

Flash Nonfiction
I Corinthians 15:12-20
February 16, 2019

Once upon a time, legend has it that someone challenged Ernest Hemingway to a bet: write a story under 10 words. That story is now famous: “For Sale: baby shoes. Never worn.” We call this short, short story Flash Fiction or flash nonfiction— a story told in a few words.

Flash fiction draws you in. So taking a look at Hemingway’s story: For sale: baby shoes. Never worn. All kinds of questions come up. To whom do the baby shoes belong? Why are they for sale? And how did it happen that they were unused? Was it because of some sort of falling-out between the person who purchased the shoes and the baby’s mother? Or was the mother so desperate for money she had to sell them? Or, did something terrible happen to the baby?

Here’s an example of flash nonfiction found on a motel signboard: “Now Pet Friendly. Except for bears. We’re not making that mistake again.” Let your imagination fill in the details on that story.

The Bible is filled with flash nonfiction. Great examples are in the book of Proverbs. Here’s one of my favorites: “Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman without good sense” (11:22). Kind of begs for a little more detail, doesn’t it?

Or, how about this one: “Better is a dinner of vegetables where love is than a fatted ox and hatred with it” (15:17). Don’t you wonder what happened at that dinner?

Our scripture passage today has a flash nonfiction: “If Christ has not been raised, our faith is futile.” This begs for all kinds of questions:

Didn’t Christ rise from the dead?

Who said he didn’t?

Why is our faith futile if there is no resurrection?

What would our life and faith be like had Christ not been raised from the dead?

What would remain of the gospel if we stripped away that one foundational proclamation? Would the structure still stand?

In our passage today, the Apostle Paul, of course, is not denying the resurrection. But it does beg the question “What if?”

If Christ had not been raised, our faith is futile. How would our lives be different if Christ had not risen?

All of you probably have seen the movie “It’s a Wonderful Life.” An angel named Clarence gives the depressed small-town banker, George Baily, the ability to glimpse his world as though he had never been born into it. And if you have watched the film, the town of Bedford Falls is a much worse place without George. Why? George displayed so many small kindnesses to the people of the town over the years that those kindnesses bore sweet fruit in people’s lives.

So Paul is doing the same thing: What would the world be like had the resurrection never happened? Would our lives and the world be poorer without it?

If Christ has not been raised, our faith is futile. Paul gives five things that would be in shambles if Christ had not risen from the dead. He gives them in a negative way, and it is kind of depressing. Here they are:

If there was no resurrection, our preaching is in vain. Those of us who stand up here on Sunday morning would be preaching a lie. In fact, I might not have a job.

If there is no resurrection, our faith is in vain. Because Jesus would be no better than the tens of thousands of others who have claimed to be sent by God. If Jesus did not rise from the dead then we are a victim of a very cruel joke. We might as well go home right now.

Paul gets even more negative: If there is no resurrection, we are false witnesses – in other words, we are living a lie. And when we speak, we are liars. In fact, Jesus would be liar because he claimed he would rise again after 3 days. Who wants to follow that kind of person?

If there was no resurrection, we are still in our sins. Can't get much more negative than that. Scripture says sin is what separates us from God. A relationship with God would be very difficult.

If there is no resurrection, there is no life after death.

All we would have is this life. All of our loved ones are gone forever. Our mom and dad gone forever, our sons and daughters are gone, grandparents are gone. Forever. What we know here on earth is it. If God has not raised Jesus from the dead, then there is no hope that God will raise anyone else.

And the so-called gospel is not really "good news" at all.

But lets do something different. What happens if we put these negative things in a positive light. I think then we can really see what God has done for us by raising Jesus from the dead.

Because of the resurrection, our faith is well-founded. Instead of saying our faith is useless, or futile or in vain, because of the resurrection there is someone who we can trust absolutely.

Jesus is someone we can count on through thick and thin. He will always be there. When the women discovered that the tomb was empty that Sunday morning, the angel said: *He is going ahead of you and you will see him.*

This is our hope: that the Risen Christ goes before us and that we will find him, not in the tomb, not the place of death, but out there, ahead of us, in the ordinary places of our lives. We celebrate the resurrection in the past, but experience the presence of the Risen Christ in the present and to follow him into the future.

