

# Easter I

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[ 0 : 00 ] Numbers matter in the Bible. The number three, for example, is significant as it speaks to the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

A very good example of this is what we heard just a little bit ago from our epistle reading from 1 John 4, verse 7, which says, For there are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one.

The number three is a very important number. We think of the three days of Jesus being in the tomb prior to his resurrection.

In other words, the Bible uses images, it uses numbers to reveal deeper theological truth. And this morning, we have another number that is very significant to our understanding of resurrection and new creation.

And that is the number eight. But before we look at this number, I want us to explore two other numbers that are significant, that provide the backdrop to our understanding of resurrection.

[ 1 : 21 ] The first number is six. The number six represents man. It is a number that speaks of incompleteness at best.

Think of creation and the fact that man was to work six days. And then we go on to read, By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your food until you return to the ground.

To quote Genesis chapter 3, verse 19. At worst, the number six represents evil. Like when we read in the book of Revelation chapter 13, that the mark of the beast is 666, an unholy trinity of wickedness.

And this mark harkens back to the mark given to Cain, representing evil. But then we think of the number seven.

In the Garden of Eden, man was to work six days and then rest on the seventh. The Sabbath was a rest from the toils of life in order to receive refreshment.

[ 2 : 33 ] There were seven major feasts in the Old Testament. And the Feast of Jubilee was a special celebration where after seven cycles of seven years, that is 49 years, the next year, year 50, would be a jubilee.

What was that? Well, jubilee was where all debts were canceled. Jubilee was that time when God's people would be given a new start, a clean slate, if you will.

And by the way, this corresponds to Easter. Easter, there are 50 days of Easter before we begin the season of Whitsunday or Pentecost.

So, to summarize, the number six is the number for man. It speaks of incompleteness or even wickedness.

The number seven represents completeness and rest, refreshment. So what is the number eight all about? The number eight goes beyond rest and completeness.

[ 3 : 47 ] It is the number for resurrection, new life, new creation. Circumcision happened on the eighth day in the Old Covenant, which marked a new identity for the people of God.

And circumcision was merely a temporal sign as it has been replaced by baptism. And you can read that in Colossians chapter 2. And baptism is what?

It's the act whereby we are raised with Christ. Having been died with him, been buried with him in baptism, now we are raised to new life at the hope of resurrection.

So the number eight goes beyond just rest or completeness. It is now a participation in this new life, in this new creation, in resurrection.

Here in our gospel text of John chapter 20, we heard that familiar story of Jesus appearing to his disciples. Our resurrected Lord appeared to these men, revealing his victory over death and the grave.

[ 5 : 01 ] But one of the disciples, as we know, was not present. The man named Thomas. The disciples were exuberant with joy.

And they began telling Thomas what he missed. They explained that they had seen Jesus. That Jesus is alive. That he is risen from the dead.

Thomas does not believe their story. As a matter of fact, he says, Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

It's the very next four words that are vital to what we're discussing this morning. We read in John chapter 20, verse 26, these words.

And after eight days. And after eight days. Now, we often, as Americans, have a hard time reading the Bible, especially like the ancients did.

[ 6 : 11 ] We just think, oh, that's a coincidence. It's not a coincidence. Jesus could have appeared to Thomas an hour, a day, or even three days later.

But we read that he appears to Thomas on the eighth day. Why? Why eight days? Because the apostle John is making the connection of Jesus.

He's making the connection of Jesus and the hope of the resurrection to his hearers. After eight days, Thomas sees the risen Christ.

He feels the nail marks and the pierced side. And then he proclaims, my Lord and my God. The eighth day is a day of new beginning.

The eighth day is a time of new creation. It's a time of new birth. And this is the promise that we have right now, even now, as baptized Christians.

[ 7 : 16 ] And it's what we will experience at the end of human history. Our Lord promises us that he will raise us up for all eternity.

This is the theology of the eighth day. And that's why baptismal fonts were traditionally eight-sided, octagon and shape.

Don't look at ours. It's six-sided. But usually they were octagon and shape, representing the eighth day. Resurrection, new creation.

We have experienced our resurrection in Christ. And it's already happened. If you read Ephesians chapter 2, it talks about we've already been seated in the heavenlies.

We have already experienced this in Christ. But we will experience that final resurrection.

[ 8 : 14 ] That day of jubilee when our Lord raises us up. In a restored and renewed creation that is not hindered by sin. That is not threatened by death any longer.

So what should we learn from this eighth day? We could spend weeks exploring the multifaceted truths of this teaching.

But I just want to lay out a very simple and hopefully a very comforting point to this whole discussion. Friends, you and I are called to work.

And this work comes with great toil. It comes with obstacles. Work itself is not bad. Actually, it's a gift. But it comes with frustration and difficulties that can make life a challenge.

It can also harden us to the blessings of God. And at the end of this life, we then meet the seventh day. It's our rest.

[ 9 : 24 ] As a matter of fact, how is it that we talk about people that have died? They've been laid to rest. But this is not the end for us.

We are laid to rest with another day on the horizon. And on the eighth day, we will be raised to new life.

St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 53, For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality.

Now, what Paul is not saying there is that we're going to be raised as phantoms or as ghosts. No. We will be raised physically, materially.

And yet, we will not die. On that day, death will be swallowed up forever for us. And we will be given immortal bodies.

[ 10 : 24 ] And these bodies, again, they will be true physical and material bodies. But bodies that do not suffer, that do not decay, and do not die. Therefore, we are called to labor in the sure confidence and in the sure hope that in Christ, we will be raised to new life.

We labor with the joy of knowing that we will be reunited to all those who love the Lord and those with whom we love.

We pass through the days of men, six days, knowing that our bodies will be laid to rest, seventh day. But the eighth day is our joy and our hope.

And that's what Easter is all about. Death has been swallowed up by the resurrection of Jesus. He has conquered death. And in him, we too shall be raised to do life where our earthly, where our physical bodies will be transformed with all creation, never experiencing death again.

And yes, I'll just say it. I could not help but thinking about my dad as I prepared this sermon.

[ 11 : 56 ] Beloved, six days we work. Seventh day we rest. Eighth day we rise. And all this is made possible by our Savior who has destroyed the power of death and has overcome the grave.

And that is what Christianity is all about. Thanks be to God. Christ is risen. It's risen to me.

Amen. Amen. Amen.