

Spiritual Disciplines: Celebration

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Good morning and welcome to our Easter service for Sunday, April 4th, 2021. My name is Kent Dixon. I'm the lead pastor of Braemar Baptist Church here in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Welcome to you this morning. Happy Easter. And I'm so glad you could join us, whether you're joining us live on Facebook right now or later on in the day or in the coming days.

So welcome to you this morning. I'm so glad you're with us. I'm going to be leading us in celebrating communion together a bit later. So gather whatever you have handy, a glass of water or juice, a piece of bread or a cracker or something and have those nearby.

We'll need those later. Well, it is Easter Sunday. You may have started your day today with a special Easter breakfast. Maybe you plan to follow your service today with a special Easter brunch. When we had gathered together for Easter in the past, we had a brunch together as a church before the service. So I long for those days to come back and I believe they will one day.

[1 : 10] So we'll be celebrating Easter together in many different ways once we're in person again. Maybe you have plans to get together with a small group of friends or family as you're able to do that later.

Perhaps even online. Lots of people are doing that. And I hope that each of you have maybe had a chance to have a bit of Easter candy in a basket this morning with that grass that seems to end up everywhere like tinsel does at Christmas time.

But above all those things, today, Easter Sunday, we gather together as followers of Jesus Christ to recognize that he is risen.

The Son of God who came to earth as the man Jesus, who taught and preached, who laughed and cried, who loved and led, was betrayed and crucified.

He died on a cross and he rose again. Jesus is alive. Our Savior has risen.

[2 : 18] Can you celebrate that this morning? This Easter day, this resurrection day, reminds us of that through Jesus, God makes all things new.

Resurrection power is real. And God has given us the same resurrection power to live in freedom from sin and death and to have a life that is fully alive.

Well, it's easy to forget the real reason for this holiday. Let's take a moment to put aside the Easter bunny and egg hunts and baskets filled with goodies.

And remember the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus and his resurrection from the grave. Traditionally, as Christians, we share a greeting on Easter Sunday.

And while we may not be able to hear that response right now, I encourage you to turn to whomever you're with, or even if you're alone, say the words back to me as I say them.

[3 : 24] He is risen. And we traditionally respond with, he is risen indeed. He is risen, my friends.

He is risen indeed. Let's pray. Dear God, thank you that you make all things new. Thank you for the victory and power in your name.

Thank you that you hold the keys over death. That by your might, Jesus was raised from the grave, paving the way for us to have new life with you.

Lord, thank you that you had a plan, that you have a plan, that you made a way. We confess our need for you, fresh, new, again this morning.

We ask that you will renew our hearts, our minds, and our lives for the days ahead. We pray that you will refresh us by your spirit.

[4 : 28] Lord, keep the words of your truth planted firmly within us. Help us to keep focused on what is pure and right. Give us the power to be obedient to your word.

And when the enemy reminds us where we have been, Lord, hissing his lies and attacking our way, we trust that your voice will speak louder and stronger, reminding us that we're safe with you, and

that your purposes and plans for us will not fail.

Lord, we ask that you will be our defense and our rear guard, keeping our way clear and removing obstacles, covering pitfalls.

Lord, lead us on your level ground. Shine your light in us, through us, and over us.

May we make a difference in this world for your glory and your purposes. Father, set your way before us. May all your plans succeed.

[5 : 38] May we reflect your peace and hope in a world that so desperately needs your presence and healing. Thanks be to you, God, for your indescribable gift.

To you be glory and honor on this Easter Sunday and forever. We pray all these things in the powerful name of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen. Let's join together as we reflect on the miraculous message of Easter Sunday. We're going to sing some worship songs together.

We're going to sing two songs. Christ the Lord is risen today. And crown him with many crowns.

These are some great hymns of our faith.

And so you'll be able to, as always, follow along with the lyrics on the screen as the worship leader leads us in singing, Christ the Lord is risen today, followed by crown him with many crowns.

[6 : 46] May you blessed, be blessed as you sing. Christ the Lord is risen today.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Sons of men and angels say, Hallelujah.

Raise your voice and triumph sigh. Hallelujah. Help me.

King, Alleluia. Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia. Once he died, our souls to save.

Alleluia. Where thy victory, O grave. Alleluia.

[8 : 56] Crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne.

Hark how the heavenly anthem drowns all music but his own.

Awake, my soul, and sing of him who died for thee.

And till him as thy matchless King through all eternity.

Crown him with many crowns.

