

Good News of the Kingdom of God

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[0 : 00] Let's pray as we stand. Living Christ, we ask now that you would come and be amongst us and to show yourself to us in a fresh way.

And we pray that we might hear you and see in you our own security and our hope and even our life. We ask this in your name. Amen.

Well now, if you have your bulletin and want to follow along, we're going to have a look at both those passages back on page 3 that were just read to us.

And it's terrific to be together this morning because what we celebrate is really beyond our power to express.

It's beyond our imagination. It's beyond our hopes and yet it's true. And it touches our deepest needs, our deepest heart with the hopes of God for us.

[1 : 09] The resurrection of Jesus opens the door to a new life and to the kingdom of heaven. And the resurrection is the story of the most profound reversal that the world has ever seen.

And we love reversals. In our movies and in our literature and in our stories, we love reversals. Shakespeare's plays are full of reversals where the audience knows what's happening but the actors don't usually until right at the last moment.

Good movies are full of reversals. Good movies like *The Castle* and *Lord of the Rings* depend on reversals. Movies that are not so good like *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* and *Australia*.

Glad to have said that finally. They depend on reversals. And we love reversals because they echo the great story of God with us, God with the world.

And the whole of the Gospel of Luke is written deliberately to show us this massive work of turning things upside down that Jesus does and to include us so that we will participate in the reversal.

[2 : 30] And my text this morning is in the second little passage, Luke 16, halfway through verse 15, down halfway through the second line, where Jesus says, What is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

Now if you were after a text this morning that was about daffodils and Easter eggs and bunny rabbits, I'm sorry to disappoint you. This is a dark and magnificent saying straight from the lips of Jesus and it tells us two things.

Why we need the resurrection and what the resurrection does for us. Firstly, why do we need the resurrection? The basic reason is we've turned the world upside down.

If you read through Luke chapter 16, in that chapter, Jesus is dealing with our relationship with money and he says that money can make you into a slave.

You cannot serve God and money. And then verse 14, the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard these things. They ridiculed Jesus.

[3 : 48] They scoffed at him. But he said to them, You are those who justify yourselves before men. God knows your heart. What is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

Now we have a pantomime view of the Pharisees. When they come on stage, we mentally boo. But we've got to see that they were deeply religious and highly regarded members of the community.

These were the men in the community who received all the awards. They sat on all the boards. They gave their money generously to charity. They knew their Bibles.

They went to church. They tried to live for God seven days a week. But Jesus accuses them of having life upside down.

He says to them, Even though you are religious, you have put something else in the place of God.

You've got something else at the center of your life. You're building your lives, you religious men, he says, around something other than God.

[4 : 51] Outwardly, they were full of religion and full of good works. But in their hearts, they simply loved money more than anything else. And the real cut in what Jesus says is that he is accusing them of idolatry.

When Jesus uses this word exalted, he says, the idea of being exalted is something that we have lifted up to the highest place in our hearts.

It's not a physical measurement of feet above sea level. It's a spiritual reality of how our hearts work. Jesus is saying that we take things that are perfectly right and good in themselves and we elevate them in our hearts until they enter into a supernatural realm and they take the place of God. What is exalted, says Jesus, is raising up something in your life above everything else, making it so important to you that it begins to function as God.

And this applies to people who are not religious, but it is especially relevant to those who outwardly say, we worship God, but inwardly, actually, there's something else in our lives we raise up higher than God.

[6 : 12] And Jesus says, what is exalted among humans is an abomination in the sight of God. Now, I bet you didn't think you'd hear abomination from the pulpit this morning.

It's not the kind of word we use in casual conversation. It makes me think of those violent video games, you know, grand theft abomination. But this is a word that comes from in the Old Testament, and it's almost always used for worshipping idols, and what it means, literally, is taking something that is beautiful and defiling it, defacing it, corrupting it, contaminating it.

You may have seen the movie Mr. Bean. He is a humble employee of the London National Gallery, and he has to transport a painting, Whistler's Mother, to a gallery in the United States.

I saw this on a plane, and it was a painful thing to watch. But he's by himself with this painting, and he sneezes on it. And so he takes his handkerchief out of his pocket and dabs off the wet on the painting, but his handkerchief has blue ink spilled on it.

And so all this blue ink goes onto Whistler's Mother's face. So he grabs the painting and takes it down and races into a cleaning cupboard and gets some lacquer thinner, puts it on a rag, and rubs it on the face, and the face comes off.

[7 : 47] And there's this great hole in the middle of Whistler's Mother's, where her head ought to be, and he draws a little cartoon face with a big nose and hangs it up again.

And on the plane, when he did it, everyone went, oh! Now, when we go back to the beginning of the Bible, God created us and placed us in his beautiful world so that we would see his face, we would have face-to-face friendship with him and with one another.

