

April 13, 2020

Good Monday!

Can I be honest with you? Yesterday was tough for me. I'm sure it was tough for you as well. But for a preacher, Easter Sunday is the Super Bowl. It's that one day out of the year when we preachers look forward to a full day of celebration with a packed church and a message that can't be beat. It's that one day out of the year when we boldly proclaim that He is Risen and get a big response from everyone that is there. But that didn't happen yesterday. It was quiet and it was emotional. But for a different reason.

Through this self-isolation order that we have been adhering to in Ohio, I typically go into the sanctuary on Friday afternoon to video Sunday morning's worship service. I spend a lot of time trying to create something for our regular worship time. I create a story board of how I want the service to flow, I come up with some announcements, choose some music, preach the message and then go home and edit it and put it all together for people to view on Sunday morning. Most pastors in America are coming up with creative ways to provide a worship experience for their people. Some do a live online service, while others, like me, video a service and then put it online for the church to view.

Yesterday, Denise and I sat down to watch the service and as the opening video began, tears began to flow down my face. I was homesick for the people of First Christian Church and I ached inside because I couldn't be with them. I could tell by watching myself (I'm a pretty severe critic of myself) that the enthusiasm wasn't there. I was preaching to an empty building.

And then it dawned on me later on during that videoed service: The empty sanctuary was a perfect illustration of the empty tomb. Jesus IS alive—the tomb was empty because Jesus didn't need a tomb. Tombs are for dead people—and Jesus isn't dead. Likewise, the sanctuary at Leipsic FCC wasn't empty because the people of that church aren't defined by their presence in the seats. They're defined by the way they serve their Risen Lord and the fact that even though they weren't in the building, they were with their families—many of them watching the very video that was causing the tears to run down my face. The empty sanctuary doesn't reflect the life that is in the people. Jesus defines their lives. And so in retrospect, I rejoice in knowing that the people of the church celebrated Easter in their own special way. You can't take the worship away from people who love the Risen Lord! They will find a way to worship.

Now we all long to be back together. We want to see each other and enjoy the special relationship that is ours because of Christ. But until then, we will continue to worship each week by some video that I manage to put together. But I'm already planning on that day when we come back. I don't know when that will be, but I can assure you that we will have a great time when it happens. The writer of Hebrews in chapter 10:23-25 says, "Let us **hold fast the confession of our hope** without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good

works, not neglecting to meet together [this is temporary—we'll get back together], as is the habit of some, but **encouraging one another**, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (bolded emphases are mine)

See you soon! (I hope!)

Pastor Tim