[10 : 03] The Lord of life, who trod unto the grave. And rose victorious in the strife.

For those he came to save. His glories now we sing. Who died and rose on thine.

Who died eternal life to bring. And lives that death may not be.

Crown him with many crowns. Crown him the Lord of heaven.

One with the Father known. And bless his spirit through again.

[11 : 11] Crown him with many crowns. Crown him with many crowns. Crown him with many crowns. All hail, Redeemer hail.

For thou hast died for me. Thy praise shall never, never fail.

Throughout eternity. I hope those songs were a blessing to you.

Maybe they're not quite as triumphant and majestic and orchestral as you would expect for an Easter Sunday. But the messages of those songs are so powerful.

And so I hope they were meaningful to you this morning. Over the past several weeks, we've been recognizing through a sermon series that as followers of Jesus Christ, as his disciples, we can benefit from some tools and skills that will help us on our journey.

[12 : 27] And these tools and skills are known as spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are designed to help us put ourselves before God.

Put ourselves in a state of mind and a state of heart where we can best interact with him. And over the past few months, we've taken a close look at the spiritual disciplines together.

And I hope that you will return to these sermons in the future. That you will use them as resources to refresh and remind yourself of the importance of the spiritual disciplines in our lives.

And the ways in which these disciplines, learning them, refreshing them, can enrich your relationship with God. It's fantastically fitting to me that as we conclude our sermon series, Spiritual Disciplines Exercise Your Faith.

We conclude that this morning and we're wrapping it up with the corporate discipline of celebration. Isn't that fitting? Isn't that fitting?

[13 : 37] Can you believe the way that worked out? Well, you may be thinking, worked out. Yeah, I'm sure you looked ahead, looked at Easter and planned backwards. Don't give me that much credit.

Give it to God. And I was reflecting on the topics a few weeks ago and I suddenly realized that this topic, celebration, was going to fall on this day, Easter Sunday.

And I don't know about you, but I love a good celebration. I love to laugh. I love to share food and fellowship and company with the people I care about.

Aside from being somewhat hesitant to stand on a chair in a restaurant and have total strangers sing happy birthday to you while you wear a weird hat. I think most of us would agree that we love to celebrate, don't we?

But I also believe that we may tend to focus on the celebration itself rather than the cause to celebrate, the cause for celebration.

[14 : 45] We will celebrate, really most of us, at the drop of a hat, won't we? We celebrate graduations from play school into kindergarten.

We'll celebrate graduations from elementary school into junior high. We celebrate new jobs and retirements. We celebrate weddings and anniversaries.

We celebrate when babies are born. And in a way, we celebrate when someone passes away. In a memorial service, we are celebrating that person's life.

We're remembering who they were and who they are, how their life and their presence has changed us. We seem to be people who crave celebration and look for any opportunity or any occasion to celebrate.

And I believe that's generally a good thing. So why is it that we seem to be wired for celebrating? Well, I believe that God created us to be people of joy.

[15 : 59] He's always intended for our lives to be filled not with pain and adversity, worry and anxiety, striving and failing, but with joy.

The Bible is filled with the message of God's plan that we be a joyful people. Maybe you've traditionally thought of the Christian idea of celebration as one-sided, simply about us celebrating God and who God is.

Or perhaps you've drawn a distinction in your mind between what you may have perceived as the grumpy, joyless God of the Old Testament versus the joyful God of the New Testament.

Can you relate to either of those things? A celebration between us and God is one way of celebrating God. Or the Old Testament and the New Testament seem to have a contrast between the nature of God and possibly in our minds how deserving he is of being celebrated.

Well, I want to begin this morning by sharing something that will hopefully change your mind. The prophet Zephaniah painted a beautiful word picture of the nature of God in the Old Testament in the book of Zephaniah 3, verse 17, where we read, The Lord your God is with you.

[17 : 27] He is, we hear this phrase, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with his love.

He will rejoice over you with singing. That sure sounds to me like God celebrates us, doesn't it?

And it sure sounds like the God of the Old Testament is the same joyful God we may recognize in the New Testament. Isn't that lovely, that picture there of God celebrating us?

Zephaniah is drawing our attention to the fact that true joy comes when we draw near to God, when we faithfully follow him and his commands.

And as we just touched on, God actually celebrates us. Ultimately, not for the things we do, not for our achievements, but simply because he created us and he deeply loves us.

[18 : 35] This sense of joy and celebration with our God is mutual. In fact, it even begins with God celebrating us.

