

March 24, 2013

A Sermon Preached by
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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF DELRAY BEACH

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Starbucks Spirituality

Acts 2:22-24

Will You Pray With Me?

Abundant God, You are the source of every perfect gift. In the cross of Jesus, You defeated death and provided for us eternal life. We pray this morning that our imaginations may once again be captured by the power of Your love and that we may respond by giving our whole lives to the Lordship of Jesus. Amen.

Three children were discussing their mother's professions. One said, "My mother is an attorney, she practices law." Another said, "My mother is a doctor, she practices medicine." The third child said, "My mother is a Presbyterian, she's not practicing right now." Well, I wonder how many of us that describes. Are you practicing the faith in a manner that is so rich, full of flavor and vital that anyone notices?

I am deeply convinced that the hope of the world is the local church. And the hope of the local church is members who are living out a Starbucks Spirituality.

Both of my children have worked for Starbucks. In their training, they

learned that a core part of Starbucks' mission is attracting people who don't drink coffee! Think on that for a moment. Central to Starbucks' success is that they intentionally seek to attract people who don't drink coffee.

How? First, Starbucks offers an array of beverage options with every imaginable flavor. Second, Starbucks lifts and maintains the energy level of the staff. Staff is told to learn the regular customers by name and to remember their beverage preference. "Good morning, Diane. May I start a Grande Latte for you?" And third, by creating pleasing, vital atmospheres where people want to spend time. Starbucks success is found in offering a wide variety of flavorful products, served with energy and in a pleasing environment.

Some years ago, *The New York Times* declared that Starbucks has now become America's living room. People go less for the beverage and more for the experience. Is the experience of your faith by others resulting in persons desiring to have what you have?

Our lesson this morning from Acts is the first Christian sermon. It is only three verses long. I know what every one of you is thinking: “Why can’t we have sermons like that?” Notice how the sermon is developed. The sermon has three movements: the first Christian sermon ever preached is a three point sermon!

- **Movement One:** Who Jesus is.
- **Movement Two:** Jesus was crucified.
- **Movement Three:** Jesus was raised from the dead.

There is power in brevity and directness. Here is a presentation of the Gospel that has flavor, energy and attractiveness. It is what I would call a Starbucks presentation of the Gospel.

John Leith, a wonderful theologian, once told me on the campus of Eckerd College that he is convinced that the primary reason the church lacks power today is amnesia: that most people populating North American churches simply have forgotten this first sermon and the power behind it. So their faith is lived without power.

Make no mistake. When we recall this first sermon, meditate on it regularly and pray that its power will penetrate us, Jesus will take up residence in our lives. And we will be changed. It is then that we will declare, as Paul did so many years ago,

that it is not I who lives but Christ who lives in me.

Notice the claim of the gospel. We don’t have to manufacture Starbucks Spirituality. We don’t have to artificially manufacture lives that are flavorful, energetic and attractive. Jesus does that as we live in Christ and Christ lives in us. But that does require intentionality on our part. As Fred Craddock once observed, the enthusiasm of Easter needs to be turned into common energy.¹ We must live each day in a manner that continues the work we see Jesus doing in the Gospels.

Many years ago, the artist Stenberg had his artist studio in Dusseldorf, Germany. He was commissioned to paint a picture of the crucifixion of Christ for a church. He wasn’t a Christian and had no intention of becoming one. He took the assignment because it would be money in his pocket.

Before he began to paint, he carefully read all he could about the death of Christ. After several weeks of studying every detail available about the crucifixion, he began to paint: first the background, then the cross. Day by day, he added increasingly more detail to his work. One day a little girl was in his studio and saw the nearly finished painting. She didn’t know who it was in the painting. “Who is

that?”, asked the girl to Stenberg. “That is Jesus Christ”, answered the artist. “But what is happening to Him?” “It is a painting of when they killed Him but I don’t have time to speak of such foolishness now.” The little girl, as most little girls, would not be so easily dismissed. “Was He really bad?”, she asked. The artist snapped, “No, He was really very good.” The girl began to cry, “Then why was He killed?”

Even an accomplished artist like Stenberg can be exhausted by a persistent little girl and her questions. Stenberg proceeded to tell the story as best as he could from all of his research for the painting. He told how Jesus was born, how He lived and all the good He did for people. Stenberg told of Jesus’ generous spirit and extravagant forgiveness to all who desperately needed forgiveness. But there were people who didn’t like the kind of world Jesus was making so they put Him on a cross to die. Even then, Jesus forgave them. Stenberg spoke all these words, though they had no meaning for him.

The little girl was deeply touched and said to the artist, “You must love Him very much since He loved you so much.” At that moment, the little girl’s words pierced the artist’s heart. He looked at the unfinished painting and saw something he had never seen before - he saw the love Jesus had for

him.

The Crucifixion became Stenberg’s career defining masterpiece. More, it became Stenberg’s gateway into the love of God in the person of Jesus Christ. From that moment forward until his death, Stenberg lived a vigorous faith. You might say that his was a Starbucks Spirituality.

Hear the first Christian sermon again:

- Jesus lived.
- Jesus died.
- Jesus lives again. Amen.

¹Fred B. Craddock, “What Do We Do After Easter,” *The Collected Sermons of Fred Craddock* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 2011), 197.