



AFTER EASTER

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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, April 24, 2022

On the annual calendar of the Christian Church, these last two Sundays shine the brightest, for they represent the apex of Christ's ministry while on the earth, such that the intervening week has been called "Holy Week."

More text in the Gospel accounts has been devoted to that 7-day period than any other in the story of Jesus, an indication of its significance to the salvation plan of God. Here's what I mean:

Matthew 21-28 (8 chapters; 384 verses)

Mark 11-16 (6 chapters; 250 verses)

Luke 19-24 (6 chapters; 282 verses)

John 12-21 (9 chapters; 299 verses)

That's a total of 29 chapters (more than any one of the Gospel accounts!), and 1215 verses!

Palm Sunday

Let's reflect for a few moments on Palm Sunday (so called because of the branches people waved in Jesus' honor)...

Christ's triumphal entry was a fulfillment of prophecy spoken of in Zechariah 9:9, "*See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*".

Zechariah's prophecy was fulfilled in detail, and it was indeed a time of rejoicing, as His followers welcomed their King. Unfortunately, the celebration was not to last. The crowds looked for a Messiah who would rescue them politically and free them nationally, but Jesus had come to save them spiritually.

Some of Jesus' most challenging teachings were given in the courtyard of Jerusalem's Temple during that final week, distancing Him from the religious establishment and from many of those who had followed him previously.

With Jesus, it was always “first things first,” and mankind’s primary need—then and now—is spiritual, not political, cultural, or national salvation.

We still battle daily with political, cultural, and moral standards that depart from the example and teachings of Christ. Yet, our primary need remains spiritual, and when that need is met the other issues of life begin to fall into place.

Good Friday

Palm Sunday led to Jesus’ arrest and trial, His sentencing and execution—Good Friday. We call it “good” as we reflect on all that Jesus accomplished for us by His surrender and sacrifice. I think His followers then would rather have dubbed it BLACK Friday, for the sorrow and consternation it brought them.

When Jesus told His first disciples, “*Take up your cross and follow Me,*” He had in mind His own surrender to death (as well as theirs and ours), for He was confident of what would follow: a resurrection. He trusted His Father explicitly and thoroughly.

And so, we are all invited to join Him in that confidence, to the very end, even such an end as His, mindful of the fact that the crucifixion of Friday will become the resurrection of Sunday in our lives, too.

Resurrection Sunday

Jesus identified Himself as “*the Resurrection and the Life.*” (John 11:25)

Jesus’ resurrection reveals to us life *from* death—how lifeless material can be imbued with life again, when God breathes upon it.

His resurrection also reveals life *after* death—more than resuscitation—a brand new quality of life, as if born again. The apostles called it “newness of life.” God calls it “everlasting life.”

And when a person like you or me is born again, because we have died to self-determination and surrendered ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, it is also a death to be replaced, or swallowed up, by this newness of life.

It comes to us suddenly, and it grows in us gradually, but persistently, until one day, we shall be seen for who we are: the children of Almighty God. (Do not despair that others, even your own family, do not recognize in you this new life; keep pursuing it for yourself.)

And so, we have been instructed in the pages of Scripture:

“Do not present your members to sin as instruments to be used for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead and your members to God as instruments to be used for righteousness. For sin will have no mastery over you, because you are not under law but under grace.” (Romans 6:13-14)

This is the impact that Jesus’ resurrection is to have in our lives—life *from* death AND life *after* death. We who have entrusted ourselves to Him have already begun to live the life of resurrection, which was released by the resurrection of Jesus.

Consider It So

In order to demonstrate the resurrection life in ways that others can see, you must be willing to consider yourself dead, indeed, to sin. Not just disapproving of it or against it, but DEAD to it.

This is a mental effort, an exercise of your mind—considering. It is how you think about the sin in your past and the sinful impulses in your present.

Too many of us have not yet shed the sins of our past, but drag them around with us, like an overloaded suitcase that we cannot set down, or a ball and chain to which we are confined.

We acknowledge intellectually that Jesus has bought forgiveness for us, but we continue to punish ourselves emotionally by reviewing our guilt and reliving our shame. In such a case, we have not yet actually RECEIVED God’s forgiveness. We *consider* it too good to be true of us.

Based on the promise of God and the finished work of Jesus, our forgiveness is a FACT. But if we fail to embrace it, consider it so, and celebrate it repeatedly, that fact will have little IMPACT in our lives.

