

From the Pastor's Desk:
A Sermon for Sunday, April 5, 2026
Resurrection Sunday -
"The Gracious Mercy of God"

What are we here for today? What are you expecting? What are we hoping to see, hear, and/or feel? We all woke up – maybe even a little earlier than normal – and we all got ready – maybe pulling out the nicer outfit; we must have a reason, right? We called in a brass quintet who the choir rehearsed with on Thursday as well as, again, this morning because we want to get this right. This is important. But why is it important?

Now, I want to be clear, it's okay if you don't have answers to all those questions or full answers to any of them. A lot of time in life, we show up to places out of obligation, conviction, even just habit. Many times, we're just following our instincts: We know this is important even if we can't say why. We feel it in our bones, even if our minds and tongues fail us. We've learned, over the years, to trust the yearning in our souls – to tend thoughtfully to those yearnings – and so maybe that's why we're here.

Well, the simple answer is that we're here to remember and celebrate yet again a mind-blowing, reality-altering event in Jesus' resurrection from the dead. We all know someone who has died – the older you get, the more the scale starts to tip toward "dead people I know" rather than "my living friends" – but unless one of y'all have been hiding a really amazing story, no one knows someone who was dead for three days and then came back. That's today. That's what brings us here.

And I like how Matthew's gospel really leans into the dramatics of this mind-blowing, reality-altering event of the resurrection, for if any moment ever warranted dramatics, we've just alighted upon it! We've got earthquakes and fainting guards; we've got angelic visitation and a brief, surprise cameo from the risen Lord Himself. And this service, in its own way, seeks to re-create some sense of the origin story for this day – the organ's rumble and the brass's blast give us a share of the Marys' experiences on this first resurrection Sunday.

And I love all of this – I can and have and will continue to get lost in the moment of it all – but in the back of my mind is this niggling little thought: What is this going to mean tomorrow? Heck, what is this going to mean in a couple of hours after I've shed this monkey suit and I'm just shuffling around my house in my comfy shorts, while still wearing my dress socks? (Yeah, it's a real sight: Me in shorts, black dress socks, and my slippers... Sorry folks, I'm taken!). But really, what is all this fanfare – literal and figurative – going to mean when you realize you didn't buy enough milk at the store and you need to run back out real quick? Are you going to talk about yourself like, "He is forgetful. He is forgetful, indeed."

I find it significant that mere moments after their reunion – the unlikeliest reunion in the history of the world because, again, who could've

reasonably expected Jesus to rise from the dead after three days? – I find it significant that no sooner has Jesus enveloped a couple of His followers in His embrace than He then sends them to Galilee. That is, to be clear, *NOT* a short walk away. It's roughly 200 kilometers, or five marathons away. It could take up to a week of steady travel to make that trip. This little instruction – innocuous in the midst of all that high drama – already means that the resurrection is not only something we dwell in, but live out of.

Maybe I began today's sermon wrong. Maybe the question isn't "What are we here for today?" but is, instead, "Where will this day take us?" And just judging by everyone's footwear this morning, I don't think "on a week-long walk" was on anyone's radar. Good News: With rare exception, the resurrection probably isn't going to put you on an unanticipated week-long journey, but it is going to demand a response.

I contend that our response begins in our hearts and in our heads. I believe that the journey we're put on in light of the resurrection of Jesus – the journey that extends long after the last echo of organ and brass has faded – is the radical and rapid expansion of what we believe is possible – even probable – now that Jesus has been raised from the dead.

I've tried my best not to make a big deal out of my PhD in my time here because, well, in a university town a PhD sort of feels a dime, a dozen, right? But, today, I need to note that I'm a trained ethicist, meaning I've delved deep into a variety of ethical systems and approaches, learning their nuances, their histories, where they excel and where they falter. And I can confidently say that not all ethics are equal. Some have very limited uses, while others are more expansive, often allowing for new, exciting insights on how to live rightly in the world. But what all ethics share in common is a sense of what is possible. Any ethic that recommends a course of action that is not feasible is not an ethic; it is a fiction, a fantasy.

This is where the resurrection is so important. For if the joyful surprise of one resurrection from over 2,000 years ago is still enough to draw us together today, then it must be the sort of event that expands for us what is possible. And if our understanding of what is possible is expanded, then our ethics – which, again, is always founded upon the presumption of what is possible – our ethics can expand too.

I have this working theory that no one understood Jesus' pre-death and resurrection teachings – indeed, I'll go further and say that no one *could* understand Jesus' pre-death and resurrection teachings. The idea, for example, that a son could look at his father, request his inheritance from his still very much alive father, and then spend it all on sex, drugs, and rock and roll – the idea that

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this son could return to the father and be embraced and re-adopted back into the family... well, that's some post-resurrection stuff. The idea that when we care for the thirsty, hungry, naked, unhoused, sick, and imprisoned that we're caring for Jesus Himself... well, that's some post-resurrection stuff. The idea that a person can slap you on your left cheek and that it makes sense to then point to your right cheek and say, "Now this one"... well, that's some post-resurrection stuff. All of these lessons and more mark Jesus' pre-death and resurrection teachings, but none of them seemed possible... until the resurrection, which is – again – a mind-blowing, reality-altering event.

