



Easter Sermon March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2008  
Matthew 28:1-10

EU— In the London Underground there is a simple, life-saving instruction painted on the cement, posted on signs, and spoken over the loudspeakers: Mind the Gap!

If you have traveled to London and taken the underground subway system you know what I mean. But even further than that the simple saying has become a pop-icon in the culture: “Mind the Gap” is the message given to people riding the subway to pay attention to the gap between the train floor and station landing which can vary from an inch or more. Needless to say if you trip on it, step in it, or fall through it, you’re about to have a bad day...

Mind the gap has become a focus for me as I reflected on the Easter story and the reality where most of us live. For beginners I read an article from Wendy Miller a teacher at the Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg Virginia. She was making the distinction between what once was, in the Garden of Eden, and what was following our fall “out” of Eden. When she describes the reality in which we live, she is making the point of what was lost or ripped apart when sin came between us and our creator God. “The Gap”, if you will.

She writes, "...what was ripped apart in Eden? Layers of death pushed their way into our lives, each layer a gap of painful separation. We found ourselves separated from our deepest soul and self, separated and over against each other, strangers to the community of creation and hiding and separated from God. Then, fearful and full of dread, we are dragged by our aging and dying bodies towards the final separation which looms before us as our spirit leaves our body. With the life breath gone, our bodies die. Such is the multi-layered tearing. Self-hatred, self-destructive behavior, suspicion and aggression against others, wars against terrorists and acts of terror against others, abuse and rape of the earth which sustains us: these are all symptoms of the terminal illness of separation and death. Graveyards are a final testimony to the gap we live and die in." Mind the gap.

ED— The message of Jesus to remember the poor and to help the widows and orphans reminds us of this same saying: Jesus could easily be saying, "mind the gap", where the poor and orphans and widows lie, for they could easily be forgotten to trip and die there. Mind the gap between the haves and the have-nots; mind the growing gap between the richest and the poorest people in the world, all beloved of God; separated or broken by sin.

If we take a look around us, we recognize how we all live in fear, afraid of death and separation, but afraid mostly of the unknown. Fear and chronic anxiety lurk; evidenced by our silence and

indifference while our nation enters it's sixth year of war with at least two fronts; supported by each one of us despite the words of Jesus; "do not be afraid". Isn't there a growing gap between the American people and the actions of our elected officials? Supporting our very own Lutheran Advocacy Ministry reminds us of the disparities of the poor and the special interests; they work to help us, mind the gap.

In the news in the last couple of weeks: the former Governor of New York, seemingly caught in the gap of his own making; a web intended to catch those operating in the trade of sex for money. Isn't it delicious to watch the talk shows salivating over the seeming downfall of our most popular figures, Britney, Michael and the sale of his "Neverland Ranch", politicians and outspoken Pastors? The people, who fall from grace in the public eye, saint and sinner like us all, may or may not be guilty as alleged, but the pleasure of watching it unfold on the 24 hour news networks makes us all guilty of sin. Mind the gap we create or imagine between those whom we love to watch fall from their pedestals and our own lives blessed by the grace of God and broken by sin.

Or the story of Barack Obama and his Pastor Reverend Wright. We have watched the political conversations about race, the dirty little secret that most often is a political football. Isn't it bawdy fun to watch the political pundits jockeying for position to tear down the issues of race which have defined our country from its inception and which is swept under the carpet of American history, or pulled out for personal

or political gain, depending on the networks we watch or the color of our affiliations?

It reminds me of a story I heard on “Wait, wait. Don’t tell me: the NPR News Quiz”, from a few weeks ago. Apparently the trashy men’s magazine, “Maxim” published a “luke-warm” musical review of the new album by the Black Crowes, a popular rocky and roll group. The problem, it seems was the writer of the review had not listened to the album; basing his critique on a single song. This could be a lesson learned for our own filters when we hear the ramblings of the critics and pundits or the busy Christians who fall to the temptation to be hyper-critical or hyper-defensive of a position or a faith, having read very little of the actual content of a speech or the teachings of Jesus Christ for that matter. Mind the gap.

Regardless of our political affiliations, reverend Wright was pointing out in his rhetoric the continuing “gap” between the powerful and the left behind in America. Don’t we owe him and all people, children of God, the respect given to someone whose identity rises above political affiliation to the promise of being a child of God? Isn’t the gap, the chasm, dug between his views and his anger, and our views and our anger, just a way to protect ourselves from introspection and confession of sin? Mind the Gap.

CR— Mind the gap created by our sin begun when we wanted to be God and were tossed out of the paradise of the Garden of Eden. On

this glorious Easter Sunday, we receive the good news of a way to “Mend the gap”.

My favorite professor from seminary, the late Robert H. Smith, a Seminex professor of New Testament, wrote a commentary on the Gospel according to Matthew. At the beginning to the section about the Resurrection he wrote, “The tomb is empty and the world is full, and that is the work of God alone.” We are called by God to mend the gap; God sent Jesus to mend the gap. That is the miracle of the Easter story. Prior to the Resurrection and continuing still, our lives were limited and our fears were fostered upon the sin first experienced in the Garden of Eden. The gap widened with each generation, separating further and further from the Garden and further from God. Jesus enters the gap and pulls it back to together; mending the gap like a skin graft for the wound.

EG— Wendy Miller continues, “What is the Resurrection for us?” The “Resurrection is God’s way of mending the split and bringing each layer back to touch and live in harmony with others, until finally the body is also brought back to house the spirit.”

We are startled at the tomb by a shiny angel, sitting on the overturned stone, like it was some kind of hickory stump. Hey ya’ll, he says. “Greetings” is the translation, but “Boo!” may be the best way to experience the sighting of this angel or Jesus following Friday’s execution. Jesus returns to his people and proclaims the power of life over death—faith over apathy—action over fear! Just a

few days prior, Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment; as I have loved you, he says, you should love one another. Beginning with love for ourselves, replacing the “old tapes” which breed self-contempt, then sharing that new commandment, that love for others, laced with mercy and forgiveness, with one another, and finally love for all God has created and all people whom God has given names. AC— How do we “do” Resurrection? How does Jesus Christ “mend the gap”? Recall that God is the life giver; “The tomb is empty and the world is full, and that is the work of God alone.” Not “half-empty”, not even “half-full”; the world is full of salvation and Resurrection in the mending works of Jesus Christ.

Wendy Miller, again, “...as we go to tell others this puzzling news, that we are met by the very One we are looking for...Resurrection is not just about living beyond the grave and being united with our bodies in eternity. This is the ultimate mending. The other layers are also healed: we learn to love ourselves and to see and embrace ourselves as God sees and embraces us. We learn to see others, friend and foe, as God sees them and to do good, just as Jesus went about doing good, and just as God is good to all. We learn to serve those who are weak, needy, lonely, poor, sick and dying (and the hungry). They are our brothers and sisters: here—as we are on the move, walking across the gap, Jesus meets us, and we see him in the faces and the lives of those we encounter. Mend the gap as Jesus empowers us. Mend the gap. Amen.