

April 1, 2009

Happy Easter & Resurrection Day!

Dear Friends & Family, **“Trust me, it would be worth the trip...”**

I have been in my annual “Pontius Pilate” mode now for several weeks. What I mean by that is, it is our own local church’s annual “Via Dolorosa” time. This is the biggest event of the year for Immanuel & our 6th year of doing “Via”. We’ll have roughly 70 Immanuelians involved this year. It is being extended a third night as well to accommodate more people. Last year, we had approximately 500 people come through, most of which were not from our church. If you live in the greater Philadelphia/Delaware Valley area, trust me, it would be well worth your trip to come. Anyone who knows me knows I’m relentless to avoid “cheesy-ness” in drama & also how I strive to a fault for realism. One youth group came from an hour away last year & said it was worth the drive. We “morph” our church facility into a replica of 1st century Jerusalem. Visitors may arrive **anytime** between 6:00-9 p.m. Every 15 minutes, guests are divided up into groups of about 20, whereupon they proceed “back in time”, as they walk through the church, stopping at various rooms that have been meticulously given to detail re: transforming them into various locales of Jesus’ last hours on earth. They involve a Roman encampment, The Garden of Gethsemane, The Last Supper, The Sanhedrin, Herod’s Palace, The Fortress Antonia, The Dungeon, & Calvary, along with other “stops” where the guests are given time to reflect on what they’ve seen & heard. You & your group are at each stop roughly 7-8 minutes. It is a very visual & moving experience, which will capture the attention of all age groups, except for small children. It is a great “outing” for youth groups & their leaders.

Our church is conveniently located 1 & ½ miles from I-95. I wholeheartedly encourage you & yours to come. I can only say by the grace of God, you won’t be disappointed. Many churches have their own Good Friday services, & understandably so; in the light of that, we also conduct the same presentation throughout “Maundy” Thursday evening as well. Because you can arrive up until 9 p.m. & still see the entire production, some local people plan to come after their own church services those evenings.

“CHRISTIANS: ‘EXCLUSIVE’ TO A FAULT”

Given that I play Pontius Pilate each year at Via, it does tend to put me in a “Roman” mentality for several weeks beforehand. Most Christians know that when the Roman Empire persecuted Christians in the early centuries of Her existence, they did NOT do so because the Church believed in & worshiped Jesus as their God. They did so because the Early Church worshiped Jesus as LORD, that is, as THE ONLY LORD, in opposition to Caesar as Lord. When the Romans would conquer a territory, they would often absorb that nation’s particular religion & add it to their own, for “security, peace, & allegiance’s” sake, to preserve loyalty & unity in the Empire. On Rome’s part, this practice, known as “syncretism”, tolerated other religions so long as the Emperor was worshiped as supreme. Christians, of course, refused to do so & suffered horrendously at the hands of their Roman conquerors. **“OUR ‘INTOLERANT’ FATHER”**

I don’t know how many times I’ve pondered through the years the many similarities between the spirit, attitudes, & practices of Rome & those of the United States. To be honest, they are striking, alarming, & dismaying, to say the least! They only differ in “degree” at this point, but that “difference” is rapidly dissipating too! Unbridled sexual perversion & promiscuity, an obsession with sports, the arts, & entertainment, & last, but by no means least, an intolerance for intolerance on the part of Christians concerning their loyalty to the Scriptures, Jesus’ **unchallenged & exclusive** Lordship, & His Holy Word. Again, some recent reading in the gospel of Matthew highlighted our Father God’s clear affirmation of Jesus, & also His “intolerant & exclusivistic” attitude towards His “Darling of Heaven”. In Mat. 17, in the well-known account of Jesus’ Transfiguration (a funny aside: as an unsaved Catholic elementary school boy playing on our CYO

