



Owl Creek Baptist Church

4044 Owl Creek Church Road
Mount Vernon, OH 43050
Pastor: (H) (440) 943-2898
(C) (440) 503-3390
Web: www.owlcreekchurch.org



OUR VISION: *To be a continuing light in the world's darkness inspiring people to love God and to love others.*

Volume 1 • Number 6 • April 26, 2020

News and Announcements...

❖ **Happy second Sunday of Eastertide!** We continue to put off our meeting together for worship, but we also continue to grow in our faith. This period of "social distancing" is truly trying on our patience. But it is also an opportunity to grow in trust. Too much distrust of our leaders and even of the medical community has marked our times. But we are gaining new vision about how we all need to work together. Now more than ever, we need to cooperate instead of competing. We need to share with others more than simply grabbing our "fair share." We need to be more thankful for what we have rather than being anxious for what we lack. It is still a hard time of life for all of us. But, we have each other...merely a phone call, text message or email away. Share your love of God and your gratitude for his Easter grace with someone, this week!

❖ **While I, as your pastor from afar,** continue to keep contact with all of you, I hear reports of what you are doing to pass the time. Without unnecessarily naming names, church members have told me that they have begun reading the Bible more than they have for a long time. Some folks are sitting back and watching good movies. Others are busy preparing meals for those who aren't as able to cook for themselves. A few others have met regularly in small groups with their extended families. The Chapmans have done this, having had dinner with our daughter and son-in-law several times, giving us more time (and more exhaustion!) playing with our two grandsons. Life is very different for all of us. But we have faith in Christ to take the long view. We will get through this!

❖ **NEWS FROM THE ABCUSA** – On April 8, American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS) staff member Jennifer Sanborn spoke with the director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) on a group telephone call. She, along with five other leaders of nonprofit groups from around the country, was invited to advise the government office on current matters of importance. As the only faith-based member of the group, Jennifer "emphasized the need for partnership to protect the vulnerable." She described how churches were working to network with other social services to provide food, childcare, health care and other needed services and provisions. She urged the other nonprofit partners to "speak to and through religious communities, using the trust we've engendered to help people responsibly access government-sponsored support."

❖ **Tell us your news items!** Email Pastor Chapman or Bonnie Kohl with news or prayer requests that you would like to share. Any family happenings that you'd like to tell us about?

To lift up in prayer...



Some serious tensions in the body politik regarding governmental responses to relieve the pandemic crisis have been revealed. We pray that ALL Americans, regardless of political party or geographical location, would unify and see themselves as neighbors—in need of each other, and responsible for each other!

Doctors and nurses are showing signs of great emotional stress as they work to care for us during this pandemic. We pray for their strength, their courage and their own health, as they continue their vital work in our communities.

We give God praise! Martha Robey, who spent a few days in intensive care at KCH, has been released. She is convalescing at the home of her son.

For Pastor Chapman's mother, now in the hands of hospice care in San Diego.

For the Crouch family who is grieving the loss of their dear mother, Jackie.



SERMON: "Did other resurrections occur before Jesus rose on Easter morning?" (2nd Sunday of Easter)

TEXT: 1 John 3:2-3

I have been beating the drum for a proper and biblical view of the resurrection of Jesus. It has been not just my observation, but the observation of more and more Christian scholars, that the church itself is in danger of watering down this central tenet of our beliefs. This is about more than a demand for "right doctrine." It is about the critical core of our faith...that Jesus died a very real death and that God raised him to a very real (albeit perfected) physical state. The resurrected Jesus could walk alongside his disciples, talk with them, eat with them, and even be touched by them. But the implications go much farther. Jesus is but the "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18). Our resurrection will follow, but only at the "coming of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). John declared that "we shall be like Jesus" in the resurrection (1st John 3:2-3).

In other words, the resurrection does not only determine our *faith* in Jesus, but it also defines our *hope* in him. This faith and this hope are not peripheral, but central, to the gospel. But in spite of all the clear teaching about the resurrection in the New Testament, the church at large has seemingly lost its patience for this truth. Instead, the church typically preaches an alternative belief whereby those who have died in the Lord are immediately translated into heaven. This is admittedly a smoother, quicker, less complicated view. It is more comforting to think of immediate release from death than to embrace the doctrine of the resurrection, which demands the patience of waiting until the Lord's second coming for the raising of all those who have died. But, in substituting this "instant relief" doctrine for the real teaching, we are in danger of bypassing the most defining reality of the Christian faith. Christians, I say, are unwittingly promoting the disintegration of our central truth.

