
From the Pastor's Desk

Pastor Gerald (Jerry) Morris

MARCH 2016

Church without Resurrection

By now, having heard me preach at least once a month for some ten years, you've probably gotten used to my talking about change in the church. Just in case you were in a coma during every sermon (not impossible), let me summarize: Our society is changing; we are entering a post-Christian era, in which Christianity no longer has the influence it once had and churches can no longer simply wait for people to come to us. We need to adapt to this new world or watch it pass us by, leaving us in irrelevant isolation.

I won't apologize for harping on how the church needs to change, because it's true, but I do understand that change is by nature scary. There are legitimate reasons to be careful about change. What if we change something that is essential, something that a church cannot do without and still be a church? This leads to an important question: What are the things that a church cannot lose without losing its soul?

It's not music style. That's easy. All of us can imagine churches using different music styles and still being church. The Contemporary Church worships with praise choruses, we worship with traditional hymns, the Cowboy Church in Nashville does Country Western, and some churches do Polka Masses. We may prefer one style, personally, but that doesn't mean that churches that use a different style aren't real churches. The same could be said about discipleship style (Sunday School or Small Group?) and liturgical style (pastor in robes or pastor in Dockers and Hawaiian shirt?) and theology of Baptism (infants being prepared for faith or those who have already believed?) and so on. We probably have preferences for all these things, but that doesn't mean that churches that do things differently are invalid.

But this month, as we prepare for Easter, we are reminded of one essential feature of the church: the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. From the beginning, the Resurrection has been the central message of the church. It is the only thing that appears in every sermon in the Book of Acts – whether it was preached to Jews or Greeks, rich or poor, laborer or merchant or philosopher. And it's the one thing we cannot do without, or we stop being the Church.

Think about it: what would we be without the resurrection? First of all, Jesus wouldn't be our God but would be a really great teacher from long ago. A Christian would just be someone who liked the ideas of Jesus, as a platonist is someone who likes the ideas of Plato. Second, our faith would be without victory. Jesus' resurrection marks the ultimate victory over death, as his death

marks the ultimate victory over sin. Without the resurrection, Jesus' death would be just another sad example of how really great people are misunderstood during their own time. And finally, without the resurrection, we would have no hope. As Christ defeated death, so too will we. Without Easter, we are a pathetic group, a cluster of sad and hopeless people who share a fondness for the teachings of one really old and really dead moral philosopher named Jesus.

But with the resurrection, we are the Church. And however the church may change in the face of new challenges, this will never change:

Christ is Risen; He is Risen Indeed