

The Power of Christ's Resurrection

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[0 : 00] I wonder if you would take your service sheet and turn back to page 3, to the passage from Philippians that Deb read just a moment ago. Philippians 3. And as you do that, I want to reassure anyone who has health concerns regarding communion.

You know, a number of churches have abandoned communion this weekend, for a whole number of reasons. But we will be sharing the meal that Christ gave us, with this small difference, that instead of all of us partaking of the one cup, individual cups have been provided for everyone who wishes to receive it.

And I'm grateful to the Sanctuary Guild for working so hard on this. So this is what will happen. When you come forward for communion, you will need to pick up a little tiny individual cup, grape juice on the trays, wine in the silver platters, and bring your cup forward to the rail or to the two side places where we receive communion.

And when the person with the bread comes around, put your hand flat and we'll put the bread on it, you receive the bread. And then as someone comes, the assistant comes by and says the words of administration, if you would drink the cup, and return the empty cups to baskets, which will be available all around the place.

There are some people who think we're being overcautious, but if you're going to catch anything at St. John's, we want you to catch something that is for your good, eternal benefit. Now for that reason, we're going to turn to Philippians chapter 3, and I'm going to focus on verses 10 and 11.

[1 : 37] The Apostle says about Jesus Christ, And I hope you noticed, when Deb read the passage, it is full of purpose, and full of intention, and full of aim.

And the Apostle Paul has been captured and captivated by the person of Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection, and it saturates his life with a deep sense of purpose, and he says, I want to know Jesus Christ.

Now despite the best efforts of the management and leadership industry, very few of us have a clearly articulated aim in life. Some of us spend a great deal of time and money trying to find an aim that might be inspiring, motivating, and compelling.

A few years ago, the Short family were rafting down in Jackson's Hole in Wyoming, and the young man who was the captain of the ship, who had our lives in his hands, did not seem to be aware of the fact that most of us on his little craft would like to finish the ride with our lives intact.

So I tried to engage him in a little conversation, and I asked him what his plans were, which I thought was a neutral way to open the conversation.

[3 : 10] So he announced to his captive audience, as we went over rocks and all sorts of other things, that he had four short-term life goals. I can only remember three of them.

One was to complete the Iron Man Triathlon in Hawaii. The second was to climb K2. And the third was to complete the Iditarod dog sled race in Alaska.

And I need to tell you, that was not at all comforting. So I thought I might ask him what he was going to do after that, but my wife's face, the look on her face, helped me to keep my silence.

Now I think it's probably charitable to say that that young man is not normal. And what I mean by that is that most of us just muddle along without a great deal of purpose.

And if we do have a real aim in life, we're a bit embarrassed to let too many other people know about it. And I think that may be one of the reasons for the great success of the reality shows on television.

[4 : 15] At last count, there are 36 currently. And I don't think the network executives have sat down and said, we want to find a way to get the public to reflect philosophically on their lives.

I don't think that's the purpose for it. I don't think... Well, let me tell you my suggestion. I think that we watch these things because it makes us feel better about the fact that we are as miserably aimless as other people.

The reason we've gathered today is because Christ died for our sins and has risen from the dead. And by doing that, God has caught us up in something magnificent and beyond our imagination, something that is solid and eternal, something which permeates our lives with value and purpose. And in this passage, the apostle states his aim, which comes out of this, in two different ways. The first is, his life's aim is to know Christ.

That's the purpose of verse 10, that I may know him. He doesn't say, I want to know things about Jesus. He says, I want to know him, which is much more than creed.

[5 : 35] It's much more than an intellectual issue. Because, you see, the fact that Jesus has risen from the dead means he's more than just a historical figure and more than just a proposition.

The apostle Paul is speaking about personal acquaintance. And his great aim in life and his ultimate goal in life is to know Jesus Christ, to have the closest possible association with the living Jesus Christ.

In the Bible, the word know is not just an intellectual knowing of the facts. It's a deeply and intensely personal word. To know someone is to have a close personal relationship.

And I am painfully aware of how inadequate my words are to describe this reality. But you must have this in your mind, that Easter is about our relationship with Jesus Christ.

If you miss that, you miss everything. Because Christianity is not a religion that can be confined to the brain or to the will or to the feelings or to our experience.

[6 : 47] Christianity is not a view of the world. It's not a certain outlook that you draw on from time to time when things get difficult. It's not a moral system of spiritual precepts.

It's not a life given even to admiring Jesus and his great teaching and miracles. It is this. It is a relationship with the risen Jesus Christ.

And it's a relationship where he imparts his life to us. He communicates the reality of his risen life into our hearts and our lives and our minds and our souls and our spirits.

Into our longings and our desires and our aims and our goals. What we are talking about is the closest possible union between two people which you cannot confine to parts of your life.

