**Do Not Fear**

**First Baptist Church, Albemarle**

**April 5, 2015 (Easter)**

In the book *Wrong: Why Experts Keep Failing Us — And How to Know When Not to Trust Them*, David Freedman writes about the “Wizard of Oz” effect. This comes from the fact that we are taught, from a young age, to believe that someone else always knows best — first our parents, then our teachers, then experts in various fields. But not every expert is going to be right, all the time. Matter of fact, most so-called “experts” are wrong more times than they want to admit.

It is amazing for me to reflect back and see how much I have become like my dad as I have become older. When I was a kid, I remember my dad drinking coffee every morning and thinking that I would never drink a dark, hot drink. Today, I drink way too much coffee. I also remember being bored to tears when riding in a car with my dad because he liked to listen to talk radio. If you get in my car, most of the time, my satellite radio is set on ESPN Radio. It is not NPR but it is still talk radio. As I listen to all of the so-called experts on ESPN radio, I know that if they are right 50% of their predictions, they are doing well.

There are many other professions that miss the mark. Meteorologists seemingly are right only about 30% of the time. At times, the only thing they seem to get right is what the weather is doing at that very moment. Unfortunately, doctors are wrong at times, which is the reason why they practice medicine. Financial advisors also get it wrong at times as our retirement ebbs and flows.

Of all of the so-called “experts,” I believe consultants probably have the least amount of reprucussion for being wrong. They simply go in, tell a company what they should do and should not do before collecting their checks, never to be seen again. Here are a few phrases you will never hear from a consultant:

* Bet you I can go a week without saying “synergy” and “value-add”
* I don’t know enough to speak intelligently about that.
* How about paying us based on the success of our recommendations?

So-called “experts” are not going to be right 100% of the time. In some cases, they are not going to be right half of the time. The “experts” in Matthew’s account of the resurrection story were the chief priest, elders, pharisees, Pilate and even the disciples. They were all wrong! The chief priest, elders, pharisees and Pilate believed that Jesus was not who he said he was, the Son of the Living God. They crucified Jesus, believing that Jesus was just another zealot who was a threat to the establishment. So they beat, tortured and killed Jesus in the most horrific way possible. The disciples were also wrong because they thought Jesus’ reign would be on earth as the king of Israel and establish his kingdom as a military leader. His death on the cross crushed the disciples’ dreams for Jesus.

Sometimes it is scary to be wrong. What will happen if we fail? What will be the reprucussions if I am wrong? How are others going to be affected if I make a mistake? What if someone dies?

We often look at death with great horror. Death seems to be the end of all things…the end of the story. The finality had set in with the disciples. All of them had scattered out of fear for their own lives. At the cross, John had come back to be with the women who had been by Jesus’ side throughout the crucifixion. Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene were among many women who had stayed to care for Jesus. It was the women who stayed faithful to Jesus but would’ve been considered the “non-experts” by others in the culture.

Matthew’s version of the resurrection story can be described as scary. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb on the third day to tend to Jesus’ body. While at the tomb, they experienced a great earthquake and they witnessed an angel of the Lord come down from heaven to roll away the stone and then sit on top of it. None of the other Gospel accounts mention an earthquake. In the other accounts, the stone had already been rolled away prior to anyone arriving at the tomb. It seems that Matthew was trying to underscore the fact that an earth-shattering event had just occurred. Jesus was no longer in the tomb but “He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.”

The immediate reaction to the earthquake and the angel’s appearance was fear. The guards on duty to protect the tomb from anyone stealing Jesus’ body “were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.” But the angel’s first words to the women were “Do not be afraid.” Then the angel tells the women that they were to return to Galilee where Jesus had already gone ahead of them. So they hurry away, still afraid but filled with joy because maybe, just maybe, Jesus is who he said he was and that he truly is risen.