basketball team, we played another school called "The Transfiguration". I had no idea then what it was!), Peter, James, & John had just witnessed a foretaste of Jesus' pre-resurrection glory. Moses & Elijah appeared & were conversing with Him. Peter's first response, made in ignorance due to overwhelming fear, was to suggest that he make three tabernacles for Jesus, Moses, & Elijah to reside in. Immediately, God the Father interrupts with a very rare-in-occurrence audible voice: "THIS is My Beloved Son; listen to Him". When the three disciples looked up, it is incredible what the Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to record in his gospel: "...they saw no one, except Jesus, Himself alone." (vs.8). The New American Standard Bible, which is very close literally to the original Greek, in this case, exactly duplicates it. Do you notice the repetition & emphasis re: the Father's command on behalf of Jesus, Beloved? "NO ONE." "EXCEPT". "JESUS". "HIMSELF". "ALONE". He could have easily said, "They saw only Jesus". Look at all of the pains the Father takes to ensure there is no mistaking as to Who is His Chosen! In America, both in secular society & in the "Church", there is an INCREDIBLE pressure, just as in ancient Rome, to be tolerant & pluralistic in your approach to other religions. Notice here how intolerant our Father is in regards to Jesus, even with such Old Testament "icons" & "stalwarts" as Moses & Elijah, who represented The Law & The Prophets! *How much less* would Father tolerate "equality" with Jesus re: the various & sundry false cults & religions so profuse in America?! May He make us as intolerant as He is of anyone else but Jesus, re: being THE Lord & God! **"THE HOLY SPIRIT: JESUS' BROTHERS' 'KEEPER'"**.

Another interesting note re: this passage: Peter had witnessed countless miracles by Jesus besides this one: healings, deliverances, demonstrations of His power over nature, resurrections of the dead, etc., & yet, when faced with the prospect of losing his own life during Jesus' arrest, he *still* denied Him! What does this say to me? It is a sobering & frightening reality how many millions of people have been "moved" by religious experiences, both genuine & counterfeit, & yet still don't know Him! Despite all Peter saw, heard, & experienced spiritually, he still needed the regeneration & infilling of the Holy Spirit to confess the "exclusivity" of His Lord, as he so powerfully did at Pentecost & beyond. Truly, the Holy Spirit IS God's Peoples' *KEEPER*!

Kim & I thank you all & pray your Easter Season is an eye-opening one, spiritually. If there is any way you can attend, we'd be blessed & honored by your presence at "VIA DOLOROSA", for JESUS" glory alone.

Michael & Kim

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[Please make all tax-deductible gifts payable to: **Elim Fellowship**, 1703 Dalton Rd, Lima, NY 14485. Thanks!]
[Michael is an ordained Elim Fellowship itinerant home missionary, endorsed by his local church. He makes his living & supports his family & ministry by preaching God's Word & through faith in the Lord & His provision through His people.]

Ministry/events for MARCH & those not listed in last month's newsletter:

Mar. 19-23: Merritt Island, FL: my brother & I visiting my ailing parents.

Mar. 29: Immanuel Church, Wilmington, DE: Via Dolorosa Room Captains' mtg.

Over half the month of April will be consumed with Via Dolorosa, re: set up, tear down, & performance

April 4: Immanuel Church, Wilmington, DE: "Temple Guard" Via promo skit: Director & actor

April 6: Hopewell Christian Fellowship, Elverson, PA: HNC board mtg./Hopewell Network pastors' mtg.

April 8-10: Immanuel Church, Wilmington, DE: 6th annual "VIA DOLOROSA" production: actor//captain

April 21: New Holland, PA: Tel Hai Camp Spring Banquet: association member attendee

April 23: Marlton, NJ: Elim area monthly pastors' mtg.

“A bed...& things I’ve read”: Kim & I are still trying to sell our Tempurpedic bed, so that we can buy another bed, more suited for my back, if you know of anyone who might be interested.

Recent Reading: Fundamentalism & The Word of God, by J.I. Packer; The History Of The Christian Church, by Philip Schaff; The Expositor’s Commentary, Matthew, by D.A.Carson; The Gospel Primer, by Vincent