Which becomes the centre out of which we live. That is what the apostle means when he says I want to know Christ. Because you see, from the beginning of the Bible God's clear purpose in creating this world and creating us in this world was to bind us to himself in friendship.

[7 : 56] Deep, eternal, loving relationship. He is the source of life. He is the source of light. He is the source of glory. And all things good.

And at the heart of what is wrong with me and at the heart of what is wrong with you and the people sitting next to you and everyone in this world is that we turn away from his love and his truth and we pretend that he does not know what he is saying and that he doesn't deserve to be God and we treat him as though he wasn't there and at the heart of all that we do we do not relate to him as God.

You may have seen this week in Australia a young woman by the name of Natasha Ryan turned up. She disappeared in 1998 as a 14 year old and when she disappeared there was a nationwide search involving thousands of people and half a million dollars.

In May 2000 after years of shattered hopes her parents and family held a memorial service on what would have been her 17th birthday and at the service her mother made a telling comment that it was not possible that she was alive she would have let me know and not let me go through all this pain.

Police have arrested a man and charged him for her murder and during his trial police received an anonymous tip that Natasha was alive living secretly with her boyfriend just kilometres away from her family home.

[9 : 29] True story and after a very painful family reunion Natasha has insisted on going back and living with her boyfriend and is now taking offers from the tabloid media to tell her story.

Film offers are next and there are photographs now of her frolicking on the beach. It's an amazing story and I think it is an excellent picture of how we treat God.

All the time that Natasha lived secretly she was living a lie and the issue is not whether she was very well behaved as she lived with her boyfriend the issue was that every day she was hiding from

her searching family and daily wounding that relationship.

And Jesus tells us that he has come from heaven to seek and to save those who are lost and he gives his life to bring us back into union with God and the issue for us is not that we are moral decent upright people who invest in ethical funds but whether we have been ignoring what Jesus has done for us pretending that we don't have a heavenly father frolicking on the beach without a thought for who God is without a care that God is searching or without a thought for whether we are found.

Look at verse 9 the apostle says I want to be found in him not having a righteousness of my own based on law but that which is through faith in Christ the righteousness from God.

[11 : 09] He says look there are two kinds of righteousness he says one is my own where I build the good things that I've done and the other is from God which I receive by faith in Christ.

And he says at one time in my life I was building the account on this side and it was proof positive that I was hiding from God. But God has offered his righteousness to us in the person of Jesus Christ and I receive that when I see his rescue.

I think people think that somehow the death of Jesus deals with our bad deeds but we also have to compensate with a bunch of good deeds. So you know we have to show that we're genuine. God does a bit and we do a bit.

But remember this is the Apostle Paul who's writing whose religious pedigree and religious achievement would outshine any ten of us in this building.

Verse 7 speaking about his religious attainment he says whatever gain I had I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

[12 : 26] He says by seeking to build my righteousness by seeking to try to make myself acceptable to God I was not only doing the impossible I was wounding the relationship.

He said I climbed to the very top of the ladder of religious performance and discovered the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall and when we meet the risen Christ all those things that we used to think were on the credit side of our religious account suddenly move over to the debit side.

Because you see those very things obscure us receiving the grace of God and they help us hide from him. All my morality and all my good deeds and all my bookkeeping are a dead loss in bringing me into friendship with God.

Friendship with God comes through what Christ has done in his death and in his resurrection. And when we place our faith in him Christ imparts that new life to us and he becomes the object of our faith and confidence.

I have used this quote before but Leon Tolstoy says he describes his conversion like this Five years ago I came to believe in Christ and my life suddenly changed.

[13 : 44] I ceased to desire what I formerly desired and I began to desire what I formerly did not want. What had previously seemed good to me seemed evil and what seemed evil seemed good.

It happens to a man he says it happened to me as it happens to a man who goes out on some business and on the way decides the business is unnecessary and returns home. All that was on his right is now on his left and all that was on his left is now on his right.

That's what it is to know Christ. It's not a slight adjustment in our outlook. It's not an addition to our already very full lives. It is the new life that comes from our living bond and union with Christ.

And you may be wondering what does that have to do with Easter? And that brings me to my second point. The apostles' aim was not just to know Christ secondly the apostles' aim was to be raised with Christ.

You look at verse 10 again that I may know him and the power of his resurrection. May share his sufferings becoming like him in his death that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

[14 : 59] When he says if possible I may attain the resurrection he's not doubting that he will be raised he's just not sure of the method which was very much on his mind because he was in prison maybe looking at execution.

And he says what I'm going to attain is the resurrection from out of the dead. It's a unique phrase. And it highlights the fact that the resurrection which is the Christian hope is a bodily resurrection where our bodies will be raised and transformed.

And I need to say to you on Easter Sunday that the New Testament makes very plain that the tomb was empty and that the Christ bodily appeared to his disciples in the new glorious resurrection

body.

and it's that that created the Christian church not the other way around. The belief in the resurrection is not just a vague spiritual belief in life after death.

