

Resurrecting Hope: Resurrection Hope

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. Happy Easter Sunday to each of you. My name is Kent Dixon, and I'm the pastor here. So welcome to each of you this morning, whether you're here in person. As you know, people listen on the phone line or listen.

We have a podcast and some other ways that people connect with us. So whether you're listening online or you're here with us in person, God bless you as you do that.

It's April 9th, Easter Sunday. So you may have started your day today. You got maybe, hopefully, this morning is not the only candy you've had today.

But you perhaps have had an Easter basket already, or you get that when you get home. We always, my parents always used to make us wait until after church. So maybe you've been tortured by seeing it, but not being able to dig into it yet.

Maybe you plan to follow the service today with a brunch with friends or family. Over the COVID time, we didn't have the opportunity to do that.

[0 : 58] So maybe you're back to the point where you feel comfortable and you want to re-engage with family and friends in that way. You're gathering with a group of people that you love in person. But above all those things, today is Easter Sunday.

And we gather today as followers of Jesus Christ to recognize that he is risen. I'll prompt you for the formal version, but good response.

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

I don't know about you. I've been a Christian all my life. And periodically, I stop and think, this day, what happened on this day is the central truth of our faith.

Can you recognize that? If Jesus didn't die and didn't come back to life, what are we doing here? It's the single most important event and factor in our faith.

[2 : 09] It is the anchor and the truth to which we hold most dear. Because we recognize that Jesus is alive. Have you experienced the risen Jesus in your life?

Because I have. This is not a 2,000-year-old truth. This is a daily truth that can be ours in every moment. Because our Savior is risen.

This Easter day, the resurrection of Jesus reminds us that God makes all things new. That he's given us the same resurrection power that we are talking about right now.

To live in freedom from sin and death and to have a life that is fully alive. So while it can become easy at times to forget the real reason for this holiday.

I have pastor friends. We're texting each other this morning saying, Blessings on you as you preach, brother, sister, all these different interactions. But it's easy for us to forget.

[3 : 12] To put this aside at times for the Easter bunny. For Easter egg hunts. For baskets filled with goodies. And those are fun. Those are important. But as Christians, as followers of Jesus, we must remember the ultimate sacrifice that he made for us.

And his resurrection from the grave. And here it comes. Traditionally, as Christians, we have this greeting on Easter Sunday. I love it.

I encourage you to turn to whomever you may be sitting with this morning. And share that traditional Easter blessing. He is risen. He is risen indeed. Do that now.

Amen. Amen. Indeed. So now I get to do it. He is risen, brothers and sisters.

He is risen indeed. Amen. Will you pray with me this morning? Dear God, thank you that you make all things new. Thank you for your victory and the power in your name.

[4 : 16] 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 also have new life with you.

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

We ask that you would renew our hearts, renew our minds and our lives for the days ahead. Lord, keep your words of truth planted firm within us.

Help us to keep focused on what is pure and right. And give us the power to be obedient to your word. When the enemy reminds us where we have been, Lord.

Hissing the lies and attacks our way. We trust that your voice will speak louder, more clearly and stronger to us.

[5 : 20] Reminding us that we are safe with you. Reminding us that your purposes and your plans will not fail. Father, we ask you be our defense and our rear guard.

Keeping our way clear. Removing obstacles. And helping us to navigate the pitfalls of our lives. Lord, lead us to your level ground.

Shine your light in us and through us and over us. May we make a difference in this world for your glory and for your purposes.

Set your way before us, Father. And may all your plans succeed. May we reflect your peace and hope to a world that so desperately needs your presence and your healing.

Thanks be to you, God, for your indescribable gift in Jesus. To you be glory and honor on this Easter Sunday and forever.

[6 : 30] And we pray all these things in the powerful name of our risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Well, sometimes preachers deliver a one-off sermon.

So I'm dressed, anybody who attends our church regularly, I'm dressed fancier than normal.

Somebody said, you clean up pretty good? And I said, well, I clean up every day.

I just wear different clothes. But the reality is, sure, you know, we recognize this is an important day. And sometimes preachers deliver one-off sermons.

So they'll come up on Easter Sunday or Christmas Eve or whatever and deliver an encapsulated message. One-off. And then resume a sermon series they were doing.

Or start something new. Or return to regular programming already in progress, right? So maybe starting a new series is something that people do.

[7 : 27] But to me, the Easter story and its deep meaning and truth is so much more than a one-time message. As I said earlier, this is it, folks.

This is the core of what we believe. This must change us. This must change everything. And so today, we're starting a new series called Resurrecting Hope.

