

Sermon - Positive Proof

Prayer: Show us the way

3/27/71

OT Psalm 90
1-4

NT Luke 22:
63-71

Proof Positive

Good Morning 1st United

POSITIVE PROOF

I greet you this morning on the ^{third} fourth Sunday ^{this} in Lent from the Gospel according to Luke, the 22nd Chapter and verses ^{thru} 63-71.

Now an amplified version of our text goes like this:

Now the men who were ^{in charge of} holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him. ^{They poked fun at Jesus and took turns} slapping him. ^{hit} They also blindfolded Jesus and they kept asking him, ^{Tell us,} PROPHECY! Who is it that ^{hit} struck you? And ~~all~~ through the night, ^{soldiers had a grand time} the men kept heaping all kinds of insults against Jesus.

And when the morning came, the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought Jesus to their council, And they said to Jesus, if you are the Messiah, if you are truly the Christ, then tell us.

And Jesus said to the chief priests and scribes, ^{Even,} If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I question you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.

And ^{then they asked Jesus} ~~all of them~~ said, Are you the Son of God? [?] ~~then?~~ And Jesus said to them, You say that I am, in other words, that's what you say. And the priests and scribes said, What further ^{slow} testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips.

The title of our sermon this morning is ^{Proof} POSITIVE PROOF (repeat).

Season of Lent

When was the last time we have been sharing an experience with a friend/or a neighbor ^{or a family member,} and before we could get to the end of our story, the listener demands that we prove it, that beyond the shadow of a doubt, we are required to ^{provide conclusive evidence} prove that what we are saying is absolutely true. Let us think about those times in our lives when we have been challenged to substantiate our claims of reality, by crossing our hearts/or by putting our hands on a stack of bible,/or by swearing/or by taking an oath/, by promising/or by pledging that our word is truly our bond? Yes Church, regardless of where we might be in life/or in spite of what we might be doing, there will come a time, time and time again, when we least expect it, that someone will demand ^{proof} positive proof.

And in our scripture lesson for this morning, the same thing is happening to Jesus. Jesus has been arrested/and he is now standing, front and center, before the assembled chief priests and scribes/and the powerbrokers of his day are asking Jesus to prove/to them that he is the Son of God.

And according to our text Jesus tells the priests and the scribes that/even if he told them ~~that~~ he was the Christ, that they would not believe /and if he asked them, if he ^{were} ~~was~~ the ^{Messiah} ~~Christ~~, they would not be able to answer, because the signs and symbols, the evidence they were seeking, would not ^{serve as absolute testament} ~~be the real~~ proof. Now this story happened to Jesus ^{in our scripture lesson} ~~almost~~ ^{more than} 2000 years ago, and yet this same kind of proving game goes on, up until this very day and time.

For instance, from our earliest childhood, well-intentioned parents/try to shape and ^{mold} ~~mould~~ our behavior. Yes, discipline in some form is a necessary ingredient in growing up, but sometimes the punishment/ that we receive and the withholding of parental love ~~can~~ leave deep and lasting scars on our psyches/ and ⁱⁿ our souls. So some of us grow up endlessly searching for proof, for proof that we are loveable, for proof that we are ^{matter, for proof that we are} somebody.

Again for instance, ^{during our school years} ~~from our years in elementary school~~ when well-intentioned teachers ~~try to~~ channel ^{ed} our curiosity and our creativity into reading, writing and arithmetic, we know ~~that~~ the three Rs are essential ⁱⁿ to any education, ^{ed system} but sometimes the mistakes, the failures, the put-down comments, the snickering and ridicule by our classmates /can be a crippling factor, ~~so much so,~~ that we carry this pain/over into our adult lives, wherein now as grown women and grown men we use up a lot of our life ^{is} energy trying to prove that we are smarter, trying to prove that we know more, ^{trying to prove our right to be} ~~more than anyone~~ ^{wherever we are} ~~else~~ in any given situation.

And still again for instance, ^{during our young adult years,} ~~from our adolescent years,~~ when friendship and love are experiences /as a matter of choice/ not chance, /the desire to avoid being mocked or rejected can be so great that we ^{buckle under} ~~succumb~~ to peer pressure from every which way.

