

Sunday After Easter

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Preacher: Bishop Dan Gifford

[0 : 00] Well, before I reflect on God's word, let's pray and ask God to help us as we consider what he has said. Father, we thank you for the gift of your living word.

We thank you for the gift of the Lord Jesus in our midst now. And Father, we ask that you will show Jesus to us. That the hearts, each of our hearts will be open wide to your truth.

That we will receive with humility the truth of your word. That we might be strengthened and guided to be your faithful servants in this world.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, I want to say what a joy it is to be with you here today at Messiah West. And this is my first time in this place here.

And it sounds like you guys might be a little disoriented because it sounds like you were switched around for quite a while. And for some reason you decided to go this way. It fits more people. It fits more people.

[1 : 02] Well, that's a very good thing. And it is certainly a bigger congregation than the last time I was here. God is doing a work among you for which I am very grateful. And I pray for you as a congregation regularly.

I have moved to Ontario a year and a half ago. I think the last time I was here we had literally moved two days before. And so I was feeling a bit disoriented myself on that day.

And I feel much more settled. And it's a time where I just feel very grateful to be visiting churches in this part of the country. And seeing God's work in people's lives in very powerful ways.

It's so encouraging when I come to churches and visit and see God's work. So Daniel said, you guys were in a sermon series. There's a break right now. You can choose whatever you want to preach on.

So I'm going to choose Colossians chapter 3. If you turn in your Bibles, it's just four verses. Although I'm going to be looking at other parts of this beautiful letter. And if you can turn to Colossians 3, that will be very, very helpful indeed.

[2 : 14] And I want to begin by saying, Alleluia, Christ is risen. Now when I say that, what would you say in response? Very good. Very good.

And let's say that a little bit enthusiastically right now. Alleluia, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia. Fantastic. That's the core of our faith.

That is what everything that we are about as Christians is based on. That's our bedrock. That's our foundation as well. And I love the way, how earthy it is, that we have something called the 39 Articles, that if you were holding a prayer book, you would see at the very end of it.

By the way, I used to, when I was Renaud's age, sometimes I'd get bored by the sermon and I'd read the 39 Articles, which probably meant the sermon was really boring. But in there, I love what it says about the resurrection.

It's very earthy. It says, Christ did truly rise again from death and took again his body with flesh and bones and all things pertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven and there he sits.

[3 : 32] In other words, he reigns, he rules until he comes again in glory. Well, that's the faith of Easter. It is an earthy, real rising from the dead.

And it's an event that historians have a hard time with if they don't believe in miracles, which most don't, of course. But every good historian today knows that very soon after Jesus was crucified, and there's no doubt of that, historians will say, but very soon after, people who were followers of this Jesus, their lives were changed.

And they were willing to die for the fact that Jesus rose from the dead bodily and that they saw him. And that up to 500 people at one time saw him.

And it utterly transformed their lives. And this faith spread very, very quickly right away. And in a sense, there's this God-shaped hole in history that says we can't explain why these people changed so much overnight.

Something happened to them. And the thing that happened is they saw this real, live, resurrected Lord Jesus. And they would say this, that which we have seen and heard and touched with our hands, this is what we proclaim.

[5 : 01] This is what we proclaim. This is what we're willing to die for. This is what we give our lives for. We're willing to lose our jobs for, is that Jesus truly rose from the dead. And I want to say that the great thing is that our service, as we always say in every service, I believe in the resurrection of the body.

Well, what that means is that you believe not only that Jesus rose again, but that it affects you, it changes your life today completely.

That his bodily resurrection will be like your resurrection one day. That this is what is before us. It is what we have as the sure and certain hope.

It is the resurrection of the body, the resurrection of the dead. And every day of our life as Christians depends on the fact that Jesus did this, that he rose in such power on that Easter day last week. And what it tells us too is that you and I have a changed relationship with God because of that resurrection.

[6 : 15] Because the point of Holy Week and Easter, which you all experienced last week, is that Jesus' mission to bring peace with you and God was accomplished.

