

## Love Can ... Triumph

***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”*** John 3:16. That’s really what Easter is saying to us. God cared enough about His creation – that is us – that He didn’t leave us just to founder in our own brokenness, which brings chaos into our lives. What’s broken in your life? Are there some areas of your life, or do you have some relationships that are broken? If your relationships, your life habits, your choices, or the choices of others, or just plain bad luck, leave you feeling your life is out of control, or isn’t as good as it could be, then I have good news for you today. And even if you feel like you’ve got it all together, there’s still a word for you today, for you do not know what tomorrow brings.

We all know, or will soon know, that life is hard ... though we all wish or think it should be easy. Ever since the dawn of time life for humans has been hard. Ever since humans turned away from their Creator to trust in themselves alone to make life what it cannot be without God, life has been hard. That is why brokenness and pain and hardship are endemic to life. And what awaits us at the end? When humans choose to turn from the One who said, *“Let there be light,”* they find themselves facing the darkness, an unending darkness.

### Death Defeated

But there is an alternative to this sad picture of human life. The resurrection tells a different story. With Jesus’ resurrection, not only are His life and teachings vindicated, but death is soundly defeated. On the cross Jesus took into himself all the bad stuff that all of humanity can gather and let it all die with him. So that bad stuff – including our own bad choices – the chaos that always threatens to overwhelm order, all of which has its roots in turning away from God ... all that was defeated in it’s bid to control our lives. That’s why we repeat these words: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life,”* John 3:16.

Author C. S. Lewis says that in Jesus’ resurrection, “He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death.” (C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*). The darkness and loneliness of death, including the little death that we all experience on a regular basis in every instance of broken relationships, in every broken promise, broken hope, misdeed, and lie ... all the things that leave emotional and spiritual scars

and even Death with a capital “D” that awaits us in the grave ... all of that is defeated by Christ’s resurrection.

## **Resurrection Doubt**

Oh sure, there are those who doubt the resurrection ... even Jesus’ own disciples doubted, at first. And yes, I’ve heard all the quips about Easter this year being on “April Fool’s” day. What comes to my mind is Psalm 14:1: *“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”*

But why is it so difficult to believe God can raise the dead? Life itself is a miracle, really. The whole of creation and the known universe is a wonder to behold! When you consider the complexity of just our human bodies, it is a mind-boggling miracle how it all functions in harmony! That’s why we notice, so painfully, when something isn’t working right.

God never asks us to start from the year 2018 and reason backwards to the empty tomb. It never works to start with your loved ones and then try to figure out how God can raise them. The question is unanswerable. Instead God tells us to start at the empty tomb, with what we know - that Jesus rose from the dead - and then reason to what we don’t know - exactly how he will raise the dead in Christ. We can’t figure out how God will raise us, but we trust that what he did for Jesus he will also do for those who follow Jesus in faith.

Jesus was bodily raised from death – the tomb was empty, no body, no bones ever found (even to this day). The Bible makes it quite clear that He rose, audibly and physically. The major Christian creeds state, “I believe in the resurrection of the body;” but how many Christians tend to spiritualize the resurrection of the dead, effectively denying it? They don’t reject it as a doctrine, but they deny its essential meaning: a permanent return to a physical existence in a physical universe. But this is self-contradictory. A non-physical resurrection is like a sunless sunrise. There’s no such thing. Resurrection *means* that we will have bodies. If we didn’t have bodies, we wouldn’t be resurrected!

The biblical doctrine of the resurrection of the dead begins with the human body but extends far beyond it. R. A. Torrey writes, “We will not be disembodied spirits in the world to come, but redeemed spirits, in redeemed bodies, in a redeemed universe.” (R. A. Torrey, *Heaven or Hell* (New Kensington, Pa.: Whitaker House, 1985), 68-69). If we don’t get it right on the resurrection of the body, we’ll get nothing else right.

Whether someone is alive or dead makes all the difference in the world. That’s the most important question we can ask about Jesus: is He alive or is He dead? If He is dead then the memory of his life, his words and his deeds, may still influence and guide us. But his words and actions are at an end. His life is over. The dead remain dead.

