

The Resurrection of Our Lord

April 21, 2019

Matthew 28:1-10

This is one of my favorite Easter stories. I've used it before. If you don't like reused material, fire me!

An elderly pastor got a new used car. It was the first new used vehicle he'd purchased in years and it was the nicest car he'd ever had.

One day, he was driving home down Shawano Avenue at a safe speed of 5 miles over the speed limit. Suddenly, a beat-up old pick-up truck came up quickly behind him with the horn honking. Thinking there might be an emergency, the elderly pastor pulled over to the side of the road.

The pick-up pulled over, too, and a big burly man came out of the door. He yelled, "Get out of the car." Being 46% German in heritage, the pastor did as ordered. The truck driver said, "I bet you think I was going too fast. You people in your fancy cars always think you're better than people like me. I'm going to teach you a lesson."

The truck driver went over to the shoulder of the road and drew a circle in the dirt. He said, "Stand here in this circle. Get out of the circle and I'll beat you to a pulp." They he took a tire iron and smashed the elderly pastor's windshield.

When he looked over, the pastor was standing in the circle and smiling. The truck driver said, "You like that, huh?" He took the tire iron and smashed the rear window and all the side windows. He looked over and the pastor was still smiling. "I guess you want more," the truck driver said. He took the tire iron and bashed in the hood and the grill. He bashed in the doors and the panoramic sun roof. He looked over and the elderly pastor was still smiling.

"Okay, old man," the driver said. "I give up. I've destroyed your car. How can you still be smiling?"

And the elderly pastor said (do you remember what he said?), "While you weren't looking, I stepped out of the circle three time!"

That's what Easter is all about. Easter is about stepping out of the circle.

Jesus was in the circle. It was also called a tomb. He had been crucified, hanged on a tree. By Jewish law that signified he was a sinner with no hope of forgiveness. He was dead, pierced with a spear to make that certain. The powers of evil seemed to be in control; a foreign army and their rulers, corrupt politicians, and power thirsty religious leaders had all worked together to put Jesus in the tomb, in that circle.

Jesus had been killed on a Friday. Now it was Sunday. Two women went to the tomb early in the morning. There was an earthquake that moved the stone that sealed the tomb. An angel appeared, announcing that Jesus had stepped outside the circle. He was not in the tomb, he was alive. They were told by the angel to spread the news. Filled with fear and joy, they went to obey the angel's command when they were stopped in their tracks. It was Jesus. (I'm going to believe he was smiling.)

"Greetings!" he said. They fell at his feet and worshiped him. "Don't be afraid. Tell my friends I'll meet them in Galilee." The tomb was far behind him. He had stepped outside the circle.

Step out of the circle. Maybe you're stuck in a circle of the past. Forgiveness has defeated sin. We can let go of our faults and failures. We can let go of grief and regret and find healing for a painful past.

Step out of the circle. "Don't be afraid." That's Jesus' command for us, too. We have so many fears about what may lie ahead. We can step out of the circle of worry and fear.

Step out of the circle. Those things that keep you from feeling whole and complete cannot overcome the power of the certainty of God's never ending love. Jesus has died for you and he is alive. His love lives in our hearts today and always. We can live in his peace and strength today.

I've already reused one of my favorite Easter stories, I might just as well reuse one of my favorite Easter songs.

Billie Joe Shaver has had a rough life. His father left him and his mother before he was born. He quit school after the 8th grade to get a job. He spent time in the Navy then lost two and a half fingers in a saw mill accident. He decided to go to California but the ride he found was going to Memphis so he went there instead. He ended up in Nashville and wrote songs for some famous artists and did some performing.

In 1999 both his mother and his wife died of cancer. In 2000 his son, his only child, died of a heroin overdose. That same year he almost died on stage from a heart attack. When all this happens, you give up, right? The circle is just too strong.

Instead Shaver kept writing songs, including this one. It's about him. It's about Jesus. It's about me. It's about you.

Live Forever

Billy Joe Shaver, Brother Phelp

I'm gonna live forever
I'm gonna cross that river
I'm gonna catch tomorrow now.
You're gonna wanna hold me
Just like I always told you
You're gonna miss me when I'm gone.
Nobody here will ever find me
But I always be around.
Just like the songs I leave behind me
I'm gonna live forever now.

You fathers and you mothers
Be good to one another.
Please try to raise your children right.
Don't let the darkness take 'em.
Don't make 'em feel forsaken.
Just lead them safely to the light.
When this old world has blown asunder
And all the stars from fall this sky
Remember someone really loves you
We'll live forever you and I.

I'm gonna live forever
I'm gonna cross that river
I'm gonna catch tomorrow now.

I'm gonna live forever
I'm gonna cross that river
I'm gonna catch tomorrow now.

Despite all the world could throw at him, Billy Joe Shaver continues to step outside the circle. He does it because he believes in a Savior who stepped out a tomb.

The tomb and all it represents could not hold Jesus. He stepped out of the circle and with his help we can, too. We can also help others out of their circles.

Christ is Risen! AMEN