And yet, that is not the only problem in the battle for the truth. Certain religious scholars, those who study the "history of religion" and "comparative religion," in their zeal to find similarities among the world's various faith systems, have sometimes attempted to understand the resurrection of Jesus as a common theme that has been found in ancient documents written long before Jesus. They call this theme the "dying and rising of the gods," and several scholars have gone overboard to produce what they believe are *parallels* to the resurrection of Jesus. (More traditional Christian scholars have called this trend, "parallelomania.") The conclusion of these scholars is that the resurrection of Jesus is far from unique. They claim that the story of "resurrected gods," while not universal among religions, has nonetheless appeared several times before.

Thus, in ancient Mesopotamia inscriptions have been found (in the Akkadian language, dating to 2400 BC) relating a myth called "The Descent of Inanna to the Nether World." As the story goes, *Inanna* (also known as Ishtar), was a goddess, the "queen of heaven." But she craved more power, coveting the throne of her wicked older sister

who was the "queen of the underworld." Daring a visit to the "land of no return," Inanna confronted her sister. Things did not go well, and her sister killed her and hung her "corpse" on a hook. Fortunately for Inanna, she had a loyal friend in the god, Enki, who by prior arrangement was to retrieve Inanna's body and feed it the "food and water of life." Inanna was revived, and escaped the underworld. However, she was accompanied by several demons who would force her to return to hell unless she provided a substitute. That unfortunate replacement happened to be her husband, "Dumuzi," who was also a god. The divine couple spent the rest of their lives splitting time between heaven and hell. Historians of religion excitedly draw parallels between this Mesopotamian myth and the story of Jesus. But, as can be seen, the myth of Inanna is hardly a resurrection story.

There are other stories, with significant variations, that scholars put forward as examples of their thesis that there were precursors to the resurrection of Jesus. There is the myth of *Osiris* of Egypt, who was murdered by a rival and had his body dismembered and scattered throughout the land. But his wife, Isis, with divine help, collected her husband's strewn corpse and sewed the pieces together, somehow making him fit and able enough to sire a son, Horus. This bizarre tale is put forward as a "resurrection myth" by certain scholars in the attempt to make Jesus' resurrection appear to be, at best, a copycat. But, in the end, Osiris was left to spend the rest of his existence as the ruler of the underworld. Once again, this myth is hardly up to the standard of the real resurrection story.

The efforts of these comparative religion studies have only served to diminish and discount the critical details of the New Testament story about Jesus. The gospels make it clear that Jesus was fully human, not some demi-god. He was born of a human mother, grew from infancy to adulthood, needed food and drink, often grew tired, needed sleep, and had to walk wherever he went. At the end of his ministry he was executed by the state. He really did die. He was really buried. But then God raised his Son from the dead. He was not consigned to some existence in the underworld but rose victoriously and in glory. Further, the stories of the resurrection of Jesus are full of the testimonies of witnesses. The resurrection was so real that those witnesses were in shock. So were the Roman and the Jewish authorities. Jesus' resurrection was not just some explanatory myth about the confusing lives of gods and goddesses. Rather, his resurrection was so powerful that it challenged the integrity and the authority of the very rulers who had a hand in condemning him to the cross.

All of this is to say that the resurrection of Jesus was a first and only event. There has never been anything else of its kind. It was so unexpected, so unheard of, so unique, that it could not be fit into the current religious theologies of the day, whether Roman or Jewish. The other stories of so-called dying and rising gods were simply slotted into their existing mythologies and the stories had no significant impact on their cultures. They were just more strange stories about their unpredictable gods.

The resurrection of Jesus was also not performed just for Jesus' sake. It was done for ours. His resurrection was and is the evidence that God has the power to restore our lives after death. As John wrote so confidently, "We shall be like him!" God means what he says about his love and his grace and his invitation to the kingdom. And so we hope...



TEXT: John 5:1-47 (The healing of the lame man)

Chapter five of the fourth gospel is supposedly the story of the healing of a “lame” man, i.e., of a person who did not possess the ability to walk. However, the Greek text merely states that the man was “ill” [*astheneia*], and had suffered his illness for thirty-eight long years. This diagnosis is not specific, but general, signifying that the man was weak, frail, sickly, and generally afflicted with the loss of strength that attends any number of maladies. Jesus, upon seeing him, and obviously moved with compassion, asked the man if he wanted to be made “well” [Greek = *hugiēs*; *healthy, pure, sound, whole*], a question that implied a clear offer to be healed. The man responded with the assumption that all he needed was for someone to help move his body into the healing waters of the pool of Bethesda (*Bethzatha* in Hebrew), a popular place for therapy. Jesus, possessing powers far greater than any natural healing waters, simply tells the man to “stand up and walk.” So, whether the man’s legs were healed so that he could physically use them, or Jesus removed the sickness that robbed the man of the strength to walk, is a harmless point of debate. The real point is that Jesus healed a man who least expected the miracle, giving him the gift of a restored life.

