

Easter Sunday B 04 April 2021
Mark 16:1-8
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
Greg Bensted

Christ is risen! ... Grace, peace, mercy, love, and new life to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, eternally one God. Amen.

He has been raised; he is not here. Alleluia! Let's pray:

The older I get, the simpler Easter gets. I try less to understand, explain, or make sense of what happened, and more to accept the story at face value.

You know the story as well as I do. Jesus died on a cross. He was laid in a tomb. It was sealed. On the third day the "very large stone" over the entrance was rolled back. Women go looking for the body. A messenger says, "He has been raised; he is not here." The tomb is empty and Christ is risen ...

The only way I can explain any of that is by way of human experiences, both yours and my own. I read it everywhere in the scriptures. Today's resurrection story isn't new. It's the pinnacle of what God has been doing all along. Our readings today testify to that. They declare that God has always been in the life-giving business.

- Have you ever been freed from patterns and behaviours that impoverished and diminished your life? Isn't that a new life? Isn't that a retelling of the Israelites escaping the bondage of Egypt?
- Have you ever had new insights into your life, a new way of seeing the world, another person, or yourself? Every blind man whose eyes were opened by Jesus experienced new life, a resurrection.
- Have you ever felt stuck, and without energy or direction in life? Remember the lame man and Jesus saying, "Stand up, take your mat and walk?" That's resurrection.
- What about Jesus cleansing the temple? Haven't there been times when you cleaned out and made a new start? Maybe that was your resurrection.

- What about the raising of Lazarus? “Unbind him and let him go,” Jesus said. When has your life been unbound? When have you experienced a new freedom that released and enlarged your life?
- Think about a time when it felt as if new life had been breathed into you. You felt a new sense of energy, enthusiasm, creativity, and everything was fresh and beautiful. That’s the resurrecting breath of God blowing through your valley of dry bones.
- Recall a friend who said or did exactly what you needed when you were in a desolate place and you hadn’t asked for a thing. He or she nourished your life in the same way Jesus fed the multitude in the wilderness.
- Have you ever had a relationship that you were sure could not be salvaged? There was nothing left. The hurt was too deep and the distance too wide. And then one day a letter is sent, a phone call is made, or a conversation is started. Something changes and the stone is rolled back.

These kinds of things are happening all the time. I’ve come to believe that there are really only two questions to be asked about the Easter story. One question we bring to this day. The other is a question with which we leave this day. The two questions bookend the story.

The first question is this. Is it still true? That’s the question we bring to this day. It’s not because we think the story might have changed since last year. It’s because our story has changed. Our life is different today from what it was last Easter, and we want to be reminded that Easter is still real. That’s why we show up here every year to hear the same old story.

Let’s be clear about this. In whatever ways your life has changed and is different from last Easter, whether you consider it for better, for worse, or a mixture of both, the story is still true. Regardless of who you are, what you’ve done or left undone, Easter is still happening. The story was true yesterday, it’s true today, and it’ll be true tomorrow. It may take months or even years for resurrection to free us from the tomb and pull us out of the darkness, but it will. That’s the promise of today.

The large stones of our lives are being rolled back. Our tombs are being emptied. And the messenger is still proclaiming the good news, “He has been raised; he is not here.”

That's why our little church is so bright and beautiful, filled with light, candles, flowers, and alleluias. That's why our hearts are filled with joy. These things aren't just decorations and songs, they're God's truth about your life and my life. They're the signs of Easter truth and resurrection reality.

That truth and reality we witnessed earlier when God baptised Charmaine. I want you to hold that moment, lose yourself in the wonder, awe, and miracle of creation and human life. I want you to wonder at all the potential, possibilities, and discoveries that lay before her. I want you to imagine God's wildest dream for Charmaine's life. I want you to name and offer your best prayers, thoughts, hopes, and joys for her. And after you do all that, I want you to know that you've just described resurrection, new life, for Charmaine and for yourself.

Saints, to make a world is something wonderful, to make a world new is something more wonderful still. But to break the chains of Hell and redeem one created out of God's love and in his image, is glorious. Darkness is overcome by light. Order replaces chaos. Holiness, love, truth, thwart the principalities and powers of evil. Holiness vanquishes sin. Love defeats hate. Truth nullifies error. Worship of God crushes the worship of stone idols.

Under his new covenant, Christ has made us new creatures. God has breathed new life into us. The Holy Spirit has put a new nature in us. There are now competing forces within us - the old carnal nature inclining to evil, and the new God-given nature panting for perfection – sinner and saint, and the saint will prevail. [Pastor turns to face the cross].

We love you, Jesus, because on the cross you bore shame, and spitting, and manifold disgrace for us. New emotions stir within us. We love what we once hated; we hate what we once loved. We find ugliness where we once sought bliss, and bliss where we once found bitterness. Our hearts leap at the sound of your precious voice. We rejoice at new hope. Divine enthusiasm renews our strength, enables us to run and not be weary, walk and not faint. We breathe a fresh air, partake of new food, drink out of new wells not dug by man or filled from the earth. We are a new creation. Thank you, Jesus, for saving us. [Pastor faces the congregation].

And now we are also new in relationship. We are now children of God. Free citizens of heaven. Christ is our Brother; God is our Father; the angels are our friends; and the despised people of God are our nearest kin.

Friends, Easter isn't just something from the past to be looked at and celebrated. It's the lens through which we are to see everything. It's a life to be lived. Getting Jesus out of the tomb isn't the ultimate goal of Easter. Easter is about our new life. That means that today is the beginning of the story, not the end. And the most important part of Easter isn't what happens today. What matters most about Easter is what we do tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that.

"He is going ahead of you," said the young man dressed in a white robe to the women. He is going ahead of us rolling back stones, emptying tombs, preparing new places, and calling forth life. Every cross is flowering with new life, every tomb is becoming a womb of new birth, and every darkness is being overcome by new light.

Easter happens in the Galilee of our lives: the hometown, the familiar places, the usual relationships, the ordinary circumstances. Easter happens in the everydayness of life. And that brings me to my second question, the question with which I want you to leave here today. What will you do with your new and precious life? What difference will today make tomorrow?

"He has been raised; he is not here." "He is going ahead of you to Galilee."

If we leave here today the same people we were as when we came, we've missed the point of Easter. Easter isn't the annual remembrance and celebration of an event in history. It's here and now. It's a new way of being. It's a new way of living, in Christ. He is risen! ... Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.