

“Jesus Is Uplifting”
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Menifee United Church of Christ

God of Grace,
May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart,
come from you, and be a blessing to those who need them.
Amen.

A man died and went to heaven. St. Peter met him at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter said, “What have you done in your life that uplifted people, that helped someone?” The man said, “Well, that’s easy. One time I came upon this motorcycle gang and they were annoying this woman, they were harassing this woman. I told them to stop. But they wouldn’t stop. So I went up to the biggest biker and I smacked him upside the head, I kicked over his bike, I pulled out his nose ring, threw it on the ground, and said, ‘If you don’t leave her alone, you’re going to have to answer to me.’” St. Peter said, “Wow! That’s great! When did you do that?” The man said, “Just a couple minutes ago.”

Have you done anything to uplift somebody, to lift their spirits, to help them out? I think a lot of us do what we can, but I’m thinking of one person in particular who is a very uplifting person, who lifts up people. She’s a public school teacher. She teaches kids in Sunday School whenever we have kids who want to go to Sunday School. She volunteers in the office. She volunteered yesterday for our BAG Day, our Buildings and Grounds Day. For those who don’t know, I’m talking about Lucia Gallo. Let’s have a big hand for Lucia. She does a lot to uplift people in this church and in our community and that’s a good thing.

It’s not just people in one church or in one denomination or in one faith tradition that lift people up. People do it in all religions, I think. The Buddha lifts people up. The Buddha says, “If you light a lamp for somebody, it also will brighten your path.” And that’s so true. And that’s what we need to do is light a lamp for people and have it brighten their path and brighten ours.

Other faith tradition’s leaders do the same thing. I’m thinking of Gandhi. Gandhi lifted up the people of India to the point of getting rid of British rule. Gandhi was very uplifting.

Jesus is uplifting, of course. In the gospel that we just read Jesus says to the disciples all that had to happen to the Messiah to come. Jesus “opened their minds,” it says. Jesus explained the scriptures to them, that Jesus had to die and rise after three days as Jesus did, according to the Bible. And then Jesus blessed them. And as he was blessing them, he was lifted up into heaven.

And that’s the story of Jesus, isn’t it? He was lifted up into heaven, but he also lifts us up. He lifted up the disciples. He lifts us up. I feel that that’s why we all come here today, because Jesus lifts us up. Jesus shows us the way, shows us a better way to live, appeals to the better angels of our nature. Jesus lifts us up.

Jesus’ words uplift us. In the gospel of Matthew, the Beatitudes, Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

Don’t Jesus’s words uplift you? They are so poetic, they are so prophetic, and they are so profound. They lift us up if we are poor in spirit. They lift us up if we are mourning. They lift us up if we are meek. They lift us up if we hunger and thirst for righteousness. They lift us up if we are merciful. They lift us up if we are pure in heart. And they lift us up if we are peacemakers.

Jesus lifted up the disciples. He said, as he was walking and he saw Peter and the others and he called to them and said, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people, I will make you fishers of men. I will make you fish for people.” And they did follow him. And he did the same thing to Matthew, who was a tax collector. And Matthew followed him. And Matthew was lifted up, and Peter and the others were lifted up because they followed Jesus.

Has Jesus lifted you up by calling you in some way, however that was? Maybe you just heard him inside and before that you were, dare I say it, you were spiritually dead, you were not alive until you started following Jesus. I know that’s pretty true of me. Jesus lifted me up. Jesus lifts you up.

Jesus lifted up Lazarus. Quite literally. Lazarus was a friend of Jesus. Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha, were Jesus' friends. Lazarus was very ill, to the point of dying. Mary and Martha sent for Jesus, to tell him to come. But Jesus was delayed, and he didn't show up until Lazarus had been dead for four days. When he did show up, Mary and Martha were weeping and complaining to Jesus, "Why didn't you come earlier?" But they knew that Jesus could perform a miracle and, sure enough, Jesus went to the tomb of Lazarus. And they rolled the stone back. And Jesus said, "Lazarus, come out!" And Lazarus did come out. Lazarus was raised from the dead after four days.