This all sounds just like the loving, compassionate Jesus that readers of the New Testament have come to expect in the gospel accounts. There are several other points that are made in this chapter, however. The first matter to take up, I believe, has to do with the terribly non-dramatic way in which Jesus took care of this sick man. Even though various Bible translations give as a heading to the chapter, “The healing of a lame man on the Sabbath,” very little of the text is actually devoted to the act of healing. The only comment on the decisive action is stated in all of two verses (5:8-9). Otherwise, there is no loud fanfare attending the miracle, no announcement by a master of ceremonies, no dramatic build up to the climactic event. The story is so typical of the humble way that Jesus went about his ministry on those occasions when he performed wonders and miracles. This is now the third “sign” narrated in John’s gospel. And all of these “signs” involved eye-popping actions. But in each case, Jesus seemed to go out of his way to make the event less conspicuous. Self-promoting televangelists ought to take serious note.

Far more material in this fifth chapter is concerned not with the healing itself, but with the subsequent fallout involving the religious leaders. This dispute becomes the obvious second point of the story. Thirty-seven of the forty-seven verses in this chapter are devoted to Jesus’ controversy with those whom John identifies only as “the Jews” (verses 10, 15, 16 and 18). But we may safely presume that these were likely Pharisees. Jesus’ healing of the man born blind (narrated in chapter 9) is similarly met with controversy. But, in that chapter, the group expressing their indignation is clearly named as the Pharisees. John, more than the other three gospels, included these stories of controversy with the Jewish leadership.

When we engage with these stories, we should remember that we are not reading journalistic reporting recorded soon after the events. John’s gospel was written some 60 years after his days as Jesus’ disciple, around 90 AD. He was an old man by then, and the social context had changed dramatically. The Romans had crushed a Jewish rebellion started by the Zealots back in 70 AD. Jerusalem lay in ruins, along with the temple, an event which Jesus predicted (Matthew 24:15-28). The Jewish historian, Josephus, claims that nearly a million people died in that four-year war. Surviving Jews were scattered throughout the empire. Their defeat prompted many to blame the Christians for their fate, since the Romans viewed Christians as a rogue Jewish sect that did not obey Imperial restrictions on proselytizing, thus drawing unwanted attention. By the time John laid pen to parchment for his gospel, many Jews became informants against Christians to the local Roman magistrates. (See Revelation 2:9; 3:9.) The bitterness lasted a long time.

Thus, John was writing about events that happened long before the fourth gospel’s publication. The narratives took on new meaning for John’s intended first audience. When they read the stories of the Pharisees’ plots against Jesus—even for his works of compassion—this backdrop helped explain the origin of their own experience of slander and betrayal at the hands of contemporary Jews. In Jesus’ day, the Pharisees embraced near total contempt for all Gentiles. They expressed disgust for the sick, for the poor, and even for women. As a Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus woke up each morning uttering the common prayer, “I thank you, O God, that I was born neither a Gentile, a slave, nor a woman.” After he met Jesus on the road to Damascus—with name changed to “Paul”—he wrote with a dramatically changed heart: “There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). John’s readers were thus given an explanation as to the fiery ordeals they endured at the hands of those who hated them, for Jesus himself was rejected and hated from the beginning.

But this Bible study cannot end without full historical disclosure. If we are tempted to think that Jews cornered the market on hate, let us be reminded that, after Emperor Constantine suddenly made Christianity the only legal religion in the land (around 312 AD), the tables were turned. For very soon after the Romans liberated them, Christians began persecuting Jews. Their former persecutors were imprisoned, tortured and murdered, all in the name of Christ. A few centuries later there were inquisitions. And then there were crusades. Eventually, the Jews would suffer the holocaust. And today, right here in America, the hate crimes experienced by Jews have risen more than for any other identifiable group. According to FBI statistics, 60% of all hate crimes have been targeted against Jews and Jewish institutions in the past couple of years.

Religious faith is powerful. Sadly, religious bigotry is also a powerful, though negative, force. The clarion call for the church of Jesus Christ is to oppose such hatred with the love of our Lord. Anything else is hypocrisy. Long ago, John dared to expose the religious hatred of his day. He also portrayed how even good people, doing good deeds with religious convictions, can be targeted by hate. But our greatest lesson comes from Jesus himself, who was kind toward others no matter the personal consequences. Faith does indeed require courage!