

Made New in Christ

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Easter Sunday, April 20th, 2025. My name is Kent Dixon and it's my joy to be the pastor here. He is risen.

! He is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen. So it's Easter Sunday. There's a shocker, right? It's an honor to gather here with you for such an occasion as this.

Churches and Christians across denominations and cultures and countries all over the world will come together today to remember and celebrate the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We're pausing in our ongoing sermon series in Acts because we're beginning a brand new four-week sermon series called, and as I alluded to, Easter is not a one-day thing.

We're going to explore this concept of Easter and what it means through a series called Made New, How Easter Changes Everything. The resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything. The residual effects of Easter echo from our present-day reality into eternity as men and women continue to place their faith, their hope, and their trust in a risen Savior.

[1 : 22] The journey of faith begins with confession, but it's also sustained by commitment. When we're found in Christ, our old ways of living are gone, and we are made new.

Our sermon this morning is titled, Made New in Christ. So it may go without saying, but the effects of the resurrection have reverberated throughout history.

Jesus' defeat of sin and death changed everything. And remarkably, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, and maybe you've heard it in songs or in Scripture itself, but that same power is available to us as well.

It changes us. It renews us, and it breathes fresh life into us. The key to this transformative power is faith.

Maybe you didn't know that, but that's the key. Because new life is unlocked for us when we place our faith, our hope, our trust in Jesus Christ.

[2 : 33] But for new life to be available for humanity, there had to be a death. In 2017, the Canoe Wildfire entered the west boundary of Waterton Lakes National Park.

The fiercely hot and fast-moving flames consumed roughly 30% of the park and 80% of the park's trails. Thankfully, the town site, the historic Prince of Wales Hotel as well, were able to be saved. Eight years later, the landscape looks very different. The bridges, the benches, the campgrounds, they've all been rebuilt.

And watching that park recover has been fascinating for both visitors and scientists alike. As you probably remember hearing me say, that's a cherished place for Michelle's family, and has become one for me as well.

So to hear of the devastation and then see the regeneration is amazing. So with the sunshine able to reach the forest floor in new ways, it exploded with a lush carpet of new green growth.

[3 : 46] Forests that was mainly conifer trees before returned with aspen trees and shrubs. Stands of Saskatoon berries and thimbleberry and wild blueberries grew to be shoulder high.

Other previously forested areas may ultimately grow into meadows of wildflowers. The devastation from that wildfire was overwhelming.

And at the time that it happened, it seemed inconceivable that such destruction and death could ever be a place of life and hope again. But sometimes what seems to be the end really is just a new beginning.

Easter morning began with sadness. The Messiah was dead. Jesus had been arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. He'd been betrayed by a member of his trusted inner circle.

Add to that an unfair and unjust trial where he was sentenced to death by crucifixion and hung between two thieves. Within hours, Jesus breathed his last breath and he died.

[5 : 00] And with him, the hopes and dreams of his followers seemed to die with him. They believed he was the one who would usher in the kingdom of God and make all things right, at least in their specific way of understanding it, their specific perspective.

But here they were now, mourning the loss of a friend and the loss, it seemed to them, of hope.

Jesus' body was taken down from the cross and laid inside of a cold, dark tomb.

And it all seemed so final. But, I love the but in scripture, but, what no one could see coming was that this was just the beginning.

Three days went by as Jesus' body lay lifeless in that tomb. Some of the disciples had returned to their old ways of life. They thought, well, I guess we go back to what it was.

Any hope they had, they believed, was buried behind that massive stone that was rolled into place to cover the entrance of the tomb where Jesus lay.

[6 : 08] But then, Sunday morning came. Easter morning. This morning arrived. Let's hear the words of Matthew 28, verses 1 to 8.

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake.

For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.

The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the woman, Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here. He has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee.

[7 : 12] There you will see him. Now I have told you. So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid he had filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

The Bible tells us there that, at dawn, two women named Mary traveled to Jesus' grave. And I can't resist. I always like to bring this up because I remember it, even as a child, thinking, could you imagine what it would be like to be recorded in Scripture as the other Mary?

I always thought that was funny. Mary? Yep, Mary Magdalene. We get it. And the other Mary. Some other lady named Mary. She was important though, right? She's recorded there in Scripture.