He made us to share his love with us and our hearts are shaped for the love of Jesus Christ and to worship him. But what we've done is we've turned things upside down.

And instead of receiving God's good gifts and worshipping and loving God, what we do is we take the good gifts and we fall in love with them and we elevate them to the highest place.

And when we have anything other than Jesus Christ in the highest place, we deface ourselves and we defile the glory of God.

[8 : 59] That's what abomination is. When you hear the word idolatry, most people think of people bowing down before a statue of wood or metal of gold. You know, perhaps one who does not share the vast advantages and benefits of our fabulous education.

And it is true. Sometimes people do fashion out idols out of wood and objects. But the Bible consistently speaks about idolatry as an internal, not so much an external problem.

The Bible speaks about idols of the heart. And when someone worships a block of wood, they're just doing outwardly and visibly what we all do inwardly and internally.

All of us live for something. All of us have something in our lives that we exalt so that it is ultimately important and meaningful for us.

And very often we're completely unaware of it. In fact, it's much easier to see idols in other people than it is in ourselves. If we were to ask ourselves, what are we really living for?

[10 : 08] I'm sure we would come up with a very respectable list. Family, God, friends, just like the Pharisees could. But underneath, our respectable answers, are the things that actually function to make us feel worthwhile.

The things that drive our behavior and drive our priorities and explain our anxieties and why we're so touchy about things. And they're things like the approval of others and control and having the perfect family and lots of money.

And if you look at verses 14 and 15, Jesus shows us how this works. He's just placed his finger on the idol of the Pharisees, which happens to be money.

They say, no, no, we love God. We worship God. Jesus says, your real money, your real God is money. And they ridicule and attack him. This is very important because suddenly, their true God is threatened.

And I think we don't often come to see who our true idols are until they're taken away. And that's why Jesus says in verse 15, you are those who justify yourselves before men because that's what our gods do for us.

[11 : 25] They justify me. They justify my day-to-day life. They give my life its meaning. They make it worthwhile. Those things I have to have or else I'm going to fall to pieces and I don't feel things are justified.

Those things that I look at that in the end I think are going to save me to make me secure and worthwhile and acceptable. And if I cannot have that thing, I'm going to feel very guilty.

And if you block me from having that thing, I'm going to be very angry. There's a very curious public illustration of this on television today. It's called American Idol or Canadian Idol.

If you haven't seen it, it is a television program trying to discover various talent. And I think the creators of the program probably meant the title to mean that if you win, you'll become a pop idol and your thousands of fans will bow down and worship you.

But the irony is, what the program does is it exposes people's true idols. The program seems to draw an amazing number of people with minimum talent. And when they are interviewed before their performances, they say things like this, I have to have this.

[12 : 46] This is what I've been living for. If I don't win this, I'm going to die. And many of them have friends and parents who are standing in the background saying things to them like, you can be anything you want to be if you just believe in yourself.

I've heard contestants say, if I win this, I will never be bullied again. If I win this, my father will finally be proud of me.

If I win this, I will finally be somebody. And then they go in before the judges and most of them are just woeful. And then they begin to beg the judges for a second chance as though that's going to make any difference.

And when they're turned down, they're absolutely devastated. And they go out of the judges' room weeping and wailing and screaming.

They smash things. They swear. I've heard death threats for the judges because they have built their lives around this thing that's justified their lives.

[13 : 58] The one thing they've exalted to the place where if I get that, it's going to assure me that I really am good. And that's now been taken away. They rage and they tantrum and the audiences eat it up week by week.

And of course, we are much more sophisticated. We would never dream of being exposed like that. But it is exactly the same for us. All of us have something that we have exalted, something which we hope will justify us, something that we have to have and therefore we are enslaved to it because we've made it our God.

Something without which my life doesn't have any meaning. And if it is not Christ, it will deface us. That's why we need the resurrection.

Because once we become slaves and have to have the thing that we've exalted, we are powerless to demote it. We cannot throw off our idols.

We just don't have that power. It takes a power stronger than all of us have, a power over life, a power over death. It takes the resurrection of Jesus. So that's why we need the resurrection.

[15 : 15] And secondly, what does the resurrection do? Very simply, the resurrection turns all things up the right way. By raising Jesus from the dead, God has raised him to a position which is far above all rule and all authority and all gods.

In the resurrection of Jesus, God takes all our idols and plows them into the grave and exalts Jesus to his rightful place as the only true Lord, the only true King, the only true Saviour.

You can see some of this in the first reading at the top of the page in chapter 24. To say that the resurrection of Jesus was a complete surprise and a complete reversal of expectations is a massive understatement.

None of the followers of Jesus were expecting Jesus to be raised from the dead despite the fact that at least three times he has been absolutely clear. We're going up to Jerusalem.

