“A Standing Offer”

Rev. Dr. E. Stanley Ott
I Corinthians 15:1-8
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Lloyd Ogilvie tells of a boy who loved words. Lloyd said, “He tried to stump me with the challenge to spell and define new words he’d discovered. He once tried to set me up by asking me if I knew a Latin word that describes a person who is active or skilled in practical affairs. The boy said, ‘I’m a very fragmatic person you know!’ He meant to use the word pragmatic. We laughed when I explained pragmatic means practical and that fragmatic is a made up word but a wonderful word!” Well, just about everyone I know is living a fragmatic life in some way with competing time demands and demanding people. We easily find our mind, will and emotion pulled in a dozen directions all at once. In our fragmatic lives we desperately need a still place, a solid place to stand, a place that brings order and joy to our lives.

Archimedes was a Greek mathematician and inventor who lived about 250 years before Jesus Christ was born. Archimedes once spoke about the concept of the lever, a long pole used to move a heavy object. Here we have a picture of a boy using a lever to lift a load of heavy books. Given a long enough lever and the right place to stand you can lift just about anything. So, Archimedes said, “Give me a place to stand and I will move the whole world.” Wow! The key to life in our fragmatic day is to know the right place to stand and to stand there! So the Apostle Paul wrote: Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand.

So the place to stand, a place of security and hope for our fragmatic lives is the good news of Jesus. We love good news. My friend Warren was driving in the Rockies with his son one winter’s day when they hit a patch of black ice and slid off the road and four times their car rolled over and down the mountain. At one point, the sun roof of their car popped off as they rolled over leaving a big hole in the roof. Warren's son did not have his seat belt on. When the car was upside down as it was rolling over, his son dropped right through the hole in the roof and was gone as the car kept rolling. Finally, the car came to a stop. Warren crawled out of the car and runs up the hill worried sick about his boy. He found his son unconscious, picked him up and the boy's eyes opened, "Hi, Dad!" Warren said to me, "Stan, that felt goooood!" That's good news. Let me tell
you, whatever is going on in your life, no matter how uncertain, no matter how confusing, how unsettling, how fragmentic, God has good news for you—that good news is the place to stand.

The apostle Paul describes that good news this way. Paul said this is of first importance, this is the most important thing in the world. What? First, that Jesus died for our sins. Jesus took God's punishment away from us because He loves us. Second, Jesus was buried, because he was dead. He was not unconscious. He was dead, dead! Then, on the third day after his burial, Easter Sunday, Jesus was raised to life by God, and Jesus showed himself to his friends and followers. That’s God's Good News. Jesus is alive right here, right now, forever offering forgiveness and love to you.

Paul then went on to describe more good news of Jesus this way: that he was raised on the third day [Easter Sunday]...and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me (I Corinthians 15:4-8).

In other words, Jesus appeared to a whole lot of people to show he was no longer dead but alive. Some people today question the Bible as if the Bible was merely a book of pop fiction. It’s not fiction. It’s a series of documents written by 40 diverse people over a period of 1500 years who wanted to record their first-hand experiences of the reality of God. Hundreds of people saw Jesus alive after his death and burial. They knew the resurrection was real. So “the” good news is that God raised Jesus to be alive because God loves Jesus, and that same God loves you and will raise you to life as you put your own trust in Jesus. God is always thinking wonderful thoughts about you, whispering words of love to you.

“Give me a place to stand and I can move the whole world.” So if the place to stand is the good news that Jesus is alive, right here, right now, then how do we do it? The apostle Paul tells us. Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which
also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). To stand is to hold firmly to the message that Jesus died for your sins and is truly alive, living for you. To stand is actually to hold on to Jesus himself!

When our son, Lee, was about three-years-old, I walked into our family room to see him watching a Christian television program. Lee had put the Bible on the floor and was standing up on top of it. “Lee, what are you doing?” “I’m standing on the Bible, Daddy.” “Well, why?” “Because the man [on television] said to stand on the Bible.” I replied, “Don’t you think he meant that you are to trust the Bible, to depend on what it teaches?” “No, Dad. He meant stand on it.” I love that. To stand on the good news about Jesus may not mean literally standing on your Bible but it’s pretty close. It is to trust your heart, soul, mind and strength to Jesus. It’s to stand on his promises and trust him with your life.

Do you know what is meant by the phrase, “a standing offer?” It means an offer that remains in effect until the person to whom it is offered accepts the offer. If I say to you, “I will go to Baskin-Robbins Ice Cream with you anytime from now on,” That would be a standing offer, and a pretty good one at that! Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live (John 11:25). That is the standing offer of Jesus. Believe in him, trust in him, invite him into your life, choose to follow him. You will find him the still place in your fragmatic life. He will encourage and love you from now to eternity.

Norman Vincent Peale1 told of growing up in southern Ohio. He said, “As a boy, I spent many, many months with my father’s mother, a wonderful grandmother of strong character, sweet, firm, a woman of great faith. And one sad day—and yet it turned out to be a wonderful day—she died. We accompanied her body to the cemetery. The minister was an old, country preacher who had never had much schooling and whose grammar wasn’t the best. He was a tall man, white-haired, with a big face and big strong hands – he was a farmer between times.

