

**AMERICAN BAPTIST UNITED MISSION  
WHEN GOD SHOWED US THE WORLD ACCORDING TO GOD**

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April 2010**

**When we are united in God's mission,  
our United Mission will grow.**

*“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:12-14)*

Greetings from your Ambassador for United Mission in these beginning days of Easter 2010!

The household of Jesus Christ (the church) is built on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In a sermon describing the women who came to the tomb on that Sunday morning, Park Renshaw wrote about the tumult of a new world emerging from an old world following Jesus' resurrection (“If It's True. It's a Different World; Does That Scare You?” *Journal for Preachers*, Easter 1995):

And so Sunday morning, these women... came to the unnamed garden near Calvary. The Sabbath over, they went shopping for burial spices and arrived, nervous, apprehensive, at the grave. What a shock: it's open, a well-dressed young man is sitting there. He says, “Don't be afraid,” and gives them Jesus' forwarding address; and they are so afraid that they don't even go where the young man said to go.

They're paralyzed. Something has gone wrong--or has gone so right they can't take it in. Mark leaves the story there, with the men too afraid to come, and the women leaving terrified. But one thing, they knew: somehow it was clear to them that the world was not the same anymore. It was a new world. They just didn't know what to do with it yet. But they would find out.

*In raising Jesus of Nazareth from the dead, God showed us the world according to God.* In Jesus Christ the world is now a new world. It is a world where the meek *do* inherit the earth, even when they don't have a deed to it registered in the courthouse. It is a world where the poor in spirit have the only riches, and among the poor the bread is blessed and broken and everyone has enough. It's where everyone knows that *enough*

*is a feast* (in the old world a feast is not enough!). In the new world of the resurrection, those who mourn are more than comforted; they dance before the Lord with their dead--often while they are still grieving. It is a world where the peacemakers know themselves, and everyone else, as children of God, and the merciful know what mercy does: it turns our enemies into sisters and brothers and causes weapons to rust and corrode or be transformed into tools.

The apostle Paul clearly understood that belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is foundational to the faith of the church. (See 1 Corinthians 15:12-14 above.)

The household of Jesus Christ begins with the dancing and laughter of Easter, or it does not begin at all. The church is a miracle that depends on the resurrection work of God. The church is possible only through God's victory over death in Jesus Christ and God's promise that God will destroy death in all things. The household of Jesus Christ lives between the two realities of the destruction of death in Jesus Christ and the destruction of death in all things.

Yet, far too often the church behaves as though the news of Jesus' resurrection hardly matters, or that it never really happened. The result, either way, is a bland, listless celebration of Easter.

Tragically, in most congregations in North America, the resurrection of Jesus does not receive major emphasis outside of Easter Sunday. One reason for this, as we have seen, may be a lack of belief. Another may be fear of what it really means if Jesus is alive. These two reasons may, in fact, be intertwined and combined into a single set of conflicting emotions within an individual Christian.

Joseph S. Harvard, III (*Journal of Preachers*, Easter 2010) pointed to the words of Henri Nouwen in *Our Greatest Gift, a Meditation on Dying and Caring* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994) in which Nouwen told a story about going to a circus in Germany. He was captivated by the trapeze artists—the Flying Rodleights. After a telephone conversation, they met and became friends; Nouwen followed them around Germany. He reported this conversation that he had with the leader, the “Flyer Rodleigh,” who explained to him how they fly through the air:

As a flyer, I must have complete trust in my catcher. The public might think I am the star, but the real star is my catcher.” “How does it work?” Nouwen asked. “The secret,” Rodleigh said, “is that the flyer does nothing and the catcher does everything. When I fly I have simply to stretch out my arms and hands and wait for him to catch me. The worst thing I can do is to try to catch the catcher. A flyer must fly and a catcher must catch and the flyer must trust, with outstretched arms that the catcher will be there for him.

Easter means letting go and trusting in the Catcher. Easter is about learning to trust God who will catch us.

In these days of economic stress and turmoil, it is tempting to claim the position of the catcher, and not the flyer. But God calls us to let go and trust God. It is tempting to American Baptist congregations to hang onto funds, instead of letting go so those funds can be used for God's mission. **As part of God's family I believe that God calls us to let go and to be united in mission—American Baptist United Mission.**

Your church's United Mission giving supports your local region, which makes it possible for the region to provide more effective support for your church and others. In fact, most of the income for each of our regions comes from gifts to United Mission. Our giving to UM pays the major parts of the salaries of our region's staff who provide: • staff service for search committees; • assistance resolving church conflicts; • area ministers to maintain contact with individual pastors and with associations and small groups of churches; • camping ministry; • resources to assist your church in growth and spiritual health; and • education and training of pastors, youth, and lay leaders in congregational empowerment. UM giving also supports: • The Office of the General Secretary • American Baptist Men • American Baptist Women's Ministries • ABC Information Services • National Ministries • International Ministries • Colleges, Seminaries, Homes Hospitals, etc. • Career Centers • Mission Resource Development • American Baptist Historical Society • American Baptist Personnel Services • Orientation to ABC Life • and more. Reminder: If you need a remittance form with your church's name, address, and PIN number, please contact your regional office.

THANK YOU for your support of American Baptist United Mission!

*Ron*