

"ALL SHOOK UP"

MATTHEW 28:1-10

Great Easter Vigil – March 10, 2016

It's no secret, at least to some of the folks who may be worshiping with us this evening, that "All Shook Up" was the title of a hit song, made popular by Rock n' Roll Star Elvis Presley, way back in 1957. This song was such a big hit that it actually reached the top of all three of the great musical charts in the United States: Pop, Country, and Rock n' Roll, and stayed there for eight solid weeks in a row. By the end of the year it was recognized as the number one top song of 1957.

Brothers and sisters, Elvis Pressley was right, wasn't he?

(1) Falling in love with an amazing, wonderful woman is one of those experiences in life that can get a man all shook up. But there are other inducements to the human spirit that can bring about that same kind of colossal effect on one's emotional and psychological makeup as well, that are not all "positive" experiences for us in this life!

(2) Becoming involved in a horrendous automobile accident and living to tell others about it. That can certainly make even a survivor of that awful ordeal feel "All Shook Up!" But it's more of a negative than a positive emotion we are experiencing in those days.

(3) But another thing that could cause you to become "All Shook Up," might be a windfall of money, if it suddenly is dropped into your lap, unexpectedly, out of the blue!

But of all the things that have ever happened to human beings throughout the history of the world: nothing has ever shaken up MORE human beings anywhere or at any other time that has this great event that you and as the people of God are celebrating with millions of believers all over the world this weekend: the good news that Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified is alive again! He is now risen from the dead and lives and reigns unto all eternity!

The women, who had personally witnessed the horror of our Lord's crucifixion just 2 days before, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, were taking some oil and spices down to the graveyard to anoint the cold and lifeless body of Jesus!

Just two days before this, Jesus had died, because ruthless men had arrested him and framed him on some trumped up charges of political sedition against the Roman Empire, which resulted in his crucifixion on a hill called Calvary, or Golgotha, the "place of the skull" on Friday morning. Those who witnessed personally this great injustice, and the cruelty of it all--were certainly all shook up. Jesus' twelve disciples were so shook up at the hour of his arrest that they all deserted him and fled, and left him to fend for himself; all except for the Apostle John and the women who witnessed the horror of our Lord's crucifixion.

How could the one who brought others back to life, die?

Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior sent from God. Who would save them now that he was dead and gone? It was an emotionally devastating blow to each of their human spirits for sure.

Yes, the disciples were all shook up. It was bad enough that Jesus died, but the way he died, like a common thief, stripped of his clothing, spat upon and mocked when he was crowned with a crown of thorns, also mean that Jesus of Nazareth was publicly humiliated and degraded!

How was it possible, at least to their human assessment of things, that the One who had calmed the raging sea before his disciples' eyes, was completely undone by a sea of hatred had completely washed over him! This is the Jesus who was supposed to save them from the oppression of the Roman Empire, but now the Roman Empire had killed him! They were all shook up!

Still shaken by the events of the previous Friday, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary began to walk to the tomb to pay their final respects to the dearly departed. But, it was precisely at this point that God decided to shake things up a little bit more!

Suddenly there was an earthquake and the ground shook. This happened when an angel of the Lord had descended from heaven and rolled the stone away from the tomb, not so that Jesus could get out, but so that these women and all others who would come to the graveyard that day, might look in and see for themselves that the lifeless body of Jesus of Nazareth was no longer there!

When the angel appeared in its bright raiment the Roman guards trembled for fear of him, and they too: These big, burly, masculine, muscular men were all of a sudden also --- all shaken up. St. Matthew tells us that they shook with fear. Those strong soldiers, comrades of the ones who had nailed Jesus to the cross, now cowered in fear. Matthew says they became like dead men. I suppose he means, among other things, perhaps that they fainted. But Matthew has chosen his words carefully. For the one who had been dead, Jesus was now alive, and the ones who had killed him were like dead men. And God shook things up turning the earthly powers of this world completely on their heads.

Quickly the angel reassured the women. "Don't be afraid, I know you come looking for Jesus, but he is not here. He has risen just as he said he would. Go tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee" (Matthew 28:6-8). The women were still shaken, but now they were also joyful. Just as the angel had told them, they went to tell the disciples. They may not have fully believed, but they still went. As they went they came face to face with the reality of the resurrection. And Jesus said, "Go tell my followers to go to Galilee and they will see me too."

Have you ever stopped to think that our annual celebration of this Queen of all Church Festivals, the Resurrection of our Lord on Easter Sunday, is all about God the Creator and Redeemer of this world, completely shaking up the current order of things to create a new order!?!

As Matthew tells the story, Easter started with an earthquake: an earthquake that turned the world as we know it upside down.

No longer was death the end. For those who followed Christ and called him "Lord," the death of Jesus was a new beginning. The tomb became a womb bringing forth new life. But this was no mere earthquake that simply rocked the physical structures of the surrounding terrain.

It also rocked and toppled principalities and powers. Those who thought they had triumphed over God's Messiah were shaken to the very core of their existence. Rome had failed to hold Christ down. They had tried to nail him down. They had tried to shut him up with guards and a stone. But he still rose triumphantly. Even the powers of darkness and death could not triumph over Christ.