The fearful resurrection story continues. On the way to finding the disciples, the women are suddenly met by Jesus. . They neither held any doubts about his identity nor how they ought to respond. Upon seeing Jesus, the women fell to their knees and held onto the feeet of Christ in an act worship. Sensing their angst, Jesus reassures them by saying “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” Christ’s reassurance was further confirmation that the angel’s proclamation was true! He is risen, just as he said!

In Christ’s resurrection, we have nothing to fear. Karl Barth, one of the greatest modern theologians, wrote: “The Easter message tells us that our enemies, sin, the curse of death, are beaten. Ultimately they can no longer start mischief. They still behave as though the game were not decided, the battle not fought; we must still reckon with them, but fundamentally we must cease to fear them any more.” Satan no longer has a hold on us. Sin can no longer enslave us. Death is not the end. There is no need to be afraid today. He is risen, risen indeed! Christ’s resurrection has overcome Satan and death in order for us to have life, life that is everlasting!

So what is in the power of Christ’s resurrection? First, power of resurrection gives us salvation! Romans 3:21-26 reminds us that we have righteousness only through faith. “But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” It is through Christ’s righteousness that we have salvation which was exemplified in his death and resurrection.

It is through Christ’s resurrection that death has been conquered and through his love nothing can separate us from the love of God. “In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:37-39) The assurance of our salvation is secure through our faith in a risen Lord!

Not only does the resurrection give us salvation, it also gives us the power for living. The tomb could not hold Jesus in because we place our faith in a living God, not one that remained dead. Jesus walked out of the tomb and appeared to his disciples and many others as proof of his true divinity. He is the Son of God who has power over all things! The resurrection is significant because it gives us power - power that makes a difference to us today. Luke Johnson, a professor at Emory says, Jesus "entered into an entirely new form of existence, one in which he shared the power of God, and in which he could share that power with others." That others includes us! As Christians, we now share the power of resurrection life, power that can support us through failures, firings, divorces, illnesses and even death. Easter shows us that there is always new life beyond the pain of loss, disappointment and death. An abundant life goes beyond circumstances. It is found in the power of the resurrection.

Finally, resurrection leads us to a new place. Notice that in Matthew, Jesus wants to meet his followers in Galilee - the place of mission to the Gentiles and other strangers. He does not want his disciples to hang around Jerusalem, doing the same old things. "Go and make disciples of ALL nations," he says when he meets up with his friends in Galilee; go and serve me in new places with new people. Jesus wants us to do the same. When we experience resurrection from our old life to a new life in Christ, Jesus doesn’t want us to go back to our old lives. He desires for us to experience transformation; being transformed by renewing of our minds in him. The old has gone and the new has come.

Lee Strobel, an editor with the Chicago Tribune, was an athiest and a skeptic. When his wife, who first was agnostic, became a follower of Jesus, he noticed a change in her character amd that in his own words “very attractive.” He began an indepth investigation on Christianity and the claims of Jesus to see if there was any credibility. After almost two years of research, he came to the conclusion that it would take more faith to remain an athiest than to become a Christian because of the amount of truth that pointed to Jesus being who he said he was. It was at that point he gave his life to Christ, placing his faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He wanted the character of Christ to be his own chracter.

Just a few months after he became a Christian, his 5-year-old daughter went up to his wife and said, "Mommy, I want God to do for me what he's done for Daddy."

Here was a little girl who had only known a father who was profane, angry, verbally harsh and all-too-often absent. And even though she had not picked the bones of perception or pluralism or passion, or debated anything else related to the empty tomb, she had seen up close the influence that Jesus can have on one person's life. In effect, she was saying, "If this is what God does to a human being, that's what I want for me."

Resurrection leads to transformation and transformation leads us to a new place. We are no longer the same as before but we are transformed into his likeness.

Over the past 40 days, we’ve been walking together through Lent and often finding ourselves being uncomfortable with our own sins and sins of the world. We’ve journeyed together through the darkness of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. We’ve waited with sadness but with great hope for this Easter morning. We are a witness to one another and to the world that Jesus is not dead. He did not remain in the grave. . HE IS RISEN! HALLELUJAH! HE IS RISEN INDEED!