This is what we may call the “partnership of faith”—Christ’s work PLUS my trust.

Ongoing Trust

His work was not “one and done.” His entire life was aimed in a single direction: our salvation and return to life with God. He taught about it continually. He demonstrated it repeatedly in His own choices and behaviors. He bought it with His blood, sweat, and tears; and finally, with His very life. Then He rose from the dead, ascended back to the Father’s throne in Heaven, and continues to intercede for us there—a man in Heaven, representing and advocating for mankind on Earth.

And our trust is not “one and done” either. Trusting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is not an event. Although we may remember the day, or even the moment it first began, we are called

up to trust Him every day, again and again and again. You will need to trust Him— intently and actively—for the rest of your life.

We will trust Him for what He did for us on the cross, for what His sacrifice bought and accomplished.

We will trust Him for His intercessions on our behalf—to fend off the evil one and provide all that we will need.

We will trust Him to give us victory in all that He calls us to do in His name, whether in our homes, in our jobs, in our church and community, and in the wide world around us.

We will trust Him, not only for this life, but also for the life that is still to come. As we pray: “Your Kingdom come” AND “Your will be done in the Earth, as it is in Heaven.”

This will require everyday consideration—intentional and active thought, intercepting our memories and feelings and desires, and taking them captive to obey Jesus Christ.

Recall Notice

So many temptations, and their associated sins, are stirred by our memories of the past— emotional stirrings, sights, fragrances, sounds, words. We remember first, then we are tempted. And if we embrace the temptation, it leads us to sin.

It’s really important to recognize this progression, because, if we do, then we’ll have opportunity to interrupt its progress.

The first stage is memory. You can remember many things from your past—some desirable, and some painful. You can recall things at will (at least sometimes... Where did I leave my keys?), but the majority of memories arise, unsolicited—prompted, as I said, by present sights, sounds, fragrances, feelings, interactions, and such. Just, all of a sudden, there it is!

If it’s a joyful memory, I may savor and revel in it. No harm there, unless it’s distracting my attention from something necessary, like the pancake I’m overcooking!

If it’s a confusing memory, for which I lack understanding as to its meaning or what my response should be, it may trigger questions. These could lead to prayer (providing comfort and, perhaps, resolution), or it could provoke disbelief (leading me toward sin).

If it’s a painful memory, I may savor that as well, morbidly reliving the pain and some associated thoughts of injustice and vengeance. Resentment is a two-part word that means to re-

feel the pain of an offense or violation. It revives the same hurt feelings and leads toward a bitter and cynical disposition (turning my pain into sin).

Memories in themselves are morally neutral—they're just memories: stored snapshots or video clips from our past. But they frequently give way to temptation, which can lead to sin.

While you cannot (and should not) prevent them (that would be to live in denial of your past), you should be wary of where they might lead you, and not indiscriminately give up the reins (abandoning yourself to wherever the memories may take you).

The thoughts are yours—yours to assess, and yours to control. Like a large horse beneath you, they may exert a mind of their own, but you're in charge (Jesus has given you that authority)—exercise it (don't fear or give up hope).

Weapons of War

"The weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds. We tear down arguments and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against [what we know to be true] of God, and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

If you let your memories take you where they may, and you continue to reflect upon them uncritically—mentally reliving those charged moments of your history—the enticement to sin will intensify. Be careful! You can easily slip past the point of recovery.

Instead the Bible advises these responses:

- Consider yourself dead... unmoved (except as the Holy Spirit leads you)
- Put them to death... cut them off, refuse to entertain them (be done with them)
- Cast them down... throw them out, trample them underfoot (unwelcome guests)
- Take them captive... put them in chains, make them serve you (God's purposes in your life)

This is spiritual warfare—a major part of living the resurrection life of the Spirit.

And, remember, resurrection is not something you can do for yourself. It *requires* an external force. Jesus was raised by the Father, through the Spirit of Holiness. It must be the same for you.

Do not presume you can do what is necessary on your own, but lean on the Lord, by prayer and thanksgiving, to access His authority for your circumstances, whether internal or external.

True Christianity is not just putting on Christian religiousness, but putting on Christ. Submitting to His leadership, to His power, to His presence. Letting Him live in you, motivate you, instruct you, command you. And, as a result, letting His life show through you.

“Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and the one who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26)

Welcome to the powerful partnership of resurrection life!