And other places in Scripture tell us that these women had come to anoint Jesus' body for burial. But suddenly a violent earthquake shook the ground as an angel of the Lord appeared, rolled the stone away from the tomb entrance.

Now, maybe you've heard this. You saw it in the picture. Huge stone, thousands of pounds, took many men to roll it into place. Those stones were also put in place on an angle to make it easy to close, very difficult to open.

[8 : 31] The angel goes, moves it, sits down on it. That's what I love. The angel sits on this stone that marked the finality of Jesus' burial, or seemed to.

The angel's appearance was shocking, we read there, like lightning. So whether he appeared like a flash of lightning, or a dramatic presence like that.

And his clothes were white as snow, we read. The women and the guards who were watching over the grave were terrified. But the angel spoke to them tenderly.

We notice that throughout Scripture, right? Angels get that they are scary. That's what I love. They get that they're impressive. They get that they're terrifying. So they're always tender, generally tender.

So he spoke words of comfort that are pronounced over people, I checked, 70 times throughout Scripture. The angel said, do not be afraid.

[9 : 31] Right? The angel recognizes that human reaction and immediately acts to bring calm. Easter isn't a time for fear or sadness, but joy.

Though the women had come to care for Jesus' lifeless body, he was not there. The tomb was empty, and he had risen. The women ran off to find the other disciples.

They were no longer filled with fear. They were still nervous, right? But they were filled with joy, we read there. That's what Easter is about. Easter confronts our fears and offers us joy.

Anyway, we live in a world, I think you probably all agree, where we can find ourselves in a similar place to the women in this story, can't we? Any given Sunday, people may come to church with anxiety, with fear over their circumstances.

Fear that their lives will never change. Fear that their circumstances will never change. Fear that their marriage cannot be saved. That their diagnosis is a foregone conclusion.

[10:43] And for too many of us, our lives, I believe, are dominated by anxiety and fear. So maybe the first thing you need to hear this morning is the message of the angel at the empty tomb.

My friends, my brothers and sisters, do not be afraid. Easter confronts our fears. The empty tomb reveals the mighty power of a God that wasn't just a reality for Jesus then, but is a reality for us today.

Author and speaker Beth Moore says this really well. The power of the resurrection means that nothing but the tomb is meant to be empty.

The reality, the power of the resurrection, means that nothing but the tomb is meant to be empty. Easter is a source of joy, should be, for Christians.

We should be filled with joy because the power of the resurrection is able to make everything new. Do you believe that? It's not just kind Easter words that you might find in a card.

[11:54] The empty tomb means that your past can be made new. The empty tomb means that your hope for the future can be made new.

It can be restored. The empty tomb means that your very life can be made new. True joy, I believe, is a byproduct of hope.

Hope that if Jesus truly has risen from the grave, then through our belief in him, there's nothing that's impossible for us either.

Do you believe that? Evangelist and publisher D.L. Moody told this story. A bright young girl of 15 was suddenly cast upon a bed of suffering, completely paralyzed, on one side, and nearly blind. She heard the family doctor say to her parents as they stood by the bedside, She has seen her best days, poor child. The girl overheard. No, doctor, she exclaimed.

[12:59] My best days are yet to come when I shall see the king in his beauty. That's our hope, Moody says. Christ rose from the dead to give us a pledge of our own rising.

The resurrection is the great antidote for fear of death because nothing can take its place. So no matter where you find yourself today, the empty tomb pushes back against your fear.

It reminds us that the best is yet to come because Jesus Christ is alive. Heard some amens.

That's good. Feel free. Interrupt me with amens all you like. So what's the proper response to Easter? Is it faith?

Faith is a word that we use a lot in the church, I hope, because we have faith in all kinds of things. We have faith in things in our lives, right?

[14:08] Faith that our job will still be there on Monday or Tuesday when we go back. Faith that our car will start when we leave this service. Faith that the ham is not burning right now.

But the kind of faith the Bible speaks to is a deep trust in someone or something that can't be explicitly proven.

Do you understand that's what your faith in Christ means? Once the tomb was found empty, it was unexplainable. But the women and the disciples at that moment had a choice to make.

Would they have faith that Jesus was really alive? This has been the defining question for 2,000-ish years.

Do we trust the resurrection? I heard a yes. Extra points. Do we believe that the power of God raised Jesus then and can therefore, as Scripture tells us, make us new now?