Overcoming Life's Greatest Challenges. And this series will continue beyond today. That's a teaser. Come back. So I really hope you will come back because this is important stuff.

So if you were thinking you're off the hook after Easter Sunday, I'm going to be watching for you. To come back because this is so important. So this message we're starting within this series is a sermon titled Resurrection Hope.

Not a shock, right? We should start with resurrecting hope with the hope of the resurrection. Today, we're filled with a renewed hope because of the resurrection of Jesus. And have you ever thought that before Easter was a celebration of life, it was a time of mourning for Jesus' death?

[8 : 41] We know the whole story. But can you imagine what it was like when we didn't? Or when people didn't? It would have only been a few days before when the disciples would have watched their friend, the one they believed to be the long-awaited Messiah.

Believed that with all their hearts as he was crucified on a Roman cross. Not a good Friday by any stretch of that definition.

They'd placed all their hopes and dreams in this coming kingdom that Jesus was going to bring into the world. But on that Friday, they were crushed.

Jesus was brought down from the cross and laid in a tomb. You've probably heard descriptions of the size of the stone that was rolled in place, that guards were placed on duty at the tomb.

This was over, folks. This was a dark, dark day for those people. It was the finality of Jesus' death that would have been a knockout blow to anyone.

[9 : 48] Any hope that the disciples had for a world where God would rule and reign. Jesus told these stories and then he died. Where he would free them from sin.

That's what he said would come. Free them from the corruption that sin caused in the world. That hope they had was apparently seemingly crushed on that day.

So sometimes, let's recognize for a moment, the most painful things we experience in life are disappointments. And they can range from insignificant ones, relatively insignificant, to other times where our trials or our grief or our challenges are life-altering.

And so we're going to take a look at a few pictures. And I want to show you in a gradually increasing scale of what disappointment looks like and the different ways in which we can experience it in life. So I don't know if you've been here. Have you been last to the cookie plate? Not that fun. I was sure there was one more, but I live with a young adult who beat me to it because he's faster.

[11 : 01] So maybe that's a kind of disappointment you've experienced, which is relatively minor, right? Maybe your waistline forgives you for having missed the last cookie. But sometimes things are even more serious.

Now, this is not recently. But as you well know, I have a certain allegiance in my sporting pantheon. I'm a one-sport guy. But I remember this all too well. We were that close. We were managing a push. But we just couldn't do it.

It's different this year, which is a good thing, right? But, you know, that is a blow. In my house, people know if the game's not going that well, they should maybe steer clear of me a little.

And if they come home and say, how's the game going? And I just say, eh, 6-1. Whatever, they just go, whew. They don't have to tiptoe as much.

[12 : 05] But again, I mean, in the grand scheme of things, I hate to say it, it's minor. It's relatively minor. What about a health concern? What about news that you expect to go one way that goes a different way?

Throughout my life, I've sat at bedsides as a nephew, as a grandchild, as a son, twice. And it's not that fun.

And maybe you've experienced this in your life or you are now, whether it's your own health concerns or someone you dearly care about gets news or goes through something that is a deep challenge that affects you.

Maybe it goes even worse. So we've all lost people, some of us more recently than others. And this feels final.

Right? It feels crushing. It feels hopeless in a personal way. It hurts us deeply. What did we experience recently in the city of Edmonton?

[13 : 11] So the loss of Constables Jordan and Ryan shook us as a society to our core. We thought these are the good guys, right?

And yet this happened. And it still rocks our society. We're all grieving this in some way or another. What about that?

The fall of the Twin Towers in New York changed the shape of everything in one way or another. Have you flown anywhere recently?

The extreme degrees of security checks, all because of this. The fear people have of being in public places, of largely due to this.

We are afraid, and it's because of challenges that have happened in our lives. Things where we had hope in a situation, but the circumstances possibly crushed it.

[14 : 13] And so out of each one of those pictures, there's emotions. And if you've ever found yourself in one of those situations, I mean, some of them affect us in a more broad sense, but maybe you can relate in some way to how the followers of Jesus felt on that Easter morning.

After three days of deep sorrow, they were in need of a resurrected hope. And if we're honest this morning, probably some of us are here today in need of renewed hope as well in one or more areas of our lives.

Life has not been easy, has it? In a lot of ways. And some of us have faced great challenges, and perhaps others of us are right in the middle of the challenges that we are facing.

And I don't know absolutely everyone's story, certainly not for some of you here who I've not met yet. But you might be in the very middle of the worst experiences of your life, the biggest challenges of your life.

So perhaps you've experienced a devastating loss this year. Perhaps your closest relationships have suffered recently.