Part of the challenge is that Jesus was teaching in the midst of an already pretty good ethic – the Torah or the Law. Don't get me wrong, I find an ethic like "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" to be a little wanting today, but I've been too steeped for too long in all these post-resurrection possibilities. Objectively, though, it is a good ethic that can scale up and down rather nicely. At its core, this ethic believes that negative actions *should* result in negative consequences. And isn't a big part of your soul already believing that? Don't you already think the bad guys should get punished?

I suspect a lot of Christians celebrate the resurrection, but live out the Law. Again, the Law isn't bad, but is – instead – less useful than the Rule of Love and the Way of Grace that we receive because of the resurrection. The Law is, as Paul says in Galatians, our "nanny." Nannies hold only a temporary role in the life of a child. If someone is 45 years old and still has a nanny, well... okay. At some point, though, we have to grow up and even the best nanny has no meaningful role left in our lives. The resurrection is our growing up moment.

Because of the resurrection, I believe it is not just optimistic to aim for global peace, it's possible; indeed, it is required. Because of the resurrection, I believe poverty has already been eradicated – that is, that all contemporary poverty is not a result of the limits of a utilitarian ethic but rather is a result of evil that denies the resurrection. Because of the resurrection, I believe no one ever has to go hungry again.

I was reminded recently that public theologian Tony Campolo, who died about 18 months ago, used to do this thing when he spoke at churches. It was an effort to intentionally shock Christians out of their utilitarian mindset or their eye-for-an-eye mindset and, as such, it is shocking.

Campolo would step into the pulpit and say, "I've got three things to tell you: First, every 10 seconds somewhere in the world a child dies from hunger." (Side note: I'm roughly 15 minutes into this sermon, so that's 90 dead kids). Then he'd go on: Second, you don't give a sh... crap (but, uh, he didn't say crap). Third, you're more offended that I said, ahem, "crap" than at 90 kids who died but

didn't need to." Ope! Turns out, Campolo wasn't swearing... he was testifying!

Because of the resurrection, we can be and must be offended by the right things. We have to let the resurrection take centerstage in our hearts and in our minds. We have to build lives around the resurrection, not the Law. Did you know you could do that? Did you know that you can build your life around love and grace more than even law and order... it is an option... it's not just a sentiment.

But it will also be a journey. One worship service – even one with all the trappings like this one – is not enough to dislodge all those lesser ethics that have taken up residency in our souls. It's a good thing that its finally spring because the resurrection reveals we've got a lot of spring cleaning to do inside each of us.

And maybe that's why Jesus said, "See you in Galilee" before hoverboarding away (or whatever He did after the women left His company). Maybe those disciples needed to take a week-long walk to process just what all was possible now that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Not for nothing, Matthew's gospel is often called the most Jewish of the gospels for all the ways Matthew intentionally tries to parallel Jesus and Moses, so it makes sense that just as Israel had to wander the desert for forty years to shake off their slave mentality, now even Jesus' disciples need some time and space to move away from their lesser assumptions about the world and what is possible and to move toward the greatest hope we have: Christ died, Christ rose, Christ will come again.

This is what Paul means when he writes "be transformed by the renewing of the mind." We have to shake off all those lesser ethics. And, to be clear, I call them "lesser," not bad. Because of the resurrection, we are embarrassed in our riches; we can toss out good ethics in favor of better ethics. Forget your sparkling wine; we've got real champagne – that sort of thing.

But how will it all work out? How, precisely, will we feed all the children and stop all the wars now that Jesus has been raised from the grave? Well I can tell you... I don't know. But that doesn't mean the ethic isn't good. It means that it is a journey to discovery. (I also think we can safely assume that we're not just going to meander our way to no more hungry children and global peace, so either we walk toward that goal or we acknowledge we don't care about the 30 *more* children who have died since I first told you that stat).

But what I *do* know is that post-resurrection possibilities have continued to reveal themselves to me throughout my quarter-century of faith in Christ. Even in little ways. Like, I did not know how we would care for a congregant when he was placed in a medically-induced coma a week-and-a-half ago. I didn't have a plan for that and – and this is true –

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that was *not* a class in seminary for me! But here we are. We're doing it. Dar and Corky are taking care of his cats and checking on his apartment. Dick and Judy Martin have interfaced with his landlady. Many of you have visited him and scores of you are praying for him. Because of the resurrection, we can spend time and energy in ways we didn't know we could; our minds are being renewed in real time as we live out these post-resurrection possibilities.

This is why, elsewhere, Paul will write, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." The ethical possibilities opened up to us by the resurrection aren't necessarily going to be known to us from the start – it is still faith that carries us – and typically these possibilities only come to us as we make our own post-resurrection journeys just like those original disciples. Because of this, our experiences in faith are to be surprised again and again at all the things Christ can do through us.

In the end, we each know why we're here. For mental images of the pastor in shorts and black dress socks, clearly. But where are we going? Oh, Lord knows. Sorry, I said that wrong... Where are we going? The Lord knows... and it's worth the journey.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.