Parents are generally firm with rules and guidelines to protect their children, to keep them from getting hurt. They want their children to experience happiness and joy in their lives.

They want to keep them from experiencing pain, especially pain that can be avoided. And in the same way, God has set out guidelines and rules for us, not to rob us of joy somehow, but to protect us, to help spare us from pain, especially avoidable pain.

It's when we trust God with our lives and draw close to him that we will experience the true source of happiness.

God watches our lives with delight. He longs to celebrate with us. All we need to do is let go of the selfish choices in our lives that will ultimately only give us temporary joy or worse than that, cause us pain.

[19 : 58] We often read during the Christmas season that when the angels appeared to announce the birth of Jesus, the shepherds were terrified. But in Luke 2 verse 10, we read, The angel said to them, Do not be afraid.

I bring you good news of what? Great joy that will be for all the people. God sent the angels with joyful news, marking a time of celebration, not only for the world, but for all creation and for all time. The coming of Jesus Christ. God's plan for us, my friends, is infused with joy and celebration. In the midst of fear and anxiety, the peace and joy in the presence of Jesus gives us cause to celebrate.

We've reflected on our tendency to seek joy and celebrate at every opportunity, right? But the Apostle Paul reminds us that it's in the Lord that we find the true source of never-ending joy.

[21 : 18] Paul reminds us in Philippians 4 verses 4 to 7, one of my favorite passages of Scripture. Paul begins, Rejoice in the Lord always.

I will say it again. Rejoice. I love how Paul says that. Come to God to get your joy. Oh, and in case you missed what I just said, I'll say it again.

Come to God to get your joy. Joy. Rejoice in God. While other joy can be fleeting, it's in God where we find the deepest and most satisfying source of joy.

God's joy leads to Paul reminding us, continuing in verse 5, that with God as the source of our joy, Paul says, let your gentleness be evident to all.

The Lord is near. We should naturally be people who overflow with joy and reflect it to other people. Are you a serious and dour Christian?

[22 : 30] Does the joy of the Lord not shine through you? I want you to reflect on that. Are you joyful? Do you reflect?

Do you exude joy? Perhaps one of the most important messages we need to take hold of in these days begins in verse 6, where Paul says, Do not be anxious about anything.

And then, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Friends, have you felt a lack of joy in your life? We can definitely recognize it can be easy to be discouraged about unpleasant circumstances.

Or to take relatively unimportant events too seriously. I overthink things. I take unimportant things more seriously than I should in a lot of situations.

[23 : 46] If you've been missing a sense of joy in your life lately, perhaps it's time to return to the source. If Paul was able to preach this message of joy from a prison cell of all places, maybe he was onto something about his joy connection.

Not being anxious about anything, easier said than done perhaps, right? That may seem impossible to you in the circumstances of your life.

But Paul's advice here is to turn our worries into prayers. Give our concerns, give our worries, give our anxieties back to God, the true source of our joy.

Don't worry about things. Ask God for help with them. Or ask God to help you put them into the proper perspective.

My friends, we have so much to celebrate. We can celebrate who we are as people who have been created by a loving God.

[24 : 56] We can celebrate that God created us for a purpose. To partner with him in his plan to share the good news of who he is and what he has done.

As people called to share God's purpose, we can celebrate that as Paul says in Romans 8, 28, God will work through everything in our lives, the good and the bad, for our good, according to his will.

That should give us joy and assurance and hope and comfort and confidence.

Above all, friends, we can celebrate what God has done for us. For the many things that he provides for us every day throughout the course of our lives.

For every gift he gives us, from talents and skills to providing for our needs. Giving us ongoing opportunities to share with others how God has changed our lives.

[26 : 06] And on Easter Sunday, we recognize the greatest reason we have to celebrate. And the source of our joy. Our savior.

The risen Jesus Christ. Whose death and resurrection has made a way for us to be forgiven. Forgiven from our sin.

And to be restored in a relationship with God so that we can spend eternity with him. You may know this truth.

But does it penetrate your heart? Does it give you joy? Does it make you someone who breathes joy always?

My friends, thanks be to God for Jesus Christ, his son. The sacrifice he made. The sacrifice he made. And the fact that he has risen again.

[27 : 08] He is with us. Jesus is alive. And we can have salvation in and through Jesus Christ.

Well, it may seem counterintuitive to you that we're celebrating communion this morning. That we're focusing on the sacrifice and death of Jesus on the day when we're supposed to be celebrating his resurrection.

But as we reflected on Good Friday, you don't get resurrection without crucifixion. You don't get sacrifice without suffering.