**On the other hand, if he is alive, then everything is radically different. If he is alive he can show up at your doorstep, surprise, confront, encourage, and instruct you. There is really no equivocating on this point, he's either alive or he's not. New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson says it this way: "There is no middle ground between dead and alive. If Jesus is dead, then his story is completed. If he is alive, then his story continues" (Luke Timothy Johnson, *Living Jesus*).**

## **New Creation**

**That God could raise the dead was not a novel idea for the first Christians – like many of the Jews they believed that God would raise the dead on the Last Day, at the end of history. The stunning thing about Jesus' resurrection was that, what was believed to happen in the future had happened now. His resurrection was the first of its kind "...the beginning of the New Creation: a new chapter in cosmic history has opened" (C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*). His resurrection signals to us the beginning of a new creation, giving us a chance to be remade in His image. Hope came in person at Easter and the future stepped into the present.**

**A recent survey (2016 Rasmussen) shows that almost three-quarters of Americans believe in the resurrection. But if you ask them why it matters not many could give an answer that has much to do with the teaching of the Bible or the Christian faith. Most Americans have a general (if vague) belief in some kind of life after death – some kind of immortality of the soul notion – not much different from many other cultures before us.**

**But the New Testament speaks of Christ's rising from the dead as the first event of its kind in all of the history of the universe. The new heavens and the new earth, God's new creation, began with the resurrection of Jesus. The promises of the prophets were fulfilled: a new covenant with God's people (Jeremiah 31), sins forgiven and death no more (Ezekiel 36), and the transformation of all creation (Isaiah 60-66). The resurrection of Jesus was not just one miracle (though that would be astounding enough), rather, it was the decisive beginning of the general resurrection and God's final redemption of all things.**

**The old creation (Adam and Eve), human nature, we know is flawed and fatal. The new creation, heralded in Christ's resurrection, brings into being all that God originally intended. God's love for us triumphed over the brokenness and evil that emanates from the old nature. God's love can begin now to triumph in your life over all your broken relationships, weaknesses, faults, and sin. As you cling to Christ you attach yourself to a better future, than if you keep hanging on to your old nature. That is what St. Paul is talking about when he writes: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!* 2 Corinthians 5:17.**

Those who place their faith in Christ have taken the first step toward their own renewal and rebirth. As long as you are truly trusting in Christ you are becoming a new creation. That means that the old nature with its slavery to passions, desires, anger, addictions, envy, malice, selfishness and all the destructive activities that characterize it, is being replaced, with the new nature modeled after the new man, Christ Jesus. You see, Christianity isn't about how to be spiritual, achieve your goals or have your best life now. Christianity is about power. Power to obey God. Power to change. Power to love those who are messed up. Power to get back up after being pummeled by wave after wave of affliction. We don't have to be conformed to the pattern of this world - be like everybody else - because we are now patterned after the One who triumphed over sin and death.

### **Ultimate Triumph**

A couple of weeks ago as I was greeting Preschool parents and children coming into school, one of the dads asked me, "What do you do or how do you pray when you're having a bad day." I replied to him that I pray, "Lord I'm not feeling good or confident right now, so be with me today, help me cope with the challenges and frustrations that I face. Remind me again that you have it all under control." And I can pray that way because I know Jesus rose from the dead, He's alive and present in my life. I also said to this dad that whenever people ask me how I'm doing, I often say, "Not having a great day, but I'm on the winning team!" I say that because I know that on Jesus' team we win over any and all the chaos that might creep into our day and our lives and threaten to undo us. I have this assurance: *"They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers,"* Revelation 17:14.

At the resurrection of Jesus, Love triumphed over all the catastrophes and evil arising from the old and fallen creation. A new creation has begun. His resurrection is more than a promise of a heavenly hereafter. It is the encouragement not only to live godly lives so we can attain our personal heavenly reward in the afterlife. It is the impetus to be engaged in preparing ourselves, and our community, and our world for the future that is already in the making. Jesus' resurrection is the first sign of the New Creation and you have this choice: you can continue to walk toward the old creation - filled with chaos, decay and death - or you can walk toward the new creation - filled with hope and life and the goodness of God. What direction are you headed today?

Because God raised Jesus from the dead after the catastrophe of the cross, we can be sure that God is now in the process of overcoming all catastrophes. The resurrection is proof that no matter how bad things get, God so loves us he won't let us be lost. His care for us is everlasting. *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or*

***famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” Romans 8:35, 37.***

***Friends “... I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” Romans 8:38-39. I’ll stake my life on it.***

**Love can triumph. God has proved it so. God wins and we will win with Him. Christ is risen!**