That's the point of why he came. That you are in a forever relationship with the Lord Jesus. That you are adopted by grace. I have a friend in ministry who is adopting a little girl right now. It's in the process. Which is quite a, it's quite an involved and difficult process. But they know who this little girl is. She's only about two months old. And her life is forever changed because she will be adopted by this Christian family.

There is a complete change that she will experience the rest of her life. And it will, it is great, great blessing. Let me tell you. That is true for each of us if we have placed our faith in the risen Lord Jesus.

You have been adopted by grace into this new family of God. And it's a done deal. It's forever. And nothing can change it. And that is what is at the heart of your life now.

[7 : 26] That is the heart of your identity. And identity is big in our culture. But that is what is at the very center of your life.

And that's what our reading from Colossians is all about. In those verses that I want to go through you with. These little verses are about your identity. About what it means that Jesus rose from the dead for you.

And it's part of a very loving letter that Paul wrote to this group of believers in Colossi. He probably never met those believers, by the way.

But he knew about them. He heard about them. And he said that in his heart, he held them close. He prayed for them constantly. And at the very beginning of the letter, he says, I pray for you every day.

And then he tells them exactly what he prays for. So if you were to flip over to chapter 1, verse 9. He is praying that they will be filled with the knowledge of Jesus.

[8 : 29] And so that they will walk in a manner pleasing to God. So if you want to boil down the letter of Colossians, it's saying, know who Jesus is and who you are in Jesus.

And because of that, walk in a way that's pleasing to God. And I do invite you to read this little letter because it is an extraordinary letter.

It tells us about what the Christian faith and life is all about. And we know what it means to know Jesus and to walk in a manner that's pleasing to God.

Because in the next verse at the end, he says, keep on bearing fruit in every good work. That's what I'm praying for. And I'm praying that you will increase in the knowledge of God.

And then finally, that you will be strengthened with all power to have endurance and patience as you walk with Jesus. And all the challenges of life that you experience.

[9 : 29] In all the challenges of life. So God calls each of us to be changed. And to be transformed every day. I'm going to pray for Renaud in just a few minutes.

If I don't preach too long. I'm going to pray that he will daily increase in the Holy Spirit. And that's because God brings his growth into you and me every day.

If we are not growing, then we are actually dying spiritually. And God's work in you is to change you. And so whether you are eight years old or 98, God's great priority is that you will mature in the Lord Jesus.

That his change will take place day by day. It's sometimes a very slow growth, but it happens. And so whether you're somebody who's preparing for a career in the midst of a very busy work life.

Or you have a full-on family life. Or you are retired. If you're not growing with Christ, you are spiritually dying. And so the question that Paul is helping us with is, How practically can I work with God in his transformation that he is doing in you?

[10:48] How can I cooperate with the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in us? Well, if we want to summarize it up, how do I cooperate with God in this?

The answer would be, hold fast to Christ. Hold fast to Christ. I think that's a good thing to put up on your refrigerator. If you have magnets, if you have whatever, take them all down and just put one thing up there that says, Hold fast to Christ.

Because it is saying that the only way to this growth, this growth that comes from God, is if we abide in the Lord Jesus. It's like him being a vine and us being branches.

And I think that sometimes this is difficult work. It actually can be difficult to hold fast to the Lord Jesus. When I was 11 years old, which is Renaud's age, or not when I was, when my son was 11, he and I went to a father-son camp.

And it was fantastic. And one of the things we did, it was on an island off the coast of British Columbia, and we went on an inner tube behind a boat. And the guy who was driving the boat said, so my son and I were on the inner tube, he says, Do you want to have a relaxing ride or a challenging ride?

[12:04] And of course my son Alexander said, I'll have a challenging ride. So that means that they did circles in the boat and made you, you know, with inertia, whip around corners with the expressed intent of throwing you off the inner tube.

And so he and I were next to each other, holding on with white knuckles as we went through this. It's kind of like going through a gauntlet in a way. And I think in a way that that can be what we experience in holding fast to Christ.

And it's not a bad picture because in our society right now, there are lots of forces that pull us away, like that inertia on that boat, away from holding fast to Christ.

A lot of things that are pushing us to not hold fast. And so here's the question that Paul is actually addressing.

And he says there's three parts to what we do. And I'm only going to look at the first one. The first thing is to be really familiar with your identity in Christ. God's grace to you.

