

April 18, 2021-04-18

By Rick McKinley

Too good Not to be true

Luke 24: 36-49

A company once hired a recent immigrant and put him to work in the mail room. To the Forman's shock, the guy was a whiz. He stood in from of the sorting and shuffled the letters into slots with amazing speed. The Forman had never seen anything like it.

At the end of the day, the Forman, shook the man's hand, thanked him and said, "I have never seen anyone who could sort mail as fast as you."

The new immigrant smiled and said, "you think I am good now, wait until I can read English."

Well, maybe he was not as fast as he looked. I wondered where some of the mail ended up? Some things are just too good to be true.

Every consumer knows that is true. As one observer notes, "We are inundated by offers on a daily basis that seem too good to be true, and for the most part they are. The price quoted on TV's is a starting price. The free minutes on the cell phone being touted are between hours that no one in their right mind would be talking. The first 100km are free on the 407...but then they really get you. Or the terms of the contract overall are different than the introductory rates. "Like Homer Simpson's complaint about the record club. "The first 10 were only a penny but then they jacked up the price!

No wonder we have become cynical. Whether its life insurance, cable subscriptions, cell phone plans, or CD clubs, we are always waiting for the catch. Nothing is ever as simple as it seems.

How many times have we been cautioned, "if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is? And yet, every once in a while, we get pleasantly surprised. Something that seems too good to be true, turns out to be genuine.

Dr. Carol Noren tells about a cold, rainy Sunday evening in April: the kind of night that would depress anyone. The bad weather had ruined people's plans for the weekend, and another week of work would begin the next morning. She was living hundreds of miles from family and friends. Her budget would not allow too many long distance calls, and there was not anything good on TV. She decided to go to the supermarket to pick up a half gallon of milk and perhaps a single, long stemmed rose to brighten her apartment as well as her mood. Sunday night was the best time to do this. That is when the produce manager would remove any flowers that were past their prime

from the refrigerator case and place them in a bucket of water on the counter, and mark them down to just 25 cents each.

Noren worked her way carefully through the bucket of flowers that night, hoping to find the best flower of the lot. The department manager saw her, and hurrying over the counter, he asked, 'Are you going to buy some flowers?' When Carol Noren said yes, the manager continued, 'How many do you plan to buy?'

On impulse maybe to assure the manager and even herself that she was a serious customer Noren said, 'Two', even though that was double what she'd intended to spend.

'That'd be 50 cents, wouldn't it?' the manager said as she looked around. 'I tell you what: how would you like all the flowers for 50 cents?'

'You're kidding,' said Noren.

'No, I'm not,' said the manager. 'We're getting a big shipment of fresh flowers tomorrow morning, and I have to throw away anything here that isn't sold by midnight. If you take 'em, it'll save me a trip to the dumpster. Fifty cents, what do you say?'

Noren didn't know what to say. She left that store with more than six dozen roses, almost as many carnations, daffodils, mums, other varieties not just what was in the close-out bucket, but in a half-dozen other pails beneath the counter: blossoms that looked far too fresh and beautiful to be clearance priced. She was elated. When she got home, she had flowers in every room. She brought a bouquet to the elderly couple next door, shared them with her co-workers the following day; she dried some to make potpourri...and she was bursting to tell everybody of her extraordinary experience. She went out to buy one rose to cheer herself up. She returned with more flowers than she could count. The best she could hope was that there would still be at least one half-way decent flower in the sale bucket. If anyone had told her what might happen at the grocery store, it would have seemed too good to be true.

Imagine the reaction of those first disciples at the appearance of the risen Christ after His resurrection. Luke tells us, first of all, that they were terrified. He writes, 'While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you'. They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.'

We can appreciate that, can we not? If someone was walking around three days after I had attended the funeral, I would be more than a little uncomfortable.

Fear is a very potent force in our lives. It's said that Hans Christian Andersen, the beloved storyteller, always carried a rope with him in his travels, in case of a fire. If he stayed in a hotel on the second floor or higher, the rope would be his escape route from

the window if fire ever broke out. That rope is now on display in the museum adjacent to Andersen's birthplace in Odense, Denmark.

Was Hans Christian Andersen irrational to carry that piece of rope with him, or was he simply being prepared? Fear certainly has its positive aspects, but there is that fine line.

Many years ago, there was a Halloween evening radio broadcast by a young announcer named Orsen Wells that caused quite a stir. This broadcast warned people that 'the War of the Worlds' was beginning and that giant robots had landed. We are told that as a consequence of that broadcast, there were heart attacks, strokes, and suicides. Many people panicked, packing their belongings and crowding the roads, imagining that the robots would crush them.

'How gullible', we say. We would not fall for something as sensational as that.

How much more sensational was the appearance of Christ to His followers? No wonder they were slow to believe. Who would want to fall for something like a dead man suddenly alive? It seemed absurd. So there was that fear that suspicion.