I will be crucified and three days later I will be raised from the dead. Not one man, not one woman in his group believed it. So when the women went to the tomb on the third day, they went to embalm a corpse and they were absolutely dumbstruck when the angels appeared saying, why on earth are you looking for the living among the dead?

[16:44] Don't you remember what he told you? And even when the women go back to the other disciples, they dismiss the women saying crazy things, which just goes to prove that the resurrection created the church and not the other way around.

And so in this little passage, later that day, the eleven are gathered with some other disciples in the upper room. And this is what happens. If you look at verse 36, as they were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them and they were startled and frightened and supposed they saw a spirit. And he said to them, why are you troubled? Why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that is I myself. Handle me and see. A spirit has not flesh and bones as you see I have.

There's a lovely phrase. And while they still disbelieved for joy and wondered, he said to them, have you got anything here to eat? And there was some fish on the barbecue and he took it and ate it. It seems that Jesus wants us to know that this is not merely a mystical vision. This is not just a natural process of spring blossoming and budding.

[18:01] It's not a ghost escape from the grave. It's not a lucky escape for someone who's just putting off death for later on. This is the greatest reversal the world has ever seen.

He's not just a crucified man back either. It's not some zombie. And it's not just that there's life beyond the grave. This is the bodily resurrection of the man Jesus Christ and this resurrection body is a new resurrection existence.

It's the beginning of a new creation. And the thing about the new creation we've got to know is that Jesus Christ is exalted to the highest place in it. And throughout Luke's gospel, this is what Jesus has come to do, to bring the great reversal.

Do you remember, he was not born in Caesar's palace. He was born in a manger, in a food trough. Caesar thought that he was God. But Jesus is showing that his kingship, Jesus' true kingship, does not come through oppression and political power.

That salvation and peace come through the reversal of Jesus' coming. And Mary sings, in that first chapter, God has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the humble and meek.

[19:19] He fills the hungry with good things, and the rich he sends away empty. They go away empty because they cannot let go of their idols. In Jesus' ministry, in his teaching, his miracles, they are the reversals of the way things work.

So when Jesus goes and touches the leper and heals him, it's not just an act of kindness. He's reversing sickness to show what the kingdom of God is like.

When Jesus passes by a funeral procession and he raises the young son of a widow from the dead, it's not just a random act of compassion.

Jesus is reversing death to show what the kingdom of God is like. And when Jesus drives out demons and reverses our spiritual slavery, and when he claims power to forgive sins, he's reversing all those things that hold us captive.

That's why he has to be put to death. It's obvious that he is the one we're really looking for. He's the only one that truly deserves to be exalted to the highest place in our hearts.

[20:31] But if we're going to hold on to our other gods, if our other gods are going to have any chance whatsoever, we're going to have to do away with him. And of all the events in the Gospel of Luke, the greatest reversal is the day of resurrection.

It's a massive value judgment by God the Father on all those other things we build our lives around. Some years ago, there was a student prank in a US department store.

The night before graduation, a group of students broke into a department store. And you might have heard me tell this story before. They didn't destroy anything, but what they did was they went and they exchanged every price tag.

They took price tags off the most precious things and put them on the cheapest things and the cheapest things and put them on the most precious things. And when the store opened in the morning, there was complete pandemonium until someone realized what had happened.

And that's exactly what we have done. We have taken the cheapest things and we've exalted them to the highest value. And in the resurrection, God shows us that Jesus alone deserves to be exalted.

[21 : 44] God shows how he is going to rearrange the universe and he lifts Jesus up to the highest place. He says, here is the one you may build your lives on. Here is the only one who will give you your true worth.

He's the only thing precious enough to justify you and to satisfy you. The resurrection is a massive vindication of Jesus. It means that everything he said in his life is true.

All the things he said about the forgiveness of sins, about the heavenly banquet. The resurrection is God saying, in the death of Jesus, in the cross, you are justified.

You cannot justify yourself for your perfect family or by your achievement or by your self-success or by your beauty or by your wealth. None of these things can justify, but Jesus is more than all we need.

In him is our true salvation. In him is our true acceptance. In him is our meaning. In him is our worthiness. He's the one we're looking for. That's why the power of Jesus' death and resurrection can change our hearts.

[22 : 51] He can come to the highest place in our lives. And when he does, all those other good things are demoted from being saviors to becoming what they are, good gifts.

This is how the resurrection becomes real for us. Just look down at verse 16 for a moment. This is in the second passage. The law and the prophets were until John.

Since then, the good news of the kingdom of God is preached and everyone enters it violently.

Jesus says that history divides in two around his coming.

Before his coming were the law and the prophets where God said, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, but we cannot do it. But since John the Baptist, since Jesus has come, the good news of the kingdom is being preached because Jesus is God's king and everyone who hears the good news and sees Jesus as he really is the king of God presses into the kingdom.