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1 Norman Vincent Peale, Easter Offers Life (sermon Marble Collegiate Church), Foundation for Christian Living, 1964.
“As the body was lowered into the earth he was standing by the grave and I was standing by my father. My father was sad. His mother had left us. I was sad. Now this old preacher was of the kind that didn’t need to have a Bible in his hands. The Scripture was a part of his very soul. He knew much of it by heart.” Norman said, “I can still see him standing there with the sun on his face, seemingly unconscious of our presence as he spoke the blessed words: ‘Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.’”

“In that moment something happened to me. It was as though something hot passed through my mind and into my heart and there were tears in my eyes and I had an unshakeable conviction that those words told the truth. This was only Grandma’s body. This wasn’t the wonderful woman herself. I knew that she still lived. By unmistakable intuition I became convinced in that moment that in Jesus Christ there is no death. He, Himself had also said, ‘Because I live, you shall live also.’” That is the standing offer Jesus makes to you. Believe in Jesus and when you die you will live again with Jesus. “Give me a place to stand and I will move the whole world.” Jesus is the place to stand!

One of the finest people I’ve ever known was Gerrit Toebes. Gerrit came from the Netherlands, became an excellent Purdue University professor here in the States and a wise elder in the church. In his fifties, Gerrit was afflicted with a devastating cancer, and bit-by-bit his life ebbed away. Just before Gerrit died, my friend Jim Tozer visited him and asked this question, “Are you prepared in your mind and spirit for this, for your death, and do you believe yourself to be right with the Lord?” Gerrit replied, “Jim, I’m standing on the promises!” He was echoing the words of Russell Kelso Carter’s famous hymn written during his own illness, “Standing on the Promises,” with its famous refrain, “standing, standing, standing on the promises of God.” The standing offer of Jesus is to stand on his promises and know life!

Harry Pritchett tells one of my favorite Easter stories, about a young friend of his by the name of Philip. Philip was born with a debilitating syndrome that left him slower than other kids, and more susceptible to illness. He was a pleasant, happy boy, but as he grew older he became
increasingly aware of the differences between himself and the other children. More and more he felt out of place.

Harry said, “Philip’s Sunday school teacher was also a friend of mine. He taught the 3rd grade class with Philip and nine other eight-year-old boys and girls. My teacher friend knew that Philip was not really accepted by his classmates. He was different. He didn’t want to be different or choose to be different. He just was.” On the Sunday after Easter, the teacher brought ten plastic Easter eggs to church—red ones, yellow ones, green ones and so on. He put the eggs on the table and asked each child to take one and to go outside into the church courtyard and find a symbol of new life and put it into the plastic eggs.

“It was glorious, confusing, and wild as kids ran every whichaway. They came back and put their eggs on the table. My teacher friend began to open them. He opened one and there was a flower. The children ooh-ed and ahh-ed. He opened another one and there was a little butterfly. ‘Beautiful’ the girls all said. It’s very hard for an eight-year-old boy to say, ‘beautiful.’ He opened another one. In it was a rock. ‘That’s crazy,’ they said. ‘How’s a rock mean new life?’ The smart little boy who found the rock said, ‘That’s mine. I knew all of you would get flowers and buds and leaves and butterflies so I got a rock because I want to be different. For me that’s new life.’

“The teacher opened the next egg and there was nothing there. ‘That’s not fair,’ said some of the kids, ‘that’s stupid. Somebody didn’t do it right.’ My teacher friend felt a tug on his shirt and looking down, there was Philip. ‘It’s mine,’ said Philip, ‘It’s mine.’ The children said, ‘You don’t ever do things right, Philip. There’s nothing there.’ ‘I did so do it,’ Philip said, ‘I did so do it. It’s empty—the tomb is empty.’ The class was silent—a very full silence. A miracle took place in that room. Philip became a part of that group of eight-year-old children. He was set free from the tomb of having no place to belong.

Philip was to die the following summer from his lifelong affliction. His parents knew he wouldn’t live a full life span. An infection that other children
would have quickly shrugged off was too much and Philip died. At the memorial service, nine eight-year-olds marched down the center aisle of that church and walked right up to the communion table. There each child placed an egg…an empty plastic egg…on the table. They got it. The tomb of Jesus is empty. Jesus Christ is alive and heaven’s doors are open to you. Right here. Right now. Really open. Jesus makes the standing offer that, “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

To begin the great adventure for which God has created you, stand on Jesus! I encourage you to welcome and invite Jesus Christ into your life. Hand your life over to him. Stand on him. Trust him. Jesus himself stands right now at the door of your life and he is saying, “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me” (Revelation 3:20). So this can be the Easter of your entire life. Simply open the door, receive Jesus into your life, standing on him and on his promises, committing your life and your heart to him.

Here is a wonderful prayer. If this prayer expresses the desire of your heart, I invite you to pray it to Jesus, the Lord who loves you. “Lord Jesus, I invite you into my life. I confess that you died for my sins and extend to me the unconditional gift of forgiveness. I endeavor from this moment forward to live for you and follow you as Lord of my life. I trust that you will transform me into the person you want me to become. Fill me with your Spirit’s presence so that I may share this faith and love with other people. I offer this prayer with gratitude in Jesus’ name. Amen.”