Only recently there has been a renewed discussion of the hazing and harassing that continues in college fraternities ^{and Sororities} ~~all~~ across the country. The other day I heard a story of a student who was locked in the trunk of an automobile ^{and given} ~~with~~ three quarts of

alcohol ^{to drink} The fraternity brothers told him to prove that he was man enough to be admitted to their fellowship by drinking the entire contents of the three bottles of alcohol. So while the fraternity brothers ^{drove} ~~were driving~~ the car around town, the young pledgee, who was locked in the trunk of the car, tried to prove his manhood. So anxious was the student to prove that he was a man that he literally, drank himself to death.

Yes, this hunger for positive proof is rooted deep within us, even among those of us have achieved every outward sign of ^{material} success. And, Sisters and Brothers, it is essential, that we realize that there will always be people around who make it their business to exploit us by challenging, by daring, by testing us, wherein they demand that we undergo all kinds of life-threatening, death-dealing risks ^{taking activities} just so that we ^{can} prove that we are real men or real women, ^{to them} ~~to prove~~ that we really and truly ^{life-threatening activities wherein they say if you} do love ^{me} them, ^{then we must prove by doing such & such; death-dealing game playing that} ~~to prove that~~ we are genuinely cool in a hip-hop ^{if...} world, ^{we must prove it, by gang banging} ~~to prove that~~ we are real Christians by carrying the biggest Bible or by wearing the heaviest cross.

And ^{a few} ~~some~~ of us have our own stories of pain and horror to tell, of how we, or family members or bosom buddy friends narrowly escaped death because we were so busy trying to prove something that no external evidence ^{wherein} ~~was~~ ^{is will count} provable.

Sisters and Brothers, if we don't set the record straight and put an end to these shortsighted proving games, then our lives will always be noisy gongs and clanging symbols, (full of

sound and fury that signify nothing.) In other words, if we keep ourselves busy trying to meet the challenge^s and to pass the ^{non-ending} proving tests ^{of} that every Jack and Jill, then we keep ourselves so ^{occupied} busy that we have neither time nor energy to become the ^{authentic} women and men, to become the ^{genuine} youth and adults, ~~that~~ God ~~has~~ created and called each of us to be.

~~Dearly Beloved, in essence what I am saying is that ^{we must} if we don't follow the example that Jesus sets before us in our scripture lesson, then we slowly but surely, morning by morning and day by day, forfeit our right to the tree of life.~~

Therefore, since we see how trying to provide evidence and to prove our life's positions within the context of other finite human beings/will cause us to spend our days playing hypocritical games of show and tell, let us meditate on three authentic testimonies which Jesus taught us, so that we can know in our heart of hearts/who we are and to whom we belong, in the name of God, our Creator and our Sustainer, now, henceforth and forevermore.

Now, the first ^{proof} positive ~~proof~~ that Jesus shared was the element of faith. If we examine our scripture for the morning we will find that when Jesus was standing before the chief priests and scribes, they wanted positive proof that he was the Messiah but Jesus responded by giving them a faith answer.

In other words, the assembled powerbrokers demanded that Jesus provide them with concrete, cold, hard, factual evidence of his title and ^{of his} position. The priests and scribes made Jesus stand before them, ~~front and center~~ and they wanted him to say forthrightly/who he was and what ~~was~~ ^{was} his ministry ^{was all about} but instead of falling into the no win, lose-lose, proving game, Jesus responded by saying, If I tell you /that I am the Christ/you will not believe/ and if I question you, as to whether or not I am the Messiah, you will not answer. In our modern day language, we might say that Jesus responded ^{similar to} ~~in the parlance of~~ Harold Melvin and the Bluenotes, ^{when they sang,} if you don't know me by now, then you will never, never know me.

The point Jesus is making is that it is faith that ^{enabled} ~~made~~ the lame ^{to} walk and the dumb to talk. It is faith that ^{fixed it so that} ~~enabled~~ the deaf ^{can} ~~to~~ hear and the blind ^{can} ~~to~~ see. Now what this means, is that Jesus preached and taught throughout Galilee and Judea for three years. Jesus performed all kinds of miracles. He raised Lazarus and others from the dead. He fed the five thousand with two fish and five loaves of bread. He taught in parables, especially teaching us as disciples how to pray. And here we are coming

down to the final hours before the crucifixion and the authorities are still asking for proof, asking for positive proof, asking for evidence beyond the shadow of a doubt, that Jesus is the Christ, the one who comes from the living God.

And this same lesson can be carried over to our every day life, for it is our faith that lets the world know who we really are and to whom we belong. For some of us faith is a leap into the unknown. For others of us, faith means that we have surrendered our all, we have surrendered all that we are, all that we say and do to Almighty God, who is now the master of our fate and the captain of our soul.