Does violence to the other gods presses into the kingdom. We begin to see that God has raised Jesus up. He is the most important thing and we want to make him the center of our lives.

[24 : 13] We want to build our lives around him and so we press into the kingdom. This is very important. Christian life is not a matter of trying harder and doing things better.

We don't have the power to reverse our lives. We do not say tomorrow I'm not going to be driven by approval and materialism and moralism or whatever it is.

the only way for us to have the reversal in our lives is to press into the kingdom of God. It's to come to Christ and to say Christ will you be the center of my life and to make him our justification.

Our hearts were made for him. Every other thing that we have exalted cannot save us. It cannot justify us. But on this Easter morning we rejoice together because Christ alone deserves to be exalted above all.

If you have Christ he will forgive you. He will fulfill you. That is why he has come. It is Jesus who will justify you. And so we join all of heaven and we join God himself in exalting Jesus Christ.

[25 : 31] And we believe in our hearts that God has raised him from the dead. And we confess with our lips that Jesus Christ is in the highest place. That he has been given the name above every name.

And that to him belongs all glory and all power and all might and all majesty and all blessing and all riches and all honour and all grace now and forever.

Amen. O Lord our God we thank you for the revelation of your word. For the life-giving eternal truth you so gently and directly give us.

We confess dear Lord the oft-confused condition of our hearts. We acknowledge that at times we crave idols and lose our way in the success of those pursuits and our hearts are hardened.

We acknowledge as well that at times when our pursuits are thwarted when we hit a low spot and doubt any success or achievement or meaning in our lives our hearts are also hardened.

[26 : 33] we come before you dear Lord the eyes of our hearts open by your word to say with Job the spirit of God has made me and the breath of the almighty gives me life.

Lord in your mercy. May we be like the men who walked with the Lord Jesus on the road to Emmaus and said did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road while he

opened to us the scriptures.

Father almighty we praise you for Jesus Christ our Lord the great physician who not only diagnoses our hearts but in his death has rescued us healed us totally and completely and in his rising restores and refreshes us and invites us to rest in him all our days.

Lord in your mercy. we pray this morning for the world we rejoice for the love that is expressed in every corner every day and praise you for your restraining hand on evil and yet in the same breath we grieve for the evil that thrives.

We pray for family members friends and acquaintances who are in troubled places may they and we find our hope in you almighty God as our Lord Jesus promised in me you may have peace in the world you have tribulation but be of good cheer I have overcome the world.

[27 : 58] We pray that the kingdom of God may be built up through the work of missionaries. Here in the St. John's family we pray for Richie Spidell and his student and leadership ministry with Navigators and for Marian Maxwell and her service to women at risk and their babies in Vancouver through the ministry of Genesis House.

Lord in your mercy. We pray for Canada and for those who hold power in our nation our province and our city we ask that they may see and understand that true power lies with you and may they take pause and turn to you in decision making.

Thank you Father for the permanence and power of your word and for the men and women amongst us who have committed to studying it as their current life endeavor. May your gentle hand be upon all who are engaged in academic endeavors and may you especially give peace to those making decisions about future ministry or further studies.

Lord in your mercy we bring to you dear Lord our city one that has known disheartening violence for too many weeks now. May hearts that are lonely angry vengeful or desperate for meaning be touched by your spirit.

May those you have called as your own in this city both speak and live the gospel in a manner that the needy are touched and healed and acts of love replace acts of violence.

[29 : 25] We pray Lord that in the churches of the Anglican Network and also in those of the Diocese of New Westminster your spirit would soften transform refresh and embolden hearts to proclaim your word.

We ask that the deceptive ploys of the evil one would be held in check and the love and the joy of the kingdom of God would prevail. Lord in your mercy only you dear Lord can effectively knit together a people such as you you have called to be this church St. John's may we rejoice together love and uphold each other share each other's suffering bear each other's burdens may you strengthen protect and give wisdom to David to Dan Jim and Richard and the church council and to us all as your word and your spirit equip each of us for service we ask your healing supporting and guiding hand on all here who are ill or face difficult emotional relational physical or financial situations we remember these by name Gene Peggy Paul Rowena Ron Ben Marguerite and we ask that the light of your truth and the depth of your love may touch in a new way and lift up in a powerful way those we now bring before you privately in silence

Lord in your mercy we praise and honor you heavenly father the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus our great shepherd we rejoice in you gracious God you who have sought us found us called us rescued us and welcomed us and now dwell in us through your spirit may you equip us with everything good that we may do your will help us to take heed lest our hearts be deceived and we turn aside and serve other gods and worship them may we humble ourselves and cling to you that as we rest in you you will work in us that which is pleasing in your sight through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever Amen