This was also a life quake. It shook people to the soul. Those who had chosen death were now like dead men. But those who had the life that God the Heavenly Father had come to bring them in the gift of his Son through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ were now celebrating the resurrection. God's life-quake had given new life and hope to some very disheartened, grieving and discouraged people, who moments before had been mourning the dead.

Friends, the Spanish conquistadors were exotic explorers of the 1500s. These Spanish sailors were brave, daring men of adventure, searching for gold and silver, jasper and emeralds, braving the insecurities of their little bobbing boats in the seismic swells of ocean waves, not knowing what was out there before them in the uncharted seas of a strange new world. But legend had it that there was this great and mysterious place known as El Dorado; a land where gold nuggets were as plentiful as the pebbled stones found on the ocean's beaches of this New World.

It was in 1513 that the Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon began his search for it. He always wanted to go exploring for El Dorado, and now was the time. He first went looking for it in the West Indies, but it was not there, so he sailed to a new land called Florida, hoping to find it there.

Near that legendary El Dorado was the one thing that everybody was hopefully looking for. It was more valuable than gold and silver, more valuable than precious jewels. All of his life, Ponce de Leon and everybody else had wanted to find it. He was looking for the legendary "fountain of youth." He had sailed half way across the world, wanting to taste the waters from that fountain of immortality.

He wanted to drink from those waters and be eternally young, eternally vibrant, and eternally energetic. He wanted to drink from those waters of eternal youth and never grow old and die. And so he came searching in the land of Florida, for that place called the El Dorado, hoping to find it, that he might drink from the Fountain of Youth that it surely contained. He searched and he searched and he searched for it; like every person who wanted to find the legendary El Dorado on this side of the grave, he did not find it.

Deep down inside every person here today is a longing for immortality. Deep down inside every person has the drive to find the equivalent of the legendary fountain of youth. Deep within every person is the desire to taste the waters of everlasting life....for this is the way God made us.

God made every person in the image of God. We were made for eternity; we want it, we crave it, we thirst for it, and none of us want to die. It wasn't only Ponce de Leon who wanted to taste of the fountain of youth; all of us do.

We are sometimes afraid because we know too much and we know too little.

We know too much about the size of the universe. We know too much about the endless billions of light years in space. We know too much about the infinite size of the universe and the smallness of the planet Earth and the smallness of measured time.

On the other hand, we know too little. We know too little about God and his eternal Spirit. We know too little about heaven and too little about the resurrection. We know too little of God's miraculous eternal love. Because we know too little, we cannot prove the existence of eternal life and love with God, and that frightens us, or at least makes us nervous inside.

Consequently, not really trusting in God, not really trusting that there is life after death and on the other hand, having deep drives for eternity within us, what do we human beings do? We try to create a sense of eternity here on earth, an illusion of eternity in our world.

Human beings create "IMITATION FOUNTAINS OF YOUTH!"

What are some examples of these attempts at eternity here on earth?

(1) The pharaohs of Egypt. They stacked their great piles of rocks and created pyramids. They preserved their bodies by removing their organs and by dehydrating their bodies in salt.

(2) Do you want another modern-day example of this same kind of foolish quest? Have you heard of the more exotic science of cryonics? It is the science of freezing human tissue in liquid hydrogen at 320 degrees below Fahrenheit. Scientists drain the body of blood and then freeze it to preserve the body in liquid hydrogen. Presently, there are thirteen bodies frozen in large gaseous cylinders of liquid hydrogen, so that people are in frozen liquid looking like vertical popsicles. These bodies are frozen in hopes that someday, centuries in the future, when science is more developed, these bodies will then be resuscitated. We are also now reading about age-reversing drugs. Not really trusting in God's eternal future, we try to create illusions of eternity here on this earth.

What else do we do, we the modern Ponce de Leons?

(3) We wear our wigs. We dye our hair. We put on facial creams. We have hair transplants and face lifts. We get busy, busy, busy, trying to become so busy that we forget we are dying. Immerse yourself in life. You have only one time around. Preserve your life. Prolong your life. What else do we do? We pursue wealth, reputation, fame, family, and business. We try to leave some legacy so that we will not fade into oblivion so quickly. All these attempts at earthly immortality fail. Ponce de Leon didn't find the fountain of youth and he died, and so will we. Life eternal is not to be found in the pyramids, not in anti-aging drugs, not in freezing human bodies, nor in wigs, nor in dying your hair. It is the same for all people. All people die.

Easter is God's gift to us to convince us that there really is life after death. Easter is God's way of convincing us that death has been destroyed, that there is life beyond the grave.

On that first Easter morning, the women came to the grave, thinking there was only death, and Jesus appeared to them and convinced them and the other disciples that there was life after death. And that same Power is at work today, for Easter is God convincing you of God's eternal love and life for you and me.

Yes the love of a man for a woman and the love of woman for a man can leave you all shook up. But not nearly as shook up as the love that God has for every one of us in the gift of his Son come to be our Savior. This is the One who was put to death for our transgressions, but raised again for our justification.

"If you confess with your mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved!" (Romans 10:9-10). Amen