

The Resurrection Gives Us New Birth

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[0 : 0 0] Father, help us by your word, by our fellowship one with another, by our sharing in the partaking of the bread and the wine, and by our prayers, to know your risen presence among us, and that the joy which we celebrate outwardly we might be aware of and sensitive to deeply in our hearts.

We ask this in the name of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. This has been a wonderful weekend in the Church with a lovely Babette's Feast-like Seder Supper on Thursday, our Good Friday services, this celebration which began with the wonderful decorating of the Church yesterday, which was a delight to be a part of, and I might say of myself, a very small part indeed, but it was delightful to be there, and then it's a great delight to have you all for this service this morning, where I'm informed by Ernie that only two out of sixteen Easter mornings has the sun ever shone.

So, that you might know that the joy of this day comes out of the darkness of our hearts when the light of Christ shines into them.

Do you remember Black Monday, when we all listened to the television and watched the radio and heard the report of the stock market in Tokyo, and the report of the stock market in Hong Kong, and the report of the stock market in London, and the report of the stock market in New York, and the expectation that the report of the stock market in Vancouver wouldn't change the trend.

But there it was, that it went around the world, and everybody watched as fear went around the world, and a terrible sort of want of confidence gripped people's hearts, and they wondered what the end of it would be.

[2 : 3 6] I would love Easter to be exactly the opposite of that, that as the sun goes on its round, the good news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, instead of spreading gloom and despair, might bring great joy and happiness to our whole world.

The reason is that all that they had to do in the days of Black Monday was to communicate fear. But what we have to do on Easter Day is to come to encounter the person of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, and to communicate the wonderful reality of what God has done by raising him from the dead.

And it's important that each of us should take hold of that. Well, we live in a world where we have had a wonderful experiment in this century, and thank God this century is almost over.

an experiment in which we said, we can do it ourselves. It's no longer people that are wrong, it's the circumstances they have to live in.

And if we will change those circumstances, we will change people. So there's been tremendous improvements. Improved housing, improved clothing, improved diet, improved education, improved health care, improved security, all those things have come to change the environment in which people live their lives.

[4 : 0 9] And then somebody offers \$10 million to blow up an airliner in the midst of it. And the fear of a poison grape in Philadelphia grips a continent.

And somehow, our environment has become more controlled, but it hasn't changed what's at the heart. And what's at the heart of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that the thing that has got to change is not the world in which you live, the clothes you wear, the cities you live in, the transportation you enjoy.

What's got to happen has got to happen right at the heart of who you are and who I am, who all of us are, who all the people on this globe are.

And that's why I want you to look on this Easter morning at this passage from Titus chapter 3, verse 4 following, page 201, in the few Bibles that you have in front of you.

Paul says then and he says now that human nature is characterized in verse 3 by being.

[5 : 20] Foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another.

That's why fear runs through the whole community of this globe and grips it so often. We are afraid. But Paul says this is what the resurrection morning means.

Verse 4, read it carefully. May it be burned into your mind and conscience. This is what Easter is about. In verse 4, the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior has appeared when the stone is rolled away and Christ is risen.

We see what we have never seen before. We recognize that something wonderful has happened and this has happened to change people.

It's the goodness and loving kindness of God. The word in there is philanthropy. If I was a philanthropist and gave you \$8,000 this morning, that would be a wonderful thing for which I would long be remembered.

[6 : 30] But the nature of God's philanthropy, as it's spoken of here, is that he deals not just with the masses, but with the individual.

God has shown his goodness and loving kindness to the individual person through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We are beginning to recognize in our world a new kind of nature of disease.

Disease isn't measles, mumps, and scarlet fever anymore. It isn't infantile paralysis or smallpox or anything like that. Far worse diseases seem to afflict us at this end of the 20th century when so much has happened in the world of medicine.

There's the Ben Johnson disease. There's the disease that destroys marriages. There's the disease that poisons our environment.

We poison the place we live. There is the failure of our immune systems. There is a... There is... You can sort of imagine that one of the great sort of technical breakthroughs would be to bring up someone in a perfect environment, never subject to disease of any kind.

[7 : 54] And if you did that for three score years and ten, what would you have? Would you have a monster? Or would you have somebody afflicted with a perpetually endless life?

Hard to imagine, isn't it? Well, these things have so infiltrated our world. Depression is a major disease. Meaninglessness is a major disease.

Despair is a huge disease that we spend countless millions trying to deal with. But what Paul says in Titus 3, verse 4, the kindness, the loving kindness and goodness of God our Savior has appeared.

There is an absolutely new resource. Did you read the wonderful story of fission and fusion in the paper this week? And the suggestion by one scientist, I'm not going to guarantee these figures, but one square foot of water would produce the energy of 10,000 tons of coal if we could develop this.