[15 : 29] Some of us have had to come to terms with a diagnosis that makes our future uncertain. And all of these things with the backdrop of a pandemic.

And you could say, oh, that's behind us. And it feels like it's behind us in most ways, but maybe not completely. Do you feel a little bit nervous still?

Anytime I hear the word variant, I freeze. So these things and more can be so heavy that they begin to make us question if God still cares about us.

If God is still even at work in the world. My physiotherapist, I'm just going to share this story now. It just popped into my head. She'd forgive me. She said she used to be a person of faith and she worked in neonatal intensive care and children's hospital environments.

And she said, I came to the point where I could no longer rationalize a loving, caring God and what I experienced every day. And I said, we'll have coffee one day because I want to hear.

[16:44] But maybe that's where you're at is you're beginning to question. But friends, hope appears when we least expect it. Early in the morning on the third day after Jesus' death, a woman named Mary Magdalene made her way to the tomb.

And other places in Scripture tell us that she had come to anoint his body, prepare his body for burial. But when she arrives, she discovers the tomb is empty.

So what must have been, what must have added insult to injury, I think, is that Mary concludes someone must have come and taken him away. So not only is he gone, she's convinced that someone took his body.

And she is devastated. We read about this story in John 20, verses 10 to 14. We read there, Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying.

As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

[17:57] And they asked her, Woman, why are you crying? They've taken my Lord away, she said, and I don't know where they have put him.

At this, she turned around and saw, whoa, try and get through this, folks. Weepy pastor, for anybody who doesn't know me that well yet. At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize it was Jesus.

So as Mary looks into this tomb where Jesus has been laid, she can definitely see what is missing, right? She's expecting his body to be there, but she also fails to see what is there.

She's so focused on the fact that Jesus' body is nowhere to be seen that she misses the two angelic beings that are sitting where Jesus was.

Do you recognize that? In that passage, Mary doesn't go, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait, who are you guys? Right? She doesn't stop and say, well, I need some context here.

[19:05] But through her tears, she tells the angels that she is heartbroken because not only is Jesus dead, she believes that, but now his body has disappeared.

And this is where it can happen to us, things like this, when we begin to lose hope. When our dreams are shattered and our future becomes unclear, it becomes all too easy to begin to fixate on what has not happened, what we don't have, what someone else didn't do, what is missing.

And after Mary speaks to the angels, she turns to leave and then she comes face to face with the resurrected Jesus. But listen to what verse 14 says.

She did not realize it was Jesus. Jesus. That's always been interesting to me. Resurrection hope was standing right in front of her and she was unable to see it because of the fog of despair that she was in.

Because after all, Mary had not come to the tomb expecting to see Jesus alive, right? She didn't come there for coffee to say, hey Lord, how's it going? That crucifixion was a bummer, but you seem to be okay.

[20:32] That's not what happened. She came expecting to find him dead, not gone. My friends, Easter is a reminder that God is in the business, the business of awakening hope within us.

He does it in so many ways. Ways that can be subtle, ways that even can be missed if we're not careful, if we're not paying attention.

And maybe hope comes through a simple conversation with a friend. Maybe hope is sparked by an answered prayer. Hope can be found in an unexpected text or an email or a letter in the mail.

It could come from two young men playing guitars. That's a sign of hope to me too. But it can come taking time to be grateful for what we have rather than frustrated by what we don't have.

And you've heard me talk about this before. When we begin with an attitude of gratitude, it helps to put things into perspective rather quickly. And the key is, I believe, our expectation level.

[21 : 48] Because just like a child looking for, looking in the yard on Easter morning, we always search, we should always search the horizon for God's subtle signs of hope.

Because they're all around us. Friends, Easter comes at just the right time. It is Jesus' compassion for those that he loves that caused him to sacrificially give up his own life.

It's also his compassion that causes him to rise from the dead. As he meets Mary in the doorway of the now empty tomb, Jesus' immediate concern is the tears streaming down Mary's face.

Let's continue hearing about Mary from John 20 verses 15 to 18. Woman, he said, why are you crying?

Who is it you're looking for? Thinking he was the gardener, she said, sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him. Jesus said to her, Mary.

[23 : 01] Mary. She turned out towards him and cried out in Aramaic, Rabboni, which means teacher. Jesus said, do not hold on to me for I have not yet returned to the Father.

Go instead to my brothers and tell them I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news, I have seen the Lord and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Just as Mary had given up all hope, Jesus meets her in her tears. Why are you crying? He says. John, the author of this book, tells us that Mary thinks that Jesus is the gardener tending around the tombs.