[13:14] And then secondly, he'll talk about throwing off sin. You know, things that have to do with the old life. What it means to be separated from God.

And throw those things off. Whether it's anger or malice or immorality or a way of talking that tears people down.

Throw those things off in verses 5 through 11. And then 12 through 17, it talks about putting on the things of God. Putting on the things of Christ every day. And we're not going to be able to get into those second two.

But I want to talk about being familiar with your new identity. And the thing that's wonderful about that beginning is that Paul says this about holding fast to Christ.

This is about his own life. He says, And that's the extraordinary thing about knowing Jesus.

[14:17] is that in our holding on to him, we know that Christ first holds on to us. He holds fast to us. And that's this insight of verses 1 through 4.

is that Jesus has united himself to us forever. And that union is him holding fast to us.

It's the fundamental reality of our life that influences everything about us. I like reading biographies. And I love reading Christian biographies because I get encouraged to see how God has worked in their life through sometimes incredibly difficult things that they've gone through.

And I love reading books about secular people as well. And seeing what made them tick and what made them the influence that they were in the society.

And recently I read a biography of Albert Einstein. So Walter Isaacson, the famous biographer, wrote a great biography on him. And he tells the story about what Einstein talks about in his own life.

[15:28] This profound experience that he had when he was 5 years old. What happened was that he was sick in bed one day and his father bought him a compass.

So that's what you do when your kid is sick, right? You buy him a compass. But this was a life-altering experience for him because the fact that the magnetic needle was influenced by something that was unseen, like he didn't have to touch it or anything, and this needle is influenced, gave him a sense of wonder that motivated him for the rest of his life.

And here's what he said. He said, this experience made a deep and lasting impression on me. He said, something deeply hidden had to be behind all things.

And as a result, Einstein would spend his life working through field theories and how to describe nature, how the universe is working.

And I think this is a helpful story because the truth that you are raised with Jesus is deeply hidden to the world, yet it influences absolutely everything about you.

[16:44] The risen and exalted Jesus is this source that is behind everything about us in our new life. And in a way, he is like that force that is influencing the compass in our life of who we are.

He alone changes us. He alone gives us strength and resurrection power to be truly human, to be what God made us to be.

The force of his resurrection, the reality of Jesus in your life is shaping you all the time, but the world does not see it. We do not see it either. And the gift of that is that we often think that the new life of Jesus that we are living is the result of us really holding fast to Christ, of fighting against sin in our life.

But Paul says, we begin our battle against sin with the fact of Jesus rising and we rising with him, with this fact that we've been raised with Christ.

So I put off that sin of verses 5 through 11 because I've been raised with Christ. And then we put on the beautiful clothes in that passage 12 through 17, which is often read at a wedding, by the way.

[18:15] But it's saying it to the whole church. You know, he's saying, put on then as God's chosen ones, as those who have been raised with Jesus, this is what you are putting on.

Compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint with another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you.

So you also must forgive. And above all, put on love. Well, he's saying you do that because you are holy and you are beloved. You have been loved first.

You have been made chosen ones. And so, therefore, because you are raised with Jesus, Paul says there's two very practical things to do.

Two practical things to do. First is at the end of verse 1. Seek the things that are above where Christ is. Where is Christ?

[19:14] He is in heaven. And heaven is all about joyfully serving Jesus, who is Lord, and who we worship together. There is an adventure about this that heaven will involve.

It's this life of self-sacrificing love for others because of what Jesus has done for you. There is a joy in this that we cannot possibly take in. And we can seek these things above, not just in church ministry, but in your place of work, in your family, with the friends who are in your life.

There is this practicing for heaven that is involved in seeking Jesus, who is in heaven. Seeking him. And secondly, verse 2 says, set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth.

So he's saying, the way that you experience God's transforming work in your life is to fill your minds with the things that are of Jesus Christ. Now we live in a culture that fills our minds with all kinds of things, maybe more than any other time in history.

The information that's coming at us is incredible. This continual access to the internet means that Netflix or the constant news feeds or the storylines on social media fill our minds.