For a few of us, faith can be summed up in the story of the young couple /who bought a spanking, brand new house. And on moving day everything ~~moved~~ ^{going} along on schedule /like clock work. That evening as the sun was going down, the young couple decided to turn on the lights /so that they could continue unpacking boxes and arranging furniture. But to their dismay, the lights would not come on. The husband and wife checked the fuses in the fuse box, everything looked alright. So after ~~a while of~~ running around, exalting all possibilities of the power failure inside their new home, they decided to call /the 24 hour number /of the electric company and there they realized the problem. Their home had never been connected to the power source downtown. No one had turned on the switch, so that the electrical juice, could flow from the major generator downtown, into their new home. Yes, sisters and brothers, that is what faith is all about. Faith is

consciously knowing in our heart of hearts that we have made a decision to connect with the Creator and Sustainer, the spirit filled generator of the whole universe. Yes, faith is knowing that as Christians we are the light of the world. Jesus tells us that the ^{proof} positive ~~proof~~ of faith is that as God-fearing women and men, as God-fearing youth and adults, we live our lives with so much beauty, ^{so much} goodness and ^{so much} truth that we become just like a city set on a hill that cannot be hid. The ^{proof} positive ~~proof~~ of faith ask ^{of us} us this question, Do people light lamps and put them under bushels? From a place of faith deep in our souls we answer no, as the light of the world we do not hide our lives under a bushel but instead, the ^{proof} positive ~~proof~~ of faith puts the light of our lives on a stand and it gives light to all in the house. In essence, ^{the} positive proof of faith can be summed up in this simple mandate, ^{Sisters and Brothers} Let your light so shine, that men and women may see your good works and give glory to our ^{God} Father who is in heaven, morning by morning and day by day.

Proof

Now, the second Positive ~~Proof~~ that Jesus shared was the element of hope. When we study the passion narratives, we discover that throughout the various crucifixion trials, the authorities exert all kinds of pressure. They examine, then they cross examine, then they start the examination ^{process} all over again.

The ^{proof} positive ~~proof~~ of hope / that Jesus shares with us / is found in the Biblical verse / wherein Jesus says / that from now on, the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand / of the power of God. It is here that Jesus expresses the hope that moves us through the Season of Lent / from Crucifixion to Resurrection.

The ^{proof} positive ~~proof~~ of hope / let's us know / that the time we know now / we will soon know it no more. To make this point another way, is to say that the positive proof of hope let's us know, one by one, that the changes we are going through will soon be past, and only what we do for Christ will last, ~~for us to live is Christ.~~

Throughout ^{his} the various trials, ^{and tribulations} Jesus turns the evidence on its head. He makes a clear case that the kind of signs and wonders that the assembled court wanted him to demonstrate / were not positive proof. The scriptures say that the people mocked Jesus. That they spat in his face. They beat Jesus. They cursed him. They even blindfolded him and demanded that he prophesy as to who among them had hit ^{him} which lick. And Jesus in his silence / was saying to them / and to us / that is not the proof.

The chief priests and scribes, the soldiers and the guards were totally insensitive to the reality of what was actually

taking place in their very presence. They could not comprehend the positive proof of hope that Jesus embodied in his living.

The positive proof of hope tells us that we are salt of the earth. What this means is that faith enables us to be the light of the world and hope empowers us to be the salt of the earth. So let us unpack this language so that the meaning is absolutely clear.

For the people in the biblical world, salt was essential for survival. It was not just a spice that was sprinkled on food for seasoning. Salt was a necessity for life. Back in the biblical times, people had no methods of refrigeration, unsalted food would spoil and therefore, in a barren season, ^{whole towns and cities full of} people could starve to death ^{did not have} if they ~~were denied~~ the salt they needed for food preservation. Salt became a sign of God's presence at the table.

So when Jesus said, we are the salt of the earth, Jesus was suggesting something far more significant than ^{what} those words bring immediately to ^{the modern} mind. Jesus was saying that in human life, the healing and protecting power comes from within ourselves. We don't need magic potions; ^{we don't need psychic readings,} we don't need to play no-win proving games of Russian roulette; instead ^{we need to celebrate} the positive proof of hope ~~is~~ that we are the salt of the earth.

