

INVITED TO LIVE

EASTER SUNDAY



Catalog No. 20170416

Acts 3:15

Easter Sunday

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April 16, 2017

Acts 3:15

He is Risen. He is Risen. He is Risen.

Today we celebrate the greatest single event in history. Greater than the creation of the world. Greater than the founding of this country. Greater than the day that you or I was born. Greater even than the day that a carpenter from the backwaters of Israel died on the cross.

Today we celebrate the day that the carpenter came back to life. Today we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from death. Today he is risen.

But that event is only part of a story that came before and continues after. So today we want to talk about the risen Jesus. But we also want to talk about how he got there. And what it means for us today.

When I was in college, the ministry I was part of always held an Easter sunrise service. We'd wake up crazy early in the morning. In college, waking up at 9 am was early. So waking up before the sun rose barely made any sense at all. It was still cold as we set up everything for the service. It was cold and dark and we were all tired.

I was never sure if this was a huge theological error, but on those mornings as I woke up early, I felt like I had a kind of connection to the story of Jesus rising from the dead. In some small way, I felt like my getting up early was somehow a little bit similar to Jesus getting up out of the tomb.

Looking back, I'm not quite sure what Jesus might have thought about that. Comparing my managing to get myself out of bed a few hours early to the Son of God defeating death and sin for all time seems a little bit self-indulgent. But self-indulgent or not, there I was. Awake early in the morning, feeling like I had something strangely in common with the risen Son of God.

That leads to a curious question. What was it like to rise from the dead? What was Jesus' experience on that first Easter morning as he passed from death into life? What was Easter like for Jesus?

Beginning in September, we've been on a journey here at Peninsula Bible Church. For the entire academic year, we have been following the story of the founding of the church in its earliest days from the rich narrative contained in the book of Acts. We've called this series *SENT: Living the Mission of the Church* because all throughout the story, we have been seeing how God sends his people into the world for different purposes.

The whole idea of God sending his people into the world is, of course, rooted in someone who was sent before them. At Christmas time, we realized that God sent Jesus into the world. Last week we walked with Jesus as he was sent to Jerusalem.

This morning, we're going to see how Jesus was sent into death. But then, having died, he was sent into life once again. And finally, how his being sent into life has become an invitation for us to follow. Easter means something important for us. We are invited to live.

Many of you might be new to our church. Perhaps you used to attend or haven't been here in a while. Maybe you're only here because being in church on Easter is important to one of your family members. Maybe you're here because you're curious about this whole Jesus thing. Or maybe you have a sense that your life ought to look different. Maybe you've sensed something or someone leading you here this morning.

Whatever brings you here, we are thrilled that you are with us this morning. We are also confident that in some way the God that brought Jesus back to life is at work in your life. Here at PBC, we have a particular belief that God speaks most powerfully through the revelation of himself in an ancient text that we call the Bible.

This morning we're going to look at a sermon given in the book of Acts that we've been studying all year. This particular sermon was given by Peter, one of the original followers of Jesus, to a group of people gathered at the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Peter had just healed a man who was born unable to walk. That drew a crowd, so Jesus began to speak.

We looked at the whole passage several months ago, but this morning we're going to zero in on one verse. This single sentence summarizes the main story of what happened on Easter and what it means for us. Let's take a look.

Sent into death

Peter started by talking about how the power of God healed this man. He quickly moves on to say that this great power resides in the name of a man named Jesus. Listen to what Peter begins to say about Jesus.

Acts 3:15a:

You killed the Author of life...

Peter doesn't go easy on these people. It's possible that some of them were the same ones who called out for Jesus to be crucified several months earlier. He isn't trying to win any friends here. He calls them out.

What is fascinating to me is the language that Peter uses to describe Jesus. He calls him the "*author of life*."

The word used here that is translated "author" is sometimes translated "*prince*" or "*leader*" or "*founder*" or "*pioneer*." The word refers to someone who occupies a pre-eminent or primary position in an organization or tribe. Usually, author refers to the person who started it all.

This is a title that we are well familiar with. Around here, we practically worship people like this. We love our founders. At least, we love the successful ones. Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, Larry Page, Sergey Brin, William Hewlett, David Packard. These are our modern-day heroes.

This is what it means to call Jesus the "author of life." It's a word that is only ever used to describe Jesus in the New Testament. He is the only founder that the Bible knows. Jesus is called the founder of faith. He is called the founder of salvation. Here he is the founder of life.

Think about that for a moment: Jesus Christ is the founder of life itself.

What made Jesus so successful is the kind of life that he created. You can read about his Initial Public Offering in the opening pages of the Bible. When it describes the creation of life, you read things like this in Genesis 1:11,

"And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth."

And commands like this given to humanity in Genesis 1:28, "And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it."

Jesus didn't just found life. He created life that was capable of creating more life. Every form of life had the capability built into its core design to replicate itself. Plants with fruit containing seed and humans who were told to be fruitful and multiply. The life that Jesus founded is a multiplying life.