And John offers this information not by accident but absolutely on purpose. Because it's not just that Mary is confused and mistaken, she is, obviously, but it's also absolutely correct that Jesus is tending to the broken pieces of her heart.

He's in fact repairing the brokenness that began in the Garden of Eden in Genesis. Can you recognize that circle of life?

[24 : 29] The Bible tells us that in the beginning God created a garden of perfection where his creation would live and thrive. And he had a perfect relationship with them.

And they experienced life to the full. But then the man and woman God created disobeyed him. They ate fruit from a tree they were forbidden to eat from.

And instantly we recognize that sin and death were introduced to the world and everything was broken. And we see that brokenness and we can feel it all around us.

And you've also heard me say that before. This is not how it is meant to be. That's why we feel the grief and the anguish and the aching and the uncertainty because of sin.

this is not how it's meant to be. And we really begin to see the results of this in Genesis 3 verses 8 to 10. We read there the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day and they hid from the Lord among the trees of the garden.

[25 : 39] But the Lord God called to the man where are you? He answered I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked so I hid.

God came searching for his creation but couldn't find them because of their shame. They were naked and so they hid. At the center of the story of Easter we find a God who re-enters a garden to search for those that he loves and to offer them the opportunity to live again.

And as soon as Jesus speaks Mary's name she recognizes him and calls him teacher. In the middle of her darkness Easter came to Mary just in time.

With Easter often comes the long awaited birth of spring. In some places around the country the winters are harsh and bitter hashtag Edmonton.

Sure it can be fun to have the first snow believe it or not I'm born and raised here and I look forward to the first snowfall and I always forget.

[26 : 55] Every year I forget. We like to shovel the driveway the first time maybe. Like to build a snowman. But after weeks and months of cold weather sometimes bone crackingly cold weather it can get pretty old right?

trees without leaves ground covered in ice and snow causes people to count down the days until spring hallelujah warm weekend this weekend but we count that down.

We're longing for everything to warm up and things to come back to life and even so when the day finally comes it always seems to be somewhat unexpected right?

I don't know about you but I'm looking at this forecast going 21 but sure enough in three months from now when it's 31 and I can't sleep at night but even so this sneaks up on us spring sneaks up on us we become accustomed to the world without life the world that's gone to sleep and we're

shocked when we finally see the first signs of life coming out on the trees the grass becoming green again but spring always seems to come right at the right time for us to a barren land and in the same way even the barren and seemingly hopeless seasons of our lives God's hope is all around us it's like Martin Luther once said our Lord has written the promise of resurrection not in the books alone but in every leaf of spring time isn't that cool you thought

Martin Luther was boring he's not the seasons of life remind us that God brings life from the earth he brings life from death and he can bring life to the places in our lives that may seem to be the most hopeless because God is always right on time you can feel the shift in tone in this story of Mary as she recognizes that Jesus is alive her hope is resurrected she comes back to life and the dream of restoration and healing is once again a possibility for her so I have a question for you wonder what would happen if today starting today you were able to begin to see Jesus all around you even in the places that you may have been missing him Easter is when we look at him face to face we hear him call us by name and we can recognize that hope again because

[29 : 50] Jesus is alive friends the resurrection is victory over death you see what Mary discovered early at the tomb was that the thing that she believed to be the most final was not the end at all but the beginning Jesus rising from the dead meant that sin and its ultimate outcome which is death could not overcome Jesus Christ he held power and sway over it death did not have the last word or the final say Jesus does earlier in the book of John Jesus made this really audacious claim at the time John 11 25 the Bible says Jesus said to her I am the resurrection and the life he who believes in me will live even though he dies

Jesus said to his followers then as to us now that he is the resurrection and the life he is the hope to both eternal life and the key to a full life now it's our belief our belief as I said at the beginning of this sermon it's not just an intellectual exercise but a deep trust in Jesus that ensures that even in the worst things that happen to us in life they will not be the last things that happen to us we have hope that is resurrecting all around us a hope that means a full life in Jesus is available to us both now and in eternity so my friends this Easter day I invite you to believe in the resurrected

Christ I invite you to give him your life give it to him again and allow him to bring new life within you and the world around you let's close in prayer Jesus thank you for the hope that we find in Easter the story of your resurrected life renews our spirits and invites us to believe in you with all that we are Lord I don't want to miss you today I want to see you in your faithfulness and your trust in your grace for all people including me I give you all the dead places within me Lord all the hopeless thoughts in my mind and all of my feeble prayers I look forward with excitement and anticipation to the work that you will do in my life and in the lives of those who hear this message we pray all these things in your name amen have