A whole new resource. Well, infinitely beyond that kind of resource is the resource that is ours because God in Christ has overcome death.

[9 : 19] And that victory is to be appropriated into all our lives. With the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the power and purpose of God has been revealed.

And it's no longer that he's going to send a flood or a fire and destroy us, but that God has a purpose which is an eternal kingdom and his purpose in us right here and right now is to fit us for that kingdom.

Not to tolerate us until we become utterly intolerable, but to so work in us that we might be fit for the kingdom that he has prepared for us and for which he prepares us.

Look at how he has done that. He's done it by, and if you look at it carefully, you'll see, he's done it by, not by deeds done by us in righteousness.

That is, the church is not a self-improvement society where you're encouraged to be a little bit better than you were last week. And even though that might be very commendable and all your friends might appreciate it, nevertheless, there's something infinitely more to it than that.

[10 : 45] What has happened is that God in his mercy has given us the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.

That's something that God has done. And God shows that to us in his mercy. Now, I think if you were suing somebody for a million dollars, you would not likely become aware of their good feelings towards you.

Even though they might have them deep down, they sure wouldn't show them to you. And I don't think many of us are aware of the nature of God's love for us because we're so angry at it.

We don't like the way he's treated us. We don't like the way he treats people around us. We're prepared to sue him for everything he's got. And in this anger and in this hostility, we fail to see the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior and how he has acted towards us in his mercy.

And what he has done for us in his mercy is he's given us a bath. I remember talking. This was a memorable use of the word bath.

[12 : 03] A bright, young financier with lots of money behind him came out in about 1980 or 81 and went up to that center of all prosperity, Whistler, British Columbia, and he sunk all his money into Whistler.

He came back two years later and he looked at me and shook his head and said, I have taken a bath. The whole course of his life was changed.

Well, that's this kind of bath, but it's the bath of new life, of new birth. It's baptism into something brand new. And God has given us this bath of new birth, which is outwardly and visibly represented by baptism.

And what happens in baptism is that you die in order to live. In baptism, you give up your death-centered life in order to share Christ's life-centered death.

That's why you're going to be asked to take the bread and the wine in your hands, that which Christ gave in his death, that you in your death might find life.

[13 : 24] That's the bath. That's the event of the new birth. And not only is there that event, but there is with it something that sustains and keeps us, and that is what God does by the renewing of his Holy Spirit.

There is new birth so that you are no longer subject to the tyranny of sin and death, but you share in the resurrected life of Jesus Christ.

You've taken a bath. The old is dead. You are alive in Christ. And as one who is alive in Christ, you are daily renewed by the Holy Spirit.

That's what's to happen to you. This Holy Spirit, God, it says, has poured upon us richly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, the risen Christ whom we encounter, the proof of the resurrection for you.

So, somebody said to me yesterday, somebody who means a lot to me, do you ever doubt?

[14 : 38] And I said to say, yeah, I doubt a great deal. I have all sorts of doubts. But I also experience the renewing of the Holy Spirit, bringing my life back from its self-centered doubt and despair into a recognition of who God is and that he was here before me and he'll be here after me and my life finds its meaning in his purpose no matter what that involves.

And so, I am able to share in the reality of the resurrection in four very simple ways. After Christ's resurrection, he appeared to the disciples, then he ascended into heaven and they knew Christ day after day after day, his presence with them in four ways.

They broke bread together as we break bread this morning. And he was known to them in the breaking of bread. They listened to the apostolic witness to the person of Jesus Christ as we are listening in this passage from Titus to the apostolic witness to the person of Jesus Christ.

They had fellowship one with another as those who believed in Christ and they prayed. And in all four ways, they became aware of the risen Christ in their presence.

And we continue in that. That's who we are. That's why we're gathered here this morning. Not to celebrate something that happened 2,000 years ago, but to celebrate that because that happened 2,000 years ago.

[16 : 18] We stand in the presence of the word of God to receive the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, to pray together and to have fellowship one with another. And in that, to celebrate our risen Christ standing among us by his Holy Spirit.

That's the proof of the resurrection. You may want something much more dramatic, but that's where it is. So don't waste your time looking for something much more dramatic.

Pray, participate, have fellowship, and be taught from the scriptures. Well, when you finish the passage, you look and see, well, what just has God done?

Because this whole passage talks about what God has done. It says that he in his loving kindness and goodness has appeared to us. It says that he, our God, is our Savior, that as our Savior, he has acted in saving us, that in virtue of his own mercy, he gives to us new birth as we come to share the risen life of Christ.

He renews us daily by the Holy Spirit, which he pours out upon us richly through Christ our Savior. He justifies us by his grace.