How many of us have been raised from the dead by Jesus? Not physical death, but spiritual death? How many of you were spiritually dead? Dead inside? I see people's hands going up. We were spiritually dead, but then Jesus raised us up like Lazarus when we decided to follow Jesus. And even if we get off the right path, Jesus patiently gets us back on the right path. Maybe we were addicted to drugs or alcohol or gambling or whatever, but Jesus has faith in us and is patient with us and waits for us again to follow him. And we do. Jesus lifted us up. I know that has happened many times with me, and I followed Jesus.

The Holy Spirit lifts us up. According to Acts, Jesus gave the disciples the Holy Spirit. After Jesus ascended, this is Ascension Sunday, he left a gift for the disciples and for us, of the Holy Spirit. All we have to do is listen to the Holy Spirit. Take the time to listen to the Holy Spirit.

I hope you do that. To listen for the still, small voice within. To listen for the whisper of the wind. To listen to your car radio, maybe, and get a message from the Holy Spirit that you follow. And then you are lifted up. That's the purpose of the Holy Spirit. It's to help us. Like when Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit for 40 days and 40 nights, to be tempted by the devil, according to the Bible. But Jesus resisted the temptation and was himself lifted up.

God lifts us up. God lifts us up. According to the Bible, God gives us wisdom and understanding and salvation so that one day we will be lifted up to the kingdom of heaven. To what the book of Revelation calls "the home of God." I like that description of heaven, "the home of God."

One day, hopefully many years from now, we'll all be lifted up into the home of God. As we're promised in the Bible. God giving us salvation, giving us grace, giving us hope for the future. Eventually giving us eternal joy, peace and love.

Parents lift up their children. At least they're supposed to. That's the job of parents, I think, to lift up their children. To lift up their spirits. To remember that their children, just like them, are children of God, made in God's image, receivers of God's unconditional love.

I think I told some of you that my daughter got accepted into Harvard Law School. I was so proud of her. I would have been proud of her wherever she went, but I was so proud of her. Then she told me that she was going to defer for a year before going to Harvard. This was a couple days before Malia Obama was accepted into Harvard undergrad and deferred going to Harvard for a year, to mature a little. And that's what my daughter wanted to do and she just got word the other day that she was accepted and was deferred a year. And I texted her and I congratulated her and I said that, whether she goes to Harvard this year or next, Harvard will be very fortunate to have her. And she texted me back and said, "Aw shucks, Dad, thanks." But that's what we're to do, isn't it? We're to lift up our children. To lift their spirits. To fill their souls with love.

My grandma used to lift me up when I was a kid. She took me to Sunday School every Sunday. She lived right next door to us and she took me to Sunday School. And I learned that Jesus loves me, this I know. I learned about church, about God. She planted a seed in me which eventually made me become a minister, I think. (Don't hold that against her.) But she helped put that seed in me.

Did you have parents or grandparents that uplifted you? I know some parents are not effusive, they're abusive, either mentally or physically, so maybe you weren't necessarily uplifted by your parents. But one thing you should remember, whether or not your parents or your grandparents uplifted you, God uplifts you. God brings you to a better place, brings you here on Sunday morning, helps you to live life fully alive. And the Holy Spirit uplifts you. The Holy Spirit, if we listen for the Holy Spirit, if we take the time, not just to talk to God in prayer, but to listen to God and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will guide us and guard us. And Jesus, of course, uplifts us, like he uplifted Lazarus. He uplifts us. He guides us and guards us and loves us unconditionally. That's what God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit do. They lift us up. Forever.

Let us pray,

God of love, help us to know that you lift us up. Help us to know that the Holy Spirit lifts us up. And help us to know that Jesus lifts us up. Now and forevermore. By the power of the Holy Spirit. And in the name of Jesus. Amen.