

Sermon Text: John 20: 1-18

Now I overheard one of our members this morning complaining about her memory. I'm not naming names. She said, "Pretty soon, I'll be able to hide my own Easter eggs." I am not going to attempt to delve into the mysteries of what a male rabbit delivering dyed chicken eggs and chocolate has to do with Easter. I'll leave that up to parents. You're on your own.

Now, once I was doing, as Lorraine was, an Easter children's sermon, and I was trying to call their attention to the Easter lilies, and I made the mistake of asking them a question. That's always a mistake. I said, "Do you see anything different about our church today?" One little girl looked around, and she said, "Yes! Full!"

I know there are people here today on Easter, who have not been here before, and others who are here once a year, and so the stakes for preaching are high, and so I'll get to the point.

All the sermons recorded in the New Testament are based on one miraculous event, an event that changed cowardly disciples into fearless apostles. All the recorded sermons record what changed these men and women from grief stricken to giddy and excited about spreading the good news. It was Jesus was the Savior, the Messiah. He was crucified dead and buried, then resurrected and ascended. He was the first born of a new creation, a new thing that God is offering us all, a do-over for the whole world. This is not symbolic, but actually there were living witnesses to say so. Even non-Christians such as the Jewish historian, Josephus, records the same. Now just after the Cross, the disciples were not witnesses to anybody. They were hiding. They had the doors locked. They had the windows shuttered. They were sending out for pizza so they could slide it under the door. They weren't opening for anybody. Many men gained a reputation, you need to know, for having a following in Jesus' day, and many men were killed in Jesus' day when they attracted too much attention, and for the most part, these men are forgotten footnotes. At first, things went the same way for Jesus. His followers scattered, and they thought the dream was over. His enemies thought that He would be forgotten. We can't blame the disciples for scattering, for doing what was natural. They ran, and they hid, but something happened, and this is the proof in my mind from human psychology that is better than an empty tomb. Functional cowards were transformed into fearless apostles, who faced death publicly and unafraid.

Now, the cynical of this age say this. They logic this way, as if this is logic. They say, "Miracles cannot happen, therefore, they did not happen, therefore, the Resurrection is a lie." I hear that. It passes for deep thought, but it isn't. It isn't thought at all. It's simply a dismissal of any possibility of anything you don't know ever happening, and that makes you the measure of all things. It's arrogance, not logic. God may be capable of things that you have never conceived of. Easter is one of those things.

Good Friday and the Easter that follows is not just an old story. Parts of it replay every day around us if we pay attention, parts of it. Good Friday is a perfect example of what we now call spin control that we see in the news all the time. The religious establishment wanted to stay in power, and the Roman representatives, both Herod and Pilate, wanted to stay in power, and so no one in particular took responsibility for the decision to have Jesus killed. The Jews

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could say, “We do not have authority to pronounce a death sentence under Roman rule, even if this man blasphemes by making himself equal to God.” Pilate sent Him to Herod, and Herod sent Him back to Pilate, and Pilate, you remember, publicly washed his hands of the entire decision. The gathered crowd one moment hailed Him as the Messiah, the Son of David, and the next moment they yelled out, crucify him! So it was, and so it is now. No one and everyone is to blame.

A three-year-old named Sean accompanied his father to his first Easter worship service, and the father tried to explain in this church a full-sized crucifix above the altar. He said to his three-year-old son, “Jesus died because people nailed Him to the Cross.” The little boy’s eyes widened, and he looked around, and he said, “You mean these people?” Yes, in a way, we all did. One prophetic note came from the crowd when Pilate asked why crucify Him, what has He done. The crowd yelled, “His blood be upon us.” And it was, and it still is, but that is not a bad thing. His blood was the fulfillment of the precursor we saw in the Passover. In Egypt, the blood of the lamb saved them from death, and led that night the children of Israel out of bondage and into freedom. Jesus, John the Baptist proclaimed, was the true and final Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. In 1 John it says, “If anyone does sin,” and I would have you raise your hands if anyone does sin, “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.” Verse 2, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

We are able to live a life in God only because of what God has done in Jesus Christ. It makes me sick; it really does, when I hear somebody say I hope, I hope, I hope I’m good enough to get into Heaven. How good would that have to be? How good would that have to be to make God owe you something? New life and eternal life are gifts, gifts wrought by God in Christ. We are enabled and empowered to live new life because Christ – the second Adam, He is called – has taken on sin and death and the powers of this world, and was buried, then arose to new life. He was proof of God’s reality, God’s dream for this world, God’s healing of this world, God’s recreating of this world, the new Heaven and the new earth, which were promised. Jesus is the first born of the fulfillment of that promise. That’s what it means. He is the second Adam. He is the preview of what is to come.

We are becoming new when we are strangely detached from this world and its values. The deeper we give ourselves to God, the more we feel that. We are becoming new the more we feel compassion for friend and foe. As we give ourselves to God, and God creates in us new hearts and new spiritual power to forgive as we have been forgiven, we are becoming new when we, unlike the rich young ruler, meet Christ and understand that when there is a choice between trusting riches and trusting God, trusting God is the better way to go.

The things that divide us though are not Godly things. They are man made and woman made. They are political spin that makes us enemies of each other including race, politics, and economic politics and denominational politics, inside the church politics. Yes, that, too. All these things echo deeply of the spin and the distrust and the dislike between the Romans and the Pharisees and the Sages and the screaming fickle mob, between all of them, each other, and then Jesus.

