



**Happily ever After**  
**Rev. Dr. Craig Lindsey**  
**November 24, 2019**

This is not your typical story with an “And THEY lived happily ever after” ending. But then again, Happily ever after, rarely happens in real life. Instead of Once and For All, there are a series of changes. I have come to know this as a FAITH WALK, that for every two steps forward, we need to rock back on our heel, lest we get out of step and needing to take a step backward. One of the pieces of wisdom we have gleaned since coming to Valley Presbyterian, is that people move three times after coming to Green Valley. Given all we have gone through in the last several weeks, I do not think we will be doing that, but we will see. Those three or more moves, within Green Valley are often about “right sizing.” Rather than living Happily Ever After, there is a second, third and fourth chance as circumstances change. Thankfully Patio Sale is here to help in each of these moves.

The Gospel of Luke has multiple do-overs, After Jesus had already rebuked Simon Peter by saying “Get behind me Satan!” Jesus predicted Simon Peter would deny him 3 times, YET have a second chance and would be the one to encourage other disciples. Pilate and Herod, after their Trials of Jesus, went from disrespecting one another to becoming friends. Barabbas is given a second chance when released. Here from the Cross, while suffering and dying, Jesus forgave the crowd, All of THEM. Even the Thief, names his own sins, yet asks to be remembered by Jesus, and Jesus promises he will be with him in paradise.

Being REMEMBERED, is a big part of second chances, and of HAPPILY EVER AFTER. To not be ignored, disrespected, forgotten. We Always have another chance for life, grace, forgiveness and mercy. Always. That is the meaning of the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus. So what are the Second Chances or 16<sup>th</sup> Chance circumstances, that you wish had played out differently, where you wish you had done something, or possible wish you had not said something?

We read this story like a novel with a beginning when Jesus was born and Wisemen came; there is a Middle where Jesus heals the Wounded and Teaches parables; but in order to get to the “THEY Lived Happily Ever After” Resurrection of Easter, we have to endure this tragic scene of Crucifixion.

Or we read this as a Morality story, that Jesus is the Incarnation of God, who came to unite us with God, but the cost of that atonement, the cost of forgiveness was Jesus Crucifixion, so he came in order to Die; Jesus came to be a Human Sacrifice, there was no choice, there was no alternative, this is the cost. However, I would like to explain two other valid interpretations.

Perhaps the Gospel of Luke is not about Jesus! Perhaps the Gospel of Luke is about the “THEY”. When Wisemen came, we do not learn their names. Church Tradition has created names of Melchior, Kaspar and Balthasar, but according to Luke these strangers (we do not even know how many there were), only that “THEY” brought three gifts. We know that “THEY” were awed and humbled, and bowed down in adoration and love. We know from Luke that King Herod was afraid of the birth of a New King, and exerted a thorough policy of extermination. That is what policies of governments are for, to be thorough, methodical and orderly. This morning at the Crucifixion, we have no identification of

Pharisees, or Scribes, Saducees, or who were the people in the Crowd, or the names of the two criminals only a generic "THEY". THEY is all the people, those who condemned him, those who crucified him, those who insulted and derided him, everyone, all of us. Jesus the Good Shepherd, the Rabbi, the Lord and Savior died not because he needed it, or deserved to die, but because "THEY"/WE deserved death, THEY/We needed him to die for us. Under Pontius Pilate, the Empire of Rome had created a thorough, methodical, orderly policy for Crucifixion. Crucifixion was not used for ordinary criminals, only for ENEMIES OF THE STATE. The Jewish Sanhedrin did not have the authority to put someone to death, only the Government did. Why this matters is our pronoun "THEY", because "THEY lived happily ever after."

But, there is also another alternative... perhaps the Gospel is not about Jesus, or about us/Them, and more personal than being just a Novel. Perhaps the Gospel is about God and our faith in the Love of God...

I am so ecstatic about these folks joining this church today, and about this Elder being Ordained. The truth of the matter is that we do not Pass the Finish line, we do not Win the Gold Prize, we do not Live Happily Ever After, instead there are a series of professions of faith and affirmations we make in life. Will you be Baptized? Will you accept the responsibilities of being a Member of the Body of Christ? Will you make a Pledge and Dedicate your Offering to the Work of this Church at this time? Will you serve as an Elder or Deacon or Minister of the Church?

It is probably time that we reveal to each of the new members and Elder that to my knowledge No one has ever failed those Questions. No Congregation has ever said "We Do Not Want You." And No Congregation has ever told an Elder elected by the Church that "We do not want you." At least not in so many words. But I can tell you from first-hand experience that there is anxiety every time you are being questioned "What do you believe?"

In the Presbyterian Church (USA) you have to be elected by the Session and Presbytery to go to Seminary after College. You have to take required courses and graduate from an Accredited Seminary. You must take a series of 4 hour long written examinations on Worship & Theology, Church History, Polity, Biblical Knowledge, and the translation of a passage from the original Hebrew or Greek into English research and write a Sermon about that text. Then, you need to find a particular Presbyterian Church that wants you and your skills for their needs, not every Presbyterian Church or Minister is alike. After all of that, Candidates for the Ministry stand before the Presbytery and are asked whatever questions occur to them, for as long as the Presbytery desires, or you cannot be ordained. Our son is with us this morning, who in coming weeks will be defending his Doctoral Dissertation before his department, which is similar, except this is both Pastors and Session Members from every Church in the Presbytery. Among all the questions I was asked, the last question was "If there were an island of people, who had never heard the name of Jesus, and devastation happened and they ALL died, would they go to Heaven or not?"

My reply was that "I believe in a loving God. That God so loved the world, God gave us God's only begotten Son. I also believe that God is all knowing, so God must have known that we could kill God's Son, AND yet, God gave us that Savior, God became incarnate for us. Because of that depth of boundless love, I have to believe that God would find a way, but even if not, that God would love them." Immediately I was whisked out of the Sanctuary and the Presbytery went into 45 Minutes of heated debate. What was said, to this day I do not know. Someone stepped out to find me and I asked if I answered correctly, and was told "We do not know! Your words caused us to debate this for 45 Minutes

and the only thing the Presbytery could come to agreement about was that you needed to be Ordained to the Ministry.

But eventually the doors to the Sanctuary opened and as I entered the Presbytery began singing Greatorex' Gloria Patri. "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, it is now and ever shall be, world without end, Amen. Amen."