in the world. Dollars and Euros and Rubles and Rupees and Shekels...the list goes on. And is it me or do the names of a lot of currencies actually sound like communicable diseases? -Maybe that's why the apostle Paul referred to the love of money as the root of all evil?

But besides currency and things like the metric system, there are other ways we measure the value and quality of life. It can be different for any one of us. Maybe you measure it by age, horsepower, square footage, percentage points, degrees, minutes, gray hairs, wrinkles, bandwidth, the number of the floor your office is on, how many children you have, how many pets you own, the credit cards in your wallet, the number of bathrooms in your house, or how many apps are on your phone and so on. Think of some of the ways you measure your life -ways you measure the quality of your life. And if by chance you're one of those people who measures the quality of life by how many victories the Toronto Maple Leafs have, I will keep you in my prayers and hope you have a better life next season!

When you think about it, we humans have surrounded ourselves with ways by which we seek to judge the quality and value of life. The way we humans measure is really embodied by the character Pahom in Tolstoy's story. Most of the time it has to do with measuring the quantity of things and somehow the quantity of what we have will correlate with the quality of life. It gives us a measure of control that is rooted in the scale of too much or not enough. That's how we tend to measure things now isn't it? I know when I golf that's how I usually end up measuring the effectiveness of my putting! That's how we humans end up measuring. Too much or not enough -which always leads to the judgment of life being good or bad!

But God measures differently. The way God measures is embodied in the resurrected Christ. Because Jesus is risen from the dead we now have a whole new system of measurement because God is a different kind of ruler. A resurrection life defies conventional forms of measurement because what we are talking about here is an everlasting life, an eternal life, which is really an immeasurable life. How do you measure something that is called everlasting and eternal? This is something that really is meant to be beyond human comprehension. This is something beyond our control and beyond our definition. This is why in Psalm 108 for example we read that God's love is higher than the heavens. Or as the apostle Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, "I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to *know* this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Paul prays that the people in Ephesus may know something of this immeasurable love, that they may be able to somehow grasp it, because the

love of God is something that surpasses our knowledge. I think this is why many in our age have a hard time with God. In an age that is ruled by having measureable outcomes and scientific data that is definable, what do you do with a God that is beyond our measure. You see because the God of the resurrection is bigger than the individual, that is bigger than any human power, the God of Easter does things we can't imagine, things we can neither measure nor control.

When the resurrection occurs what we witness is what the theologian N.T. Wright refers to as "the overlapping and the interlocking of Heaven and Earth." This was something that Jews thought happened at the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was a visible sign of God's kingdom come to earth. The ancient Israelites believed that the heavens and the earth were the twin halves of God's created reality designed eventually to come together. It was believed that there would come a day when human beings would no longer be the measure of all things and God would inaugurate a new world and a new rule. The resurrection marks the real beginning of God's kingdom of heaven born on earth where God is the ruler. God is the measure of all things that truly matter.

But the heaven born, resurrection life and this kind of love is something that is impossible for us humans to fully measure. If we seriously consider the resurrection and what it means to us, it is something that surely defies comprehension for us no differently than it did for those women who first showed up at the tomb afraid and amazed. Think about it, God didn't have to resurrect Jesus. For whose benefit is this anyways? You know sometimes I think that we have become so accustomed to expect that people only do things to help themselves that the thought that any being would actually act so selflessly for the sake of others is beyond our comprehension. We just don't know how to measure such things. The resurrection is meant to be beyond our comprehension. The resurrection is beyond our sense measure because this is a case of something new done completely and utterly for us. Like the crucifixion of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus is also a selfless act done for us. And we have a hard time believing because stories of self-sacrifice and second chances seem to be the exception in our world and not the rule.

But not so says God in the Jesus who is risen. We can have heaven. We can have immeasurable hope. Think about the story that has been in the news the last few days about Helene Campbell, the 20-year-old Ottawa woman who has finally undergone the double-lung transplant she so desperately needed. For someone to receive that kind of gift of life -a second chance- it's virtually impossible to comprehend the value of a gift like that. How do we measure life at such moments? It suddenly is beyond measure. And how does that kind of gift challenge the way we measure the value of so many other things in life? My friends, resurrection is something that is not "not enough" and "not" too much. The resurrection is everything God has to give.

A second chance is more than we can imagine because it is for us, freely given. The resurrection of Jesus is for our benefit. And because God has done this, people for ages have been supplied with a hope that has allowed them to aspire to a life that was beyond this world's measure. Men and women who were and are counted among the Saints because they realized that they had been

given a measure of heaven in their lives. My friends Easter means measuring things different. You will measure relationships differently. You will measure your assets differently. You will measure your days differently. You will measure the value of life itself differently. You will measure the power of death differently.

Resurrection life means that death isn't the end of the scale. Jesus' death and resurrection has given death and life its ultimate measure. When Jesus rolled the rock, there was a rolling away of despair, rolling away of delusion, rolling away of sin and guilt and shame because the way we measure limits the value of life. Celebrating Easter reminds us that Life has a new ruler. And as long as God is the Ruler, the believer shall not only exist, but have everlasting life. As long as heaven is the measure, you shall enjoy it. As long as there is a Christ, you shall live in his love that knows no bounds. And as long as there is an eternity, you shall continue to fill it with immeasurable delight.

Christ is Risen! Thanks be to God.