Jesus wasn't just a founder himself. He founded a world of founders.

Multiplying life isn't just an idea that is found in the Bible. Modern science has identified this as one of the basic principles that defines life itself.

Steven Hawking, the theoretical physicist, defines life this way, "One can define life to be an ordered system that can sustain itself against the tendency to disorder, and can reproduce itself." ¹

WIRED magazine ran an article recently about some new discoveries relating to evolution. The article began, "Life makes more of itself." ²

Science 2.0 is a website committed to a scientific philosophy for life. A recent article on the purpose of life concluded, "The purpose of life is life. To elaborate, the purpose of life is to produce further life." ³

This is the life that Jesus authored. The founder of life founded a world of founders who would found more life.

That's why it is such an incredible thing to say that these people managed to kill the author of life. How does the founder of life succumb to death? How does that even happen? Life is supposed to create more life.

But we know the story. The crowd called out for his crucifixion. They hung him on a cross. Not only did Jesus lose his life. But the very author of life itself lost what he founded. Life gave way to death.

My first taste of death as a child was when my cat died. His name was Skippy. As it turns out, I had a rather complicated relationship with Skippy. But that's pretty normal for cat, isn't it?

As an eight-year-old, Skippy had put me in the hospital because of a severe allergic reaction to the bacteria from his claws. While I was there, Skippy made a big decision. Perhaps he felt guilty. I don't know. But Skippy attacked our neighbor's German Shepherd, Yukon.

Skippy versus Yukon was not much of a match. And for all the pain that Skippy caused me, his death devastated me. For years, I had a stuffed animal cat that I named Skippy in his honor.

Life was never meant to die. But death came to this earth. And God, the Father, in an effort to fix what had been broken, sent his Son on a mission. Jesus was sent. Not just to live on this earth, but to die on this earth. Jesus Christ, the founder of life itself, was sent into death. Jesus was sent into death.

We don't like death. We don't want to think about it. We don't want to see it. We've managed to push death aside in our world. We've moved it to the corners. We pretend death isn't there.

But deep down, we know that we live in a world of death. Our world is marked by injustice and hatred. Violence dominates the news. Millions of people are one more missed meal away from death. Even our lives here in Silicon Valley are marked by disappointment, broken relationships, failed efforts, and suffering. And at the end of each of our stories, no matter the kind of life we've lived, we all face death.

Jesus was sent to face that which scares us more than anything else. But Jesus wasn't just sent into death as a concept. Jesus was sent into the death that we experience. He knows what it is like. He faced it.

Jesus was sent into your death.

Your pain. Your loss. Your suffering. Your brokenness. Your disappointment and doubt and despair. Jesus, the author of life itself, was sent into the midst of all of that in your life. He was sent there, and he succumbed to it. He feels your sorrow. He allowed your pain to consume him. Jesus died your death.

Are you trying to face death by yourself? How do you face the suffering in your life and the suffering in the world? Are you ignoring it, pushing it aside and pretending that it doesn't bother you?

Jesus Christ, the author of life, was willing to be sent into death. But that isn't the end of the story.

Sent into life

Here's how Peter continues the first sentence in Acts 3:15:

You killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.

You killed the Author of life, Again, we know the story. Three days after the body of Jesus was taken down from the cross and buried in a tomb, his disciples found the tomb empty. In his place were angels who claimed that Jesus had risen from the dead. Finally, Jesus revealed himself. He told a woman in a garden some news that would change the world.

Let's go back to our original question. What was it like for Jesus to rise from the dead?

We don't have any stories of the resurrection itself. We don't know if Jesus came back to life gradually or in an instant. We don't know if it was quiet or deafening. We don't know if he was alone or surrounded by angels.

We don't talk much about the resurrection itself. But there is one thing that we know.

Jesus didn't raise himself from the dead. He didn't just wake up. Acts 3:15 says that "God raised him from the dead." The rest of the New Testament is consistent in its language. Jesus didn't rise from the dead. He was raised from the dead. Just as Jesus was sent into death, now we see him sent into life. Jesus was sent into life.

First, life gave way to death. Now death has given way to life. It seemed impossible for the author of life to die. Now the impossible has happened again. Jesus, who was dead, has been raised to life.

There's one other thing we do know about his resurrection. It's a curious detail added in the Gospel of John. The cloth that was wrapped around Jesus' head was folded in the tomb. Jesus had enough time to fold his burial clothes after rising from the dead. It's the Easter equivalent of making your bed!

So Jesus is raised from the dead. He makes his bed. And then what?

If you were Jesus, and you had been raised from the dead, wouldn't you show up at Pontius Pilate's house? Not really to say "I told you so." But... kind of. Wouldn't you

have appeared to Jewish leaders who were responsible for your death? Wouldn't you want to show the world that death couldn't hold you