[20:43] They fill our minds. But Paul says, don't set your minds on those things. Don't take on those values. There's a pessimism of self-focus because he says, you yourself need to be conformed to the values and thinkings that are very different.

Very different from the thinking of the world. May your aims and your ambitions and life orientation be about the things of heaven. And that's why Romans 12 says this, that the good transformation

that God does in your life happens through the renewal of your mind as God changes your mind. How does that happen? Well, the gift of times of quiet with God are an incredible treasure in this society that we're in right now.

To have what used to be called quiet times, which are few and far between, are incredibly important for us now. Times of actually reading God's word and meditating on it.

Really thinking about what does this mean for me? God, open your word to me. Times of prayer as well where we are actually praying about what did God say in that word to me today?

[22 : 00] And to consider his goodness for you. The beauty and goodness of God. Praying with the Psalms that are people who are praying that help you to pray, who know and understand the gift of God saving you, of God's hope that is certain, that is before us.

When we pray for the needs of others in our lives, we are also setting our minds on heaven.

Because we're praying that God's goodness, the goodness of heaven, what he is all about, will be brought into those people's lives that are going through challenge.

And now you might be saying today, I don't feel much like I have been raised with Christ. I don't really feel like I have the life of heaven right now.

And I want to end this little sermon by saying that chapter, verse 3, tells us something that is, that is very, very helpful for us.

It says to us that we have died and that our life is hidden with Christ in God. It is hidden in Christ with God. Whatever does that mean? Well, it means that even in the worst kind of day, and you all may have heard of this book, which my son Alexander loved, called Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day.

[23 : 32] And you all have experienced those days. And those are days when you think, am I raised with Christ? How do I seek the things of heaven, the things of Christ?

And he gives us very helpful things here in saying that we are hidden with Christ. Because being hidden with Christ means three things. Number one, it means that you have actually died to an old life, and you have entered a new one.

When Jesus forgives your sins, he doesn't just clean the slate. He actually brings you from darkness into light. And we don't live a life for ourselves now that's controlled by sin, that old life.

We actually belong to the Lord Jesus in that very, very bad day. We have been adopted by him.

There's a new life and a new orientation which doesn't change with bad days.

And the second thing he says is that we are safe with him in those very bad days, as well as the good days. Being hidden in the Bible talks about being protected.

[24 : 36] So, Psalm 17, David asks God, keep me as the apple of your eye, hide me as the shadow, in the shadow of your wings. He's saying, hide me from the heat of the sun, hide me from those predators that would attack me as well.

And what he says, what he's saying there is that God's salvation, his eternal relationship that he's created with you, is secure. No matter what feeling of danger you might experience, no matter what sense of hopelessness might come into your mind and heart, nothing in all creation can separate you from the love of God that is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what it means to be hidden in the Lord Jesus. Your salvation is secure. And the last aspect of hiddenness is that you are a new creation in that very, very bad day.

The world doesn't see this. You might not see this incredible miracle as well. You only get a glimpse of what you are in Christ. I love the way that C.S. Lewis put it in his famous sermon called The Weight of Glory.

He said, if you were to see what you will look like in your glorified body, the resurrection body, you would be tempted to worship one another if you were to see that today.

[26 : 09] He is talking about the gift of the resurrection of the body. And verse 4 says that one day when Christ who is your life appears, you know, when he's revealed in all glory to the whole world, which is hidden right now, when Jesus appears, you will appear with him in glory.

John says, when we see him, we will be like him. That is an awesome thing. This is the gift of Easter. This is what is ahead of all of us as well.

You will be revealed and you will be like the Lord Jesus. We do not see that completely now. But the hidden truth is that Jesus' righteousness covers you.

That you are looked upon as the beloved daughter or son of God every day by God the Father. And that one day you will be seen in all your glory as well when you see Jesus.

So you see that holding fast to Jesus means that we set our mind on that day that we seek after those things that have to do with that day.

[27 : 22] It means seeking his life for you. And wonderfully it means that every day you are actually living for him, holding fast to him with the immense resurrection power of Jesus at work in you.

May he by his power help you to walk in a way that is pleasing to God the Father to whom belongs all glory honor and praise the glory of the Lord Jesus the glory that you will share one day.

Amen.