He goes before us into all the incomplete, unfinished, confused and conflicted parts of our lives. He meets us in the ordinary, mundane, everyday places where we live and work, laugh, and cry, suffer and rejoice, succeed and fail. Jesus is not a memory, but a presence. He goes before you.

This is what the resurrection means.

Because of the resurrection, we are forgiven for our sins.

New York City police officer Steven McDonald forgave the man who shot him a few years ago, leaving him a quadriplegic. McDonald corresponded with his assailant in jail for years, and was sensitive to the fact that the shooter grew up in a difficult environment - one in which police are considered the enemy. Officer McDonald reached the point where he could forgive his assailant unconditionally, but he insists that "God played the greatest part in forgiving the young man who shot me."

People need to know they are forgiven. Deep down, we all long for it. This is one of the most basic longings of our hearts. Have you ever gone to someone and asked for forgiveness, and they don't extend it to you. I have. I carried that guilt for years. I believe there is so much anger and hurt in the world because we don't forgive each other. People hold on to it.

But we are called to forgive because Christ forgave us on the cross. Scripture says while Jesus hung on the cross, all our sins were laid on him. Therefore, our sins are not held against us.

This is what the resurrection means.

Because of the resurrection, we are to be envied. Paul said it in a negative way: we are to be pitied. If there was no resurrection then we have been following a great delusion. So consider Paul. He was a man of wealth, social standing, influence and great education. Yet, he was willing to throw all of that away for the cause of Jesus. He was beaten, imprisoned, assaulted, stoned and left for dead, all for the name of Jesus. Here is a man who was at one time dead-set against Christians and Christianity. His single purpose in life was to destroy everyone and everything associated with Jesus. To say that Paul was spreading a lie after all that is simply too much to believe.

Paul says at the end of this chapter on the resurrection (in one of my favorite scripture passages): Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

Everything done for God is not in vain. It is significant, valuable, eternal. Because of the resurrection.

Because of the Resurrection, our future is secure.

Charles DeGaulle was a World War II hero and later president of France. But what many people don't know is that Charles DeGaulle and his wife, Evonne, (e' vun) were the parents of a Down Syndrome child, a little girl named Ann.

Charles and Evonne would spend time at the end of every day with their children, making sure to spend some extra time playing with this very special child, Ann. When they would put her to bed, Evonne would sometimes say, "Oh, Charles, I have often prayed that she could have been like the other children. Why was she not like the others?"

When Ann died at a very young age, the DeGaulles had a private graveside funeral service. When the service was over, everyone left the grave except Evonne. Grief-stricken, she could not pull herself away from Ann's grave, but stood there sobbing. Charles went back to her and touched her arm gently. "Come, Evonne," he said. "Did you not hear the promise of the resurrection? She is now like the others."

About 5 years ago, I was called back to New Jersey to do the funeral of a dear friend of mine who was killed in a head-on car crash, hit by a drunk driver. At the gravesite, as the coffin was lowered into the ground, my friend's mother said, "I can't picture her down there." And I said, "She's not."

I sit by the bedside of people dying and give them the hope of life eternal. I stand up at memorials and say, "We have not only been given the gift of this life, but the hope that there is more after this life through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ said, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life.' Because Christ lives, so shall we – now and in the life to come."

My friends, I am so glad of the resurrection. Jesus said, "I AM the Resurrection," not "I will be the Resurrection." Jesus, the resurrection and life, is already with you right now in your daily struggles and survivals and joys. He is here to bring new life to our daily situations.

If we open our eyes of faith, the world is full of resurrection light, and we will see signs everywhere of Christ's victory over death.

Because of the resurrection, we have forgiveness.

Because of the resurrection, we have a friend to count on.

Because of the resurrection, we have a ministry that is not in vain, but fruitful.

Because of the resurrection, we have everlasting joy that will not be ended by death.

Because of the resurrection, we have a relationship with God and with others that is now and eternal.

Alleluia! Amen!