And so as Christians, we must reflect on the ultimate expression of sacrificial service. This sacrifice represented through the life and ultimately the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And we do celebrate communion. And as I speak a bit more about that, just a reminder to get a small glass of whatever liquid you may have available.

[28 : 16] Juice or water. Whatever you have available in handy. And get a small cracker or a piece of bread. Again, whatever you have available. So that we can celebrate communion together this morning.

This Easter Sunday morning. In a unique and special way online together. And remember, it's not about what you have available to eat or drink right now that is important.

But what they represent for us. My friends, we refer to the celebration of communion as the Lord's table. And you are welcome at this table by God's grace.

Let's take a moment of quiet reflection before we come to the table together. Remember, remember, it's about having your heart in the right place.

If there is an issue between you and a brother or sister in Christ. If there is an unrepentant sin in your life. I encourage you to perhaps pause and sit back.

[29 : 18] And reflect on communion, but not participate. Because as the Apostle Paul tells us. Communion is serious. And it is a very intimate and very direct connection with God.

And so we do not do it lightly. But let's take some time to reflect. As we read in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 verses 23 and 24.

Remember, my friends.

Jesus' body was broken for you and for me. My friends, the body of Christ. Broken as a sacrifice.

Let's eat this together. 1 Corinthians 11 verse 25 says, In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper saying, This cup is the new covenant between God and his people.

[30 : 58] An agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it. My friends, remember.

Christ allowed his blood to be shed. So that our sins could be washed away. The blood of Christ poured out as a sacrifice for you and for me.

Let's drink this together. Let's drink this together. Let's pray.

Father God, we are so thankful for your gift of grace to us. The sacrifice of your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

So that we could be forgiven. So that we could be made right with you. God, thank you for welcoming us to your table.

[32 : 01] Thank you that we can experience your goodness only because of your good and profound and amazing grace. Lord, thank you for calling us to be your saints.

The honor of being your church and your people. Sent into the world to tell others about you. So that you may change their lives.

As you have changed ours. Amen. On Communion Sundays in our church, we receive a benevolent offering. That is used to help folks in our community, in our church community, in the community in which our church lives and breathes.

So that we can help folks who need a helping hand. And the reality of that right now looks different. So I encourage you to continue to send offerings to your church.

Benevolent offerings that you want to be used to help people. But I also encourage you to look for opportunities to show kindness and mercy to other people. Be a joy reflector.

[33 : 07] Be a joy lantern. And let that light of joy that you have found in Jesus Christ, in a relationship with God, shine out. So that people ask what it is about you that they want to know.

Who is this Jesus that you talk about because they want to know him too. So also look for opportunities to serve people during this time.

To just be a bright light in someone's day. To help people because we're all struggling. We're all facing challenges. And that's the reality of this pandemic time.

So I encourage you to be a light. My friends, as you go out into this week. Be Easter people. Be the people who say, Why do you look for the living among the dead?

Jesus is not here. He is risen. Be ready to be surprised by what God will do next.

[34 : 10] Look for the risen Christ in those that you meet. Let the Holy Spirit nudge and guide you.

Friends, the tomb is empty because Jesus is out in the world. And now we must go out in the world as well.

That is our calling. May the joy and wonder of that first Easter morning live in your hearts today and every day.

Amen. Well, we're going to close our service today by singing one more song. To God be the glory. The lyrics will appear on the screen as we sing. And friends, once this song is finished, go in peace. Knowing that Jesus is risen.

[35 : 06] Has risen. Just as he said. And to God be the glory. God bless you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. To God be the glory.

Great things He had done. So loved he the world that he gave us his Son Who he yielded his life, atoned him for sin And opened the life, gave it all, made no end Praise the Lord, praise the Lord Let the earth hear his voice Praise the Lord, praise the Lord Let the people rejoice O come to the Father, through Jesus his Son And give him the glory, great things he has done Oh perfect redemption, the purchase of blood

To every believer, the promise of God A mobilist defender, who truly believes That moment from Jesus, the pot and mercy Praise the Lord, praise the Lord All of the earth hear his voice Praise the Lord, praise the Lord Let the people rejoice O come to the Father, through Jesus his Son And give him the glory, great things he has done To Him Come to the Father, where he gives you He is the Son And give him the money to the Son

And give me the Son And give me the money to the Son And give me the Spirit And give to me the Son And give me the Son And give you the Son And give me the days And give me the Son Habakkuk He is the Son