

“All Things New” I Corinthians 15:3-8, 12-14, 17-20, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Revelation 21:3-5  
 First Presbyterian Church; Jamie White  
 Sunday, March 31, 2024 \*Easter Sunday

Friends, here the Word of the Lord from 1 Corinthians 15:

**“For I handed onto you, as of first importance, what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, he appeared to me... Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain, and your faith has been in vain. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those who also have died in Christ have perished. If, for this life only, we have hoped in Christ, we are, of all people, most to be pitied. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died!” -I Cor 15:3-8, 12-14, 17-20**

And from 2 Corinthians 5:17: **“So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” -2 Cor 5:17**

And finally, from Revelation 21:3-5: **“I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: “Look! The residence of God is among human beings. He will live among them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will not exist anymore—or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the former things have ceased to exist.” And the one seated on the throne said: “Look! I am making all things new!” -Revelation 21:3-5** This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Today is the day. Today, we proclaim, “He is Risen!” We sing, “Christ the Lord is Risen Today” with all the ‘alleluias.’ Christ has been raised from the dead. All the brokenness in this world can and will be redeemed. And in Christ, we get to be a new creation, our old life is gone, and the new has come! This joy of Easter, it fills the room today—charging it with a certain knowledge—that if God can raise Christ from the grave, then sure enough, God can and will change this world and each of us too.

So, do you feel different? Do you feel transformed? Do you have this sense, that this year, the world will be different... this year, I will be different? This is the year, we will live

as if there is no more crying, no more mourning, no more pain. Say goodbye to poverty, to hateful political rivalry, to gun violence and war... say goodbye to death. Can things really change?

These are questions that Christians have wrestled with from the beginning. And that's because, even when we find ourselves celebrating Christ's resurrection and embracing our own experiences of becoming "a new creation," sometimes we can't help but look around at the world—and even look at ourselves in the mirror—and wonder if everything really has changed. I mean, we come today in faith, trying our best to believe that God really did raise Jesus from the dead and therefore, all the powers of evil and death in our world can be overturned. And we remember with Paul, that if Jesus hasn't actually been raised from the dead, well then, this whole faith-thing is nothing but empty optimism. If Jesus isn't alive, well then, the cross didn't mean anything at all, and we can scrap the last 6 weeks we've spent this Lent learning about atonement. If the resurrection didn't happen, the whole thing's all a sham.

But thankfully friends, we know better, because we've had experiences of resurrection ourselves. Our own personal encounters with Christ are what assure us of his resurrection. And that's how it's always been. Remember that no one actually saw Jesus rise from the dead. Think about it... no one was inside the tomb to witness him come back to life. No, the "*proof*" we have of the resurrection all comes down to the resurrected Christ appearing to his friends alive and well, after they'd all just watched him die a few days before. And just like us, none of them had an easy time believing it either. They didn't understand what they were seeing because dead people don't just come back to life.

Even more, the biblical narrative on these appearances is really diverse. In some accounts, Jesus has scars that you can touch and sits down to eat a meal. In others he can walk through walls and disappear. Sometimes his friends recognize him immediately and then other times, he's initially unrecognizable to the people who know him best. It's wild. Jesus shows up resurrected in so many different ways.

But the reason those early disciples knew it was true—even if they couldn't fully comprehend it—is the same reason we know it's true... Because we've experienced the risen Christ. Jesus has shown up for us too. God has intervened in our lives. We might not always be able to explain it, all of us have really different experiences of God showing up for us, and we'll never be able to prove it... but still, we're sitting here today because God

has transformed us in some way, we've somehow become a new creation ourselves and so we know he's alive.

That passage we just read, from the end of the book of Revelation, talks about God's new creation, about God's final and complete defeat of death. A world that will one day be completely free of sin, of pain, of mourning. There will be no more tears. It's this final, fully realized kingdom we long for and pray for each week when we say, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." But friends, I would remind you, resurrection is not simply about life after we die or about escaping this world for heaven. Theologian Shirley Guthrie reminds us, **"The resurrection happened in *this* world. For Jesus himself and for us it means the renewal of human life, not escape from it. The resurrection, in other words, does not have to do only with the significance of Jesus *for us* after we die and leave this world. It has to do also with our lives here and now."**

And so, God's new creation comes about in the long, hard-fought heartbreak and life-changing work of transformation in THIS world. Our God is not just at work when things feel good and joyful and alive... God is also at work in all the pain, all the suffering, and even in death; promising, **"look, I'm making all things new."** So, we are not just Easter people. We are also the people who know Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. We know that God can use betrayal, sleeping disciples, grief and doubt, and even an instrument of death to bring about God's new creation.

So, we are invited to join Christ as his disciples in making all things new, of bearing witness to the resurrection, of making THIS world a different place, a place that looks a whole lot more like heaven. So, how do we show that Christ is alive, that death has been conquered? Every single time we live and love like Jesus.