It's not some view that Jesus is a martyr who's been taken up to heaven. It's not a statement about one person going through death and out the other side. It's about something real that happened in this world.

[16 : 04] The Christian gospel is not just a spiritual idea. It is a gospel for our bodies. Very different from the eastern view that material reality is my illusion.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead shows that we are not immortal. That our souls don't just float on forever. That we are not caught up in a cycle endless of reincarnation.

But that for those who know Jesus Christ we too will be raised and these frail and fragile and decaying bodies will be remade and transformed to be deathless, eternal, sinless and glorious.

But that is only half the point. The point that the apostle is making here is that that final resurrection from the dead is the end of a spiritual process that begins now.

Now it's at this point that I lost the previous congregation and I need you to focus very carefully with me. Take a deep breath. Faith in Jesus Christ involves us not in one resurrection but two.

[17 : 28] For the Christian believer there are two resurrections. one is the outward bodily resurrection at the last day but the second is the inward spiritual resurrection that we receive when we come to faith in Jesus Christ here and now.

Christian faith is not just pie in the sky when you die by and by. It's knowing Christ now. It's him sharing his resurrection life with us now.

It means knowing the daily reality of his death and his resurrection that's what verse 10 means. He wants to know Jesus and the power of his resurrection now and the communion of his sufferings even now.

Some people think that the Christian life is just looking back to a nice historical event and kind of hoping something good for the future. It is not. It is a life of growing deeper day by day in our living union with Jesus Christ.

See, he breathes his new life into us. His life enters our very souls and our spirits and it gives us desires that we never had before. We find that we want to love God, that we want to obey him.

[18 : 44] We even find other Christians we find ourselves able to love other Christians. That's what it means to know the power of his resurrection.

It's this life, it's now. We find ourselves having a strange sense of homelessness in this world and we long for heaven. We find ourselves giving up certain practices for the sake of Christ and we see in Jesus Christ day by day all the beauty and the majesty and the wisdom and the loveliness of God.

God. But you see, the daily experience of the power of his resurrection is not something different from the daily experience of sharing his sufferings. They are the one and the same thing.

The way in which we experience the power of his resurrection is in and through the suffering. It's hard for us to see this because we use power in a different way.

I think when we talk about power today we mean one of two things. We usually speak about power as tremendous and destructive force. Power of God is not like that.

[19 : 52] It's connected to his love and his mercy and his grace and his kindness and his steadfast love and his compassion. It's the power at work in his suffering children. And the other way we use power today is we speak about personal power and life coaching.

I discovered recently there are 25,000 life coaches in the United States and last November the International Coaching Federation had a three-day conference in Atlanta.

I tell you this so that you might go to the next one. There are extreme life coaches. There are geek whisperers who advise engineers.

and there was a wild dolphin coach who helped humans mimic the joyful energy of dolphins. And when asked the purpose of the conference one of the coaches from Princeton said we are here to champion each other so that we can all live full fabulous self expressed lives.

I think we're going to change the mission statement from St. John's. No we're not. I'm trying to point out that the power of God is not about that. It's the power that you see as people face incredible difficulty and yet hold on to God.

[21 : 13] It's the power as Christ dies innocently for those he loves. It's the power where God takes his beloved son out of the grave and raises him.

And it is the power at work in every believer even in the suffering transforming us in the suffering and transforming the suffering to us. That is why all the treasures of God's wisdom are hidden in him.

That is why you can never come to the end of knowing Jesus Christ. That is why he is the fountain of all grace and all strength and that is why he is utterly, utterly inexhaustible.

There is only one person in this world in whom all the riches of God are found. There is only one person in the universe in whom the whole fullness of God dwelt bodily.

There is only one person in the universe who has come to heaven for us and has tasted our temptation and tasted our suffering and tasted even the bitterness of our death for us.

[22 : 18] there is only one person whom God has raised to his right hand and there is only one person who is coming again to whom all knees will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

We need to ask ourselves on this Easter Sunday and I need to ask you do you know Christ? have you received that righteousness that he offers by faith in him or are you still trying that weary game of building up your account before him?

Can you say that you have a daily living connection with the person of Jesus Christ? Do you see in him all the grace and the beauty and the mercy of God or are you still trying to hide from him treating him as a part-time God and wounding the relationship?

I mean have you responded to his love and his forgiveness because he does not force us and it doesn't come to us irrespective of our response.

I want to invite you this morning as you come forward and you receive the tokens of his death and his resurrection to tell him you want to know him.

[23 : 37] Ask him to share his risen life with you. Pray that you might be made like him in his death. That you might see in Jesus Christ God's wisdom and majesty and beauty and strength and grace.

And plead with him as I will that we might be able to say with the apostle I count everything as loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord.

To him be glory and majesty in this world and in the world to come forever and ever. Amen.