Some people are still afraid of accepting the truth of the resurrected Christ even today. What if I committed my life to Christ only to discover that it was all an illusion? All of us live with that possibility. For those of us who have experienced Christ's presence in our lives; however, there can be no question as to the reality of the resurrection. But even if it were an illusion it would be improved if everyone lived the life Jesus prescribed. What a grand illusion, if that be the case. But it is not an illusion as those first disciples discovered. They examined his hands and feet and side and they knew. But, at first, they were afraid.

But there was a second reason for their reluctance to admit to themselves that Christ was alive, according to Luke...joy. We read in verse 41: And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement...` in other words, they did not at first believe because the news was simply too good to be true. If you came up to me and told me that I had won ten million dollars in the lottery, I would probably disbelieve it. First of all, I would disbelieve because I had not bought a ticket. In the second place I would disbelieve for joy. It would be too good to be true. I would want to hold that cheque in my greedy little hands just to make sure. So it is with God's gift to us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It seems to us like too much wishful thinking

Isn't this what some psychologists and philosophers have tried to convince us. They see faith as strictly a matter of persons projecting their highest dreams on reality. This is how we would like life to be, so it must be false. Jesus is too good to be true.

But isn't there the possibility that if I did buy a ticket, I might indeed have won the lottery. I mean, somebody did. It could have been me. Just because it is something I might have wished for, does not mean that it could not happen. The good news of Jesus Christ, in his resurrected power, is simply too wonderful for our minds to contain, but that does not diminish its reality.

A social worker tells of being assigned to distribute used clothing at a social service center in a poor neighbourhood. A mother brought in her 12 year old son to see if she could find a jacket for Easter. The boy was sullen and perhaps embarrassed. The social worker, in looking through the pile of clothing found a boy's sport coat that seemed entirely new, with no sign of wear. Some rich family had apparently not needed it.

Son, said the social worker, Try this on.' The boy put it on slowly and then began to touch it and look at it. His eyes grew wide with quiet excitement. Why he gasped, it is new! Here is a child who had known only cast-offs and hand-me downs. For the first time he had something new to put on. It was an occasion of great joy for him. How great is our joy when we become a new person in Jesus Christ.

You may know the story of Ethel Waters. Remember her famous song—a song that has been sung many times in this church... 'His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he cares for me.' Born to an unmarried girl of only 12 years of age, growing up fast in the slums, earning her first money by running errands for prostitutes who could have imagined the change that would take place in Ethel Water's life when she encountered Christ. As she described it, she was headed toward self-destruction when Christ stepped in. That's not wishful thinking. That is reality. It has happened in millions of lives over the centuries the lives of those willing to pay the price of believing.

The disciples disbelieved, first of all because of fear, then for joy. But I believe there is a third reason many today are afraid of accepting the truth of the risen Christ. They are afraid it might require some change in the way they are living their lives.

As someone has correctly stated, the only person who likes change is a wet baby. Many of us are in a rut, and we are content with that rut. We don't want anyone or anything to upset our routine. The last thing we want is change. We are afraid to ponder the idea that Christ really is alive that the gospel really is true because if we accept that, we can no longer be content with half-heated commitment to Christ's purpose. Those early disciples met the risen Christ, and they were forever changed. They enlisted in His cause. They gave everything they had in serving Him.

Some of you are familiar with the name Malcolm Muggeridge. Muggeridge died in the fall of 1990. He was a highly intelligent man who served at various times in his life as a foreign correspondent, newspaper editor, editor of Punch magazine, and as a

well-know television personality in Great Britain. It was as an adult, rather late in his life that he finally became a Christian. He wrote of his dilemma as a journalist-turned-believer in his works such as *Jesus Rediscovered*, *Christ and the Media*, *Something beautiful for God*, and his multivolume autobiography, *Chronicles of Wasted Time*. The wasted time he wrote about were those wasted years before he knew Christ.

Muggeridge frequently spoke and wrote of feeling like a stranger in the world. In an interview a few years before his death, Muggeridge was asked if he would be willing to explain that feeling. His answer is worth repeating: I'd very gladly do so, because I have thought about it often. In the war, when I was in North Africa, I heard some lieutenant colonel first use the phrase displaced person. That phrase was very poignant to me, but it is also a very good definition of a person who is come to see that life is not about carnal things, or success, but is about eternity rather than time...I do not really belong here, I am simply staying here.

The point is that Muggeridge experienced a radical change in his life after he came to the realization that Christ is real and that Christ is alive. But what he discovered much to his amazement was that his new life was so far superior to his old life that he in no way would ever turn back.

Have you made that discovery yet. There is no joy in half-hearted faith. Many of us have just enough religion to make us miserable. But Christ wants to make our lives a miracle.

Do you believe the good news that Christ is risen Is it simply too good to be true. Those early disciples had trouble believing, first for fear, and then for joy, but when they did believe it turned their lives and their world upside down.