



SUNDAY SERMON

Music Festival Christians

Happy Easter! Christ is Risen. Death is defeated and we Christians are here to make sure that this story gets retold in every generation. This story - Our story - The Easter story; That the world at its worst - is no match for God - is one of triumph, liberation and redemption. The hope and possibility in the story of Christ's resurrection is a story that all of creation, throughout every generation still longs to hear even after 2,000 years of its telling.

But what to do when creation longs to hear the message of Christ's good news, but seems to have grown a little weary and frankly, suspicious of the messengers proclaiming it? This is one of the big questions that confronts all of us here this morning... How do we proclaim the good news of the gospel as Christians, when the culture around us views Christians in general with a good bit of skepticism? And this is not to say that creation's weariness and skepticism is out of place. Sadly, we live in a country where the name of Jesus is sometimes intentionally deployed to marginalize and ostracize others, rather than to declare God's radical love for all. I can honestly understand why there are those throughout the wider culture who seem to be done with the Church and over the Christians who worship there.

I encounter this reality lots of places and I wonder how many of you have encountered something similar - Quick show of hands - how many of you know people who distrust the Church? How many of you know people who distrust Christians? This one's more personal - are there any of you in here who have been in a situation where you felt it was best to stay quiet about your Christian identity?

As I suspected - Christians are kind of in a tricky spot. We're still an insanely powerful cohort in America - but we don't have as many friends as we could. Rather than lament this reality, let's recognize it for what it is - an opportunity for Christians to re-engage with the world and show others what the love of Christ is really all about.

I have this working theory that one of the reasons so many people are skeptical of Christians is not because they hear from too many; rather it's because they hear and observe the actions of too few Christians. For the non-Christian this will certainly sound like a preposterous hypothesis, but the evidence suggests that I might be on to something.

continued

DATE

Easter 2
Sunday, April 28, 2019

PREACHER

The Rev. Amy Molina-
Moore

St. Columba's
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

St. Columba's is a welcoming Christian community that seeks to be open in spirit, deep in faith, rich in worship, active in service.

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Last week there was a huge cultural event that took place in a desert. Anyone here ever heard of Coachella? - It's this huge music festival that just might be the most glamorous, the most hip of all the music festivals that happen in a given year. I'm probably not explain it right, but find a young person and ask them - they'll probably know more about it than I do. Anyway - this festival it's big, it's sexy, it's popular - it draws about 50,000 people a day and 2 years ago 250,000 people attended it. You get the picture - it's an event that people want to go to because it's where the cool of the cool go. So imagine my surprise when I learned that last Sunday rather than be your ordinary festival day they turned the main stage into an Easter Sunday Service complete with a choir, scripture and prayer. Coachella is best known for fashion, music and sex - but on Sunday it became a place for something else entirely.

It became a place where one's attention was turned to God and where one was at least invited to ponder where they think holiness belongs in the midst of this life. Sure it might have been just for show, but I can't help but appreciate that thousands of people were given an opportunity to explore faith and the divine in the least likely of places. And rather than the headlines being "Christians ruin Coachella", the news is that the service was successful and some folks are trying to sell that experience to others by selling grass clippings they've dubbed "holy grass" from the service. (I know what you're thinking but the news reports verify that it's regular lawn grass.)

Lest you think this is a one off fluke and the wider culture really doesn't want to have anything to do with Christianity, let me offer one other example. Months ago Pharrell Williams of "Happy" fame announced a new music festival. The hottest acts will be there - some I've heard of before, some I haven't - but I stopped dead in my tracks when I saw that the last act in the line-up was a "pop-up church service." Contrary to what you've been told Church is NOT a four letter word, and people are not done with the message of the Gospel. In fact, just the opposite - they're actually desperate to encounter it. The world wants Christians to remember who they already are and it wants them to be those people in public. Which is why we now turn our attention again to the wonderful book of James this morning.

The book of James, offers us the most straight-forward explanation for how to live our faith in public; here we are given the blueprints for a life that proclaims the Easter story with integrity and authenticity that is destined to move all who encounter it. The writer asks of all of us: What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? - The world undoubtedly needs and wants a collection of people in the world who have to contend and honor these words, as we are compelled to.

The impression that the world doesn't want people of faith is a false narrative. Everyone wants to live in a world where people are divinely inspired to pursue justice, kindness, and love. They want that of Christians, just as they want that of all religious. And we, as Christians have an explicit, particular call to do just that - to do justice, to love mercy and walk humbly with our God.

In his book "A public faith" Miroslav Volf begins his work by discussing the nature of faith. Religious academics teach that every religion falls into one of two categories -either a prophetic faith or a mystical faith. The distinction is this: "Prophetic religions aim to transform the world in

God's name, rather than to flee from the world into God's arms as do mystical religions." Prophetic Faiths like the Abrahamic ones very much care about the righting of wrongs, and believe that an "authentic religious experience should be a world-shaping force." Volf goes on to say that "the prophetic role of Christian communities - our engagement to mend the world, to foster human flourishing, and to serve the common good," is not a secondary quality but is in fact "our very identity projecting itself outward in word and deed."

Our faith, if lived out honestly, carefully, lovingly can be and should be a world shaping force. This isn't something we should shy away from or ignore. Nobody wants that. The world is waiting for us to be in public who we already profess to be in the privacy of our own churches. Now let's get busy feeding the hungry, dressing the stranger, and housing the homeless even as we occasionally find our way to the festival dance floor for this my friends is the Christian way.

Amen.