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Jesus, who was only and always on God’s side, and on the side of the enemies who truly knew not what they were doing. We still don’t know what we are doing. Worst yet, we don’t seem to know that we don’t know. Jesus is on our side and on God’s side, the word made flesh, whom we nailed to a cross and buried in a tomb, and then went back to business as usual as if nothing had changed.

We like to pretend. Children and adults also like to pretend. I think that is why people like to buy lottery tickets. I don’t think it is to support public education. It is to hold the ticket and pretend how wonderful and how different your life would be if you had the power and the freedom that money can buy. Only it can’t, and it doesn’t. If you’ve read the studies of winners of large lotteries, you find out it has not.

Scripture tells us you can pretend all you want. You can own all you want, but your soul was made for God, and the whole world if you owned it, could not buy it back. God in Christ on the Cross bought back your soul from sin and death. The Easter resurrection is proof of God’s victory, but we pretend. We pretend that Jesus is an old-fashioned name and sung in hymns and such and talks of nice things, but not really relevant to the serious subjects of our life. We pretend that there are things, which matter more than loving God and loving neighbor. We pretend that enough money might fix our problems or cure all poverty or education or help make war obsolete or make racism and hatred and divorce and drug abuse just go away. We pretend that allocation of money will fix these things, but I remind you of the lottery winners. Remember that what is wrong with us is that we are broken.

We are broken off from God, and we are broken off from each other, and that is the first and the biggest problem, which nothing on this earth can fix. We are cut off with selfish hearts to begin with. All the rest are mere symptoms of the sin, which infects us and isolates us. Jesus died and took upon Himself the infection of sin and the hatred and the self-loathing and the isolation and the destructive greed and lust. These are some of the names of the powers of this world, which we dare not name in our lives, but notice only in the lives of others. God knows, and true repentance is when we know that they infect us as well. The death Jesus died, He died for sin. The new life and the new body He arose in is the preview of what we one day shall become, a new creation, and bits of that new creation can and should shine through even now, even now as we give ourselves over to God’s Holy Spirit. We still await. We await becoming completely what we were meant to be. No human effort could ever transform us, and no power of the will could ever transmute us, only the power of God can complete the new creation for which we yearn, for which we ache, and sometimes are willing to fight for it, mistakenly believing that our power can bring in God’s Kingdom, but we can’t. Only our faith and our willingness to follow humbly the will of God brings in bits of God’s Kingdom. Only humility and faith and none of that cleverness and none of that haughtiness and none of that changing beliefs du jour can do it.

Imagine Jesus told people that their sins were forgiven! This makes sense only if Jesus was God in flesh. C. S. Lewis wrote these very strong words. He said a man who was nearly a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic or else the devil, and you could shut him up for a fool or you could spit at him and kill him as a demon or you could fall at his feet and worship him as Lord and God.

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Let us not, C. S. Lewis continues, let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that option open to us. He did not intend to.

You know lately Easter has meant more to me because the older I get, and I guess this happens to everybody, the older I get, the more people I know who have already passed on beyond this life and into God's embrace. My point this morning is there is more, so much more to Easter and to our faith than just life after death. There is more. Easter means God has made new life possible now, Jesus, the second Adam, we who follow Him. Don't fall victim to the one dimensional faith, which says something like this, and some people have their faith down to this, and it does bother me, they say, "Now, let's see, I am gullible enough to believe that Jesus rose from the dead, and so God has to reward me with Heaven, and between my saying that I believe and my death, well, I'm pretty much the same as everybody else." Is that, is that all there is to Christian faith? No. I am saying that real life begins the moment you understand that you need a Savior and God has provided you one in Jesus Christ, and the Resurrection is the proof of God's continuing determination to bring a new creation upon this earth and a new creation into the souls of believers, even now. Even now, the ascended Christ continues His ministry of new life through the Holy Spirit. We don't just believe, and sit and wait for death, and then something happens. Something has already happened! Something we celebrate today. God was in Christ making peace by the blood of His Cross.

Is your marriage dead? Resurrection is possible. Is your career dead? Resurrection is possible. Is your faith dead? Resurrection is possible. Do you have an old-time friendship broken and now dead? Resurrection is possible. Is the ability to enjoy life dead? Resurrection is possible. Easter means now, even now, the ascended Christ continues His ministry through the Holy Spirit. Something has already happened, and unlike other faiths where the teaching is the thing, Jesus quite clearly said, "I am the way." He's the firstborn as proof that God is active as creator in new creation, in new hearts melted and mended and able to love can be created now no matter how long you've been dead to the possibility of feeling love and compassion again. Resurrection. That event dramatically changed everything. It changed everything.

The disciples even changed the day of worship from the Jewish Sabbath to the Lord's Day, Sunday. That is why we worship today because Sunday was the day in which they celebrated the Passover meal, which took on new meaning in Christ's Resurrection. It became known as the Lord's Day, and became the new day of worship for the Christians. It changed everything!

The magic and the marvel of life itself can be recreated in you and felt and lived and loved again with God and with others because Jesus has shown us that death and sin and judgment and spin cannot hold us, so don't wait for the eternal. Take the new life now, and let this Easter be an Easter of rebirth and renewal. He is risen. He is risen, and He has become the life and the truth and the way to God. We need not wait. Let us take that way today and always. Amen.