

Resurrection Power

“Christ is risen ... He is risen indeed!” It’s a beautiful day in Bakersfield, CA ... not just because we are privileged to gaze at the greenery and blooming trees and flowers, outlined by a beautiful snow-capped mountain background. It’s a beautiful day here, and wherever you are, because Christ has risen from death and His life-giving power reaches to the ends of the earth. Our social isolation due to the COVID virus, has put a crimp in our routines and relations. But God is not isolated from us! And if we must be apart on Easter Sunday, we can still be together in the resurrected life we have in Christ Jesus.

The Cross: Gateway to Life

Easter is the culmination of God’s program for redemption. Ever since humanity’s fall into the brokenness of sin, God has been at work to bring us back to His original plan of goodness, wholeness, and holiness.

We see all the tragedy, destruction, war, dishonesty, greed, manipulation, and just downright evil that runs through human relations in this world, and our spirits rebel at the thought that all this pain and tragedy must be the norm. Yet, that’s the truth ... not because of God but because of sin. Ever since Adam and Eve fell into temptation and believed Satan’s lie that they could be as God himself, the human race has been on a path of arrogance and destruction that can only lead to death. The original, personal relationship they had with their Creator was broken beyond repair ... except that God repair it.

Our Heavenly Father sees all the pain, tragedy, and evil in our world as abnormal and doesn’t accept it as the way it must be. So, God took the initiative to institute a “new norm” for our broken world. God’s answer to a broken world was the Cross of Christ. There God’s unflinching judgment on sin was at the same time a grand triumph over it. All the sinfulness of all humanity was nailed to the Cross with Jesus and died there with Him.

This cosmic collision broke the power of sin in this world and set a new norm for humanity restored to communion with God. From that point onward, in and through Jesus, humans could live a new life of righteousness, no longer in the death grip of Satan. He turned around the whole of the human race put it back on the path toward right relationship with God. As it says, *He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed. 1 Peter 2:24. Because of this, Redemption has been made the basis for human life – He made it possible for every man, woman, and child to get into right relationship with God.*

The Last Enemy

When Jesus cried from the Cross “It is finished,” it was because He knew He had faithfully fulfilled every task the Father had asked of Him in order for the gift of salvation to be offered to all humankind. Yet there was still one last thing needing completion. One last enemy had to be defeated, otherwise everything that Jesus had accomplished up to this point would be wasted.

That one enemy remaining was death itself. If God could not demonstrate His power over the grave, then all His previous saving work would be for naught. It would be like curing the disease but in the process the patient died. [Great he died disease free, but he’s still dead!] Jesus lay dead in the tomb after submitting to the hell of the Cross. He was as dead as any other person who has ever died.

***But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him, Acts 2:24.* When He rose, He rose physically, audibly, and was recognized by others. Nevertheless, it was a new life, one that had not been lived before, and one to which we too will rise. One day we shall have a body like His glorious body, but we can know now, even today, the power of His resurrection and walk in newness of life. The mighty power of God that raised Jesus to new life will raise us also, because He has defeated death.**

We are drowned in the waters of our baptism, buried with Christ into his death. There we died to sin. And as we rose from those waters, we stepped into Christ’s new life. St. Paul wrote to the Romans, *If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness*, Romans 8:10. When we receive Him and His grace, Christ’s resurrection life is in us already.

A Whole New You

That resurrection power is available to us today. You don’t have to be dragged down by all the misfortunes that life throws at you and your family; all those deadening thoughts and relationships that drag you into a rut or worse into depression and despair. You don’t have to be locked in slavery to addictions or bad behaviors, including our overall addiction to sin. Sooner or later such things only wear you down ... to death.

Some people talk about “a new lease on life” after going through a life-threatening challenge. (Cancer or other serious illness, a harrowing accident or attack, escaping the jaws of death). They often come out with a greater appreciation for the value of each day.

Last week we recalled how Jesus came for His dear friend Lazarus, who had died of illness. Jesus prayed to our Heavenly Father and Lazarus was raised from the tomb. He literally got a new lease on life. He, of all people, would know what a resurrected life was in practice! How differently did he consider all

his days thereafter? How about you? Friends, we are Easter people. That same power of God who raised Lazarus and raised Christ is given to us. Through Christ's death and resurrection we have escaped the jaws of death that a sin-shackled life leads to. He gave each and every one of us a new lease on life.

When Lazarus stepped from the tomb, Jesus ordered someone to remove the strips of grave clothes binding him. He was alive again but restricted by the wrappings of death still clinging to him. Maybe we could say the same about ourselves. The old life, the one that was heading toward death, still clings to us. It continually tries to drag us back into the grave; wanting to pull us back into the darkness of this world's old reality. But we have a new identity: no longer captives of sin we have become proteges of Christ.

Don't ever confuse your orientation in life with your identity. Your orientation may be toward selfish, sinful behavior, but your identity is that of a new creation in Christ, adopted into God's own family, cleansed from past sin, empowered to resist temptation, destined for a life of glory in God's holy presence. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in you who believe, trusting Him to break the shackles of sin in your life. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 2 Corinthians 5:17.*

No matter how lousy a day I'm having, I can still say, "I'm on the winning team."

Former baseball manager for the New York Yankees, Yogi Berra, once said, "In theory there is no difference between theory and practice. In practice there is." If he hadn't lived some time ago, you'd think Yogi Berra was commenting on our life these days dealing with the Corona virus. It's one thing to know that germs are out there all the time and we should wash our hands. It's quite another to practice washing our hands multiple times a day, for a full 20 seconds, no less. And now they're recommending we wear masks in public. [Well, with a face like mine I'm probably doing people a favor by wearing a mask.]

This virus pandemic is causing disruption around the whole world. We hear from relatives and friends in faraway places who are under strict "stay at home" orders. With this threat still looming over us, I hope our perception of life has taken on a new poignancy. I hope we recognize – not just in theory, but in practice – that God's gift of life is dearly precious. He wants none to perish but all to turn to Him and have true life (2 Peter 3:9).

Just remember, we're Easter people. We know that Jesus is the resurrection and the life! In Him we have a new identity.

Each new day let us lay aside every weight and sin that clings to us. Each new morning let us step again from the tomb of a dying life into the resurrected life with Jesus. Freed from the weight of sin let us walk with a new lease on

life. May the reality of our Lord's resurrection and life fill you, body, mind, and soul!

And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of His Spirit who lives in you, Romans 8:11.