[17 : 38] He makes us heir, giving us the present hope of eternal life that belongs to us now. That's what he does. What do we do?

We take a bath. We accept baptism. We accept this as the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual reality of God's regenerating us in terms of by the same power that he raised Jesus from the dead, he raises us from the life of sin to the life of Christ.

That's what we do. We accept this bath, this baptism, and we daily seek renewal of the Holy Spirit in communion, in prayer, in fellowship, and in scripture.

scripture. Now, you may be an altruist. You may be one who says, well, I don't care what God, what happens to me.

I'd like God to deal with those people over there who are in so much trouble, and I'd like God to deal with those people over there who are in so much trouble, and I'd like God to deal with this person who is in misery and in bondage, and I'd like God to help that person who is addicted and hopelessly trapped.

[19 : 08] Well, I want to remind you of one thing which I think is desperately important. You may not care what happens to you, but probably the greatest gift that you could give to those around you is to be changed yourself, to allow God to do his work in your life before you try and get him to do his work in somebody else's life.

The greatest blessing for your wife, your children, your friends, your business associates and your neighbors would be if you were allowed God to do that work in your life.

So, I think that's the way God wants to work, God to do in us what has to be done before he can do through us what it is undoubtedly his purpose to do.

So, on this Easter day, I invite you to share in the resurrection, to share in the resurrection by accepting anew. this baptism, this bath of regeneration, the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, that God has for you and that God purposes and intends to give you.

The resurrection, the celebration of the resurrection of Christ is not just to celebrate what happened to him when God raised him from the dead. it's to celebrate what that means to you as God brings you to new life and as God renews you by his Holy Spirit.

[21 : 05] You're jaded, you're worn out, you're disillusioned, you're full of doubt, despair, the diseases of our generation, you're full of all those things, maybe. Might I invite you in Christ's name to beg God to give you what it is his delight to give to you.

And that is on the basis of your having professed your faith in Christ, that you will seek today in a new way that renewal in the Holy Spirit.

You will claim it as being your rightful inheritance by reason of the mercy of God. Do that as you partake of the communion.

Do that as you share one with another. Do that as you meditate upon the word. Do that as in the quiet of your own hearts you pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[22 : 15] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Let us pray. Lord, this is a thanksgiving prayer because I was depleted of hope, exhausted of vitality.

I think some strength might be found in memories by your grave. Evil seems to have been triumphant and found a method of giving us an everlasting burden, that is, having to be satisfied with ourselves alone.

All reverence, all awe seems gone, nowhere to be found, given the hammer blows. We cannot be with you.

Yet the messenger stops and speaks to say, look, find, and keep a new gift of life.

[23 : 34] Jesus is alive. Soon you will learn to say, it is no longer I that lives, but Christ that lives in me. Let us say that together.

It is no longer I that lives, but Christ that lives in me. Thank you, Lord, that you do not make impossible codes of behavior for us and thereby make morality empty.

rather, you have empowered us to be whole persons, morally fit to be in each other's company and in yours.

As scripture says of our relationship with you, Lord, Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Lord Jesus, Lord Jesus, therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old yeast, nor with the yeast of malice and wickedness, but rather with the bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and love.

Lord Jesus, you have given us freedom from destructive habits and from enslaving passions and from following lies.

[24 : 55] These are nauseating things. They killed you, they kill us, and others all around. You gave us freedom from, not that we might drift, but that have freedom too.

We're going somewhere now. We're going somewhere attractive. We're going to redemptive habits and to uplifting passions and to follow truth.

Lord, we'll take a moment to see if we've heard you. These things give us something exciting.

Truth is better than lies. Truth is precious. It is fragile. It is hard to find and keep.

That you have given us truth by way of a person, yourself, Lord Jesus, who conquered death, is a marvelous wonder. Our culture, indeed the whole world, seeks refreshment, Lord, in our souls.

[26 : 11] And you have given us a way to do this by the renewal of the Holy Spirit. There are many burdens and unmet hopes in this church, Lord, right here, right now, in these pews and seats of St. John.

There are many burdens and unmet hopes here. Lord, we have desires.

Teach and sustain our desires that we choose employment which does not push you away. Teach and sustain our desires for good relationships in family, with peers, or with those who are in authority.

And when our integrity is challenged, as we must expect, Lord, be very close to us, indeed. And finally, Lord, this is your church giving you praise, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

We are giving each other anthems of joy. You are risen. Hallelujah. Amen. Our offertory hymn, 294.

[27 : 33] 294. 294. 294. 294. 294. 294. 294. 304. 304. 304. 304. 304.

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336. 327. 331. dime," dime." Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[30 : 24] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.