~~Jesus as the Christ did not give carte blanche approval to~~ all things human, For the scripture says this, we are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its taste, how shall it be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown

out and trodden underfoot by ^{those who pass by} ~~men and by women.~~

Here too we must ^{proof} unpack the positive ~~proof~~ of hope as to what these words mean. ^{four} If we remember our lessons from high school chemistry class, then we will recall that it is actually impossible for salt to lose its flavor. Salt can be dissolved in water, the impurities remain, but nevertheless salt will still be salt. The positive proof of hope ^{for living in this day and time} in this text teaches us that the qualities and properties of salt remain even if the salt crystals are entirely dissolved, washed away and carried ^{out the} to seven seas. In fact, this simple chemistry lesson can be tested out by analyzing the water in the ^{might} ocean. The water ^{in the ocean} at the beach is full of salt. And the same salt can be recycled year after year, age after age.

Jesus does not say that he hopes that we can be ^{come} the salt of the earth; Jesus doesn't say that we ought to be the salt, ^{Jesus doesn't say} or that we must be the salt, ^{might} ~~no~~ ^{does Jesus say} that we will one day ^{we will} become the salt of the earth. ^{proof} Instead the positive ~~proof~~ of hope that comes from Jesus directly to us is that we are the salt of the earth and as the salt of the earth God gives us the power to protect those who are helpless. As the salt of the earth God gives us power to purify that which is contaminated. As the salt of the earth, God gives us power to heal that which is broken. As the salt of the earth God gives us power to promote peace in a war torn world. As the salt of the earth, God gives us hope so that we might ^{Season} ~~flavor~~ life in all of its dimensions, morning by morning and day by day.

Now, the third and final ^{Proof} Positive ~~Proof~~ that Jesus shared was the element of love. Faith is the first positive proof. Hope is the second. And the third and final ^{proof} positive ~~proof~~ is love. Now what this means is that love calls us forth from ^{small time} pettiness so that we can expand our horizons of pro-active possibilities.

What I am saying here is that every storyteller, whether it is Shakespeare telling us about Hamlet, ^{and Macbeth} or Toni Morrison writing about Beloved ^{and Pecola Breedlove} or Luke talking about Jesus on trial, ^{before Pontius Pilate and the Sanhedrin Court} all storytellers look out at the world as you and I look out at it and they see things happening, in order to give form and direction. They see things happening in order to make a claim about events in general, and about love in particular.

And what storytellers claim is that all of life has meaning. Storytellers maintain that the things that happen to us, happens not by accident like leaves being blown off a tree by the wind haphazardly. ^{The world's greatest} No storytellers argue that there is order and that there is purpose deep down behind us. There is order and there is purpose deep down inside of us. And that all of this order and purpose are leading us to the positive proof of our somebodiness.

The power of the stories in the passion narratives tell us that life adds up somehow. The power of the stories ^{during} in the season of Lent ^{are} ~~is~~ gripping and fascinating love stories; for believing Christians ^{The Easter Story} this is the greatest love story that has ever been told. ^{You know the story} John 3:16 sums ^{the story} ~~it~~ up this way, ^{Say it with me} God so loved the

world, that God gave his only begotten son so that whosoever believes ⁱⁿ him shall not perish, but shall ^{everlasting} eternal life.

Yes, sisters and brothers, the ^{proof} positive ~~proof~~ of love let's us testify that the wages of sin are death / but the gift of God is eternal life. The ^{proof} positive proof of love enables us to sing out to the world that Jesus has taken away the sting of death, and ~~that~~ the grave no longer holds the victory. Yes, we too ^{in the spirit of} based on the positive proof of love ^{can} join the ^{cloud of witnesses} ~~psalmist~~ ^{who} proclaiming, ~~that~~ the Lord has been our dwelling place in all generations, before the mountains were brought forth and even before the earth was formed, from everlasting to everlasting, God is our God, and ~~that~~ we are God's people, morning by morning day by day.

In conclusion, I offer you the ^{proof} positive ~~proof~~ of faith, ^{Sisters and Brothers} you ^{we} are the light of the world. I offer you the ^{proof} positive ~~proof~~ of hope, ^{Sisters and Brothers} you ^{we} are the salt of the earth. I offer you the positive ^{proof} proof of love, ^{Sisters and Brothers} for God so loved the world, for God so loved the whole world that God gave his only begotten son so that ~~whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but shall everlasting life,~~

Let the people of God say
Amen

Apostle Paul writes in the Book of Romans that ^{it is God's love for us that makes us} ~~we are~~ more than conqueror. ~~For I am convinced~~ that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor heights, nor depths, nor any thing else in all creation / will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus

Yes