[15:17] It's big faith. Paul addresses this question as he writes to the early church in Rome. He wanted the proper response to the empty tomb to be very clear.

Paul says in Romans 10, verse 9, if you declare, you know this, if you declare with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, what does Paul say? You will be saved. Right? There it is. The way to experience the power of God that can make us new is actually a two-step process.

Paul says that first, you must declare it with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. So this means that we demonstrate that Jesus is our authority.

We demonstrate this by the things that we say and the things that we do. It's the outward evidence of an inward conviction.

[16:17] Second, Paul says that we must believe in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead. Our hearts must be convinced that the power of God is real.

So the first step, do you recognize it, is an intellectual exercise. Right? It's head knowledge. It's recognizing that what you've been told there is true.

But the second part, that second step, is an exercise in trust. So this can be illustrated. I was going to do it with an actual chair, but you'll get it.

It can be illustrated with a chair or a bench. Right? And you're all sitting on benches. Ha ha. So you're sitting there now. We sit on them every day, a chair, a bench, a stool, whatever.

And it's a mundane action. But have you ever thought that it's an act of faith? Everybody's now looking at the pew going, uh oh.

[17 : 20] Does he have a button that he can... It's an act of faith. Right? Have you ever sat in a chair and have it collapse on you? Not awesome. Right? Have you ever, even worse, been ready to sit in a chair trusting the chair and a friend went, yoink, and pulled it out from under you?

I've had that happen. Not a great feeling. Friendship over? No. It's not. But first, you must intellectually conclude that the chair you're planning to sit down on is actually meant to be sat on. Is it for display only? Is it a child's chair not meant to bear your weight? And then, that it will actually hold you up. So first of all, it's going to take me and will it hold me up for any length of time?

So then, you need to trust. So you've made that intellectual decision. But then you need to put your weight on it. You need to rest in its strength and ideally, forget about it.

Do you sit in a chair and think, boy, it's working so far. I, oh, any moment now though. We don't think that way, right? We place our trust in it. We commit to it.

[18 : 31] And the same is true for our faith in Christ. To celebrate Easter without making the fundamental decision to trust in Jesus' resurrection power, are you ready, is to miss the point completely.

You can be made new. But that's only possible through faith in Jesus Christ. And our faith in him ensures that we will be found in him.

We will rest in him. We will be saved by his power and by God's amazing grace. So Jesus takes what is old.

Feeling old this morning? I am. But Jesus takes what's old and makes it new. Paul speaks in a different passage about the implications of placing our lives in Jesus.

After Jesus' resurrection, there's an amazing transformation in the lives of the disciples. They encounter Jesus in his resurrected form.

[19 : 43] And it causes them to go from being afraid for their lives to being bold witnesses for what they have seen and what they have heard.

Just a reversal in them. And Paul expects this transformation to happen in the lives of every believer, even today.

He writes in 2 Corinthians 5, 17, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone.

The new is here. Paul says that when people put their faith in Jesus, they become new creations. All of our old ways of living, if we let them, are replaced with new ones.

Jesus will take our selfishness and replace it with generosity. He will take our anger and replace it with love. He takes our addiction and replaces it with freedom.

[20 : 55] He heals our brokenness, binds our wounds, and loves us unconditionally. He is worthy of our faith, our hope, our love, and our devotion.

I can tell stories about Michelle because she's not here. This one's sanctioned, I believe. Several years ago, Michelle and I remodeled our kitchen. Not to make it fancy.

You know, we weren't putting in anything crazy. This is not HGTV. But we wanted to make it more functional, right? More contemporary in some ways. It was dated when we bought our house.

It was worn. It needed some TLC. But before anything could be done to refresh it, all the old materials needed to be torn out. Anything that was old or rusted or worn out needed to be removed. Before anything new could be added, unless we did the hard work of removing anything that was rotten and broken down and old, unless we did that work first, anything new that we added would have been wasted, ultimately.

[22 : 10] It was only once the hard work of removal was complete that the replacement and renewal could truly happen. Friends, Easter is the power and proof of God.

Today, you can confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that Jesus is alive and wants to work in you. Invite him into your heart.

Invite him again into your heart to do the remodeling work that only he can do. My friends, no matter your challenges or your circumstances, cast your cares on Jesus because he cares for you. Do not be afraid. We'll close our service now with a sending song and then I'll present a benediction for us.