We show that Jesus is alive, every time we serve those in need. If you've been paying attention, you know that homelessness, food insecurity, and poverty have become quite severe in Salt Lake. These are massive, systemic problems. They can feel insurmountable, and we probably won't live long enough to see them fully solved. But that doesn't stop us from trying. Each time you look lovingly into the eyes of someone struggling with addiction or mental illness and choose to see their belovedness instead of their brokenness, you are declaring that life conquers over death. Each time that you all gather to make sandwiches downstairs, or collect food and clothing for Pamela's Closet, or serve meals at St. Vinny's, or distribute toiletries at one of the tent camps, you declare the truth of the resurrection by *doing* what you can to make all things new.

Resurrection can happen in our families too. Maybe you were raised in a family that used anger and shame as emotional currency... or in a family that never said “I love you” or was even abusive. But even though that’s all you ever saw modeled and is all you really know to do, you’ve decided to do it differently with your kids. You’ve likely had to get some help to do this, to see a counselor, to learn some new relational skills, to do your own healing. But you’ve chosen to interrupt those generational cycles of pain and death with new life. Friends, that is the work of resurrection. That is a whole family system that will get to experience life as a new creation.

Making all things new, it’s happening all around us, all the time. As the poet Wendell Berry so beautifully puts it, we can choose to ‘practice resurrection’ in everything we do. We can practice resurrection by speaking up at work when something unethical happens. We practice resurrection, when after being hurt deeply by a friend, we choose to offer forgiveness and repair the relationship. We can practice resurrection by giving our money to projects that matter. We practice resurrection by planting gardens, by recycling, by intentionally caring for our incredible planet. We can practice resurrection in our high school, by choosing to be kind to the kid that everyone else ignores, maybe because of the way they look, or because they identify differently than most.

That’s just what my friend Zoe decided to do. Life had always come easy to Zoe... she was a confident, friendly, happy teenager. But after her own encounter with the risen Christ, she realized she’d mostly been pretty preoccupied with herself; her own wants and needs. She decided to follow Jesus’ example and began looking out for those at the margins at her school. She noticed that there was a boy who would sit out in the hallway at lunch, eating and reading all alone. One day, Zoe asked God for strength, and went over to meet him, asking about his interests, favorite classes, what he liked to read. He told her he didn’t have many friends. They spent lunch together that day, and the next, and the next. Pretty soon, more of Zoe’s friends joined them in the hall and after a couple weeks this boy had begun to make a couple close friends because of this. Months later he told Zoe that before she’d sat down with him in the hall that day, he’d been planning to take his own life. But that because Zoe chose to see him and be kind, he had hope again that is wouldn’t always be so hard. Friends, if that’s not resurrection from the dead, I don’t know what is.

Now I do want to acknowledge that sometimes, practicing resurrection doesn’t always look the way we expect it to. Sometimes we won’t get to see how it all turns out.

Even more, sometimes resurrection happens really differently than we hoped. This last week our dear Bill Nixon died, after several years of a painful decline with Alzheimer's. His incredible wife Jan, and their adult children, stood by him to the end... even though he had long stopped showing up as the man and father and doctor they'd known him to be. They just kept loving him, no matter what. Bill didn't get better in this life, in fact, late last week his body just simply gave up. The transformation into God's new creation doesn't always look like what we think it should. Sometimes it looks like God standing at Bill's bedside saying, "Come home now, I love you, I have always loved you. Come experience resurrection with me in heaven."

I have been honored to stand with many of you at in moments of heartbreak and crisis... in coffee shops, and in hospital rooms, and at death's grave. And like you, I have stood face-to-face with my own deep suffering and grief. But no matter how dark it might feel out there for you today, I stand here to remind you that God is still bringing dead things back to life. God has ultimately conquered the power of sin and promises to make ALL things new. So, we say in the face of death itself the same alleluias we sing every Easter. Even when it's hard... especially when it's hard, we sing our song— alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. I know it's tough to proclaim the transformation of Easter in the face of Good Friday's grave. But what we know deep in our bones, what we declare Sunday after Sunday, Easter after Easter, is that we don't do this on our own.

We know that it is God who is doing the transforming. God is the one who raised Jesus from the dead. God is the one we can trust to be at work bringing new life in us. What does this transformation look like for you today? What needs to be different for you or within you? What are you waiting for God to transform? Is it a diagnosis? A relationship that needs to find a new path? Is it a new stage of life, that feels scary and overwhelming? Is it your kid taking your heart to deep, terrifying places? Where is it that God needs to step in and provide a new creation for you? Where is the Good Friday looking for Easter Sunday?

The work that is ours to do this Easter season is to point out the places where God is creating new life. We get to bear witness to the ways that God is transforming each of us and this world into new creations. God sends us out to tell this Good News: that Jesus Christ is risen and our whole world has changed because of that. Hope does indeed abound. God can and does transform even the darkest places of this world into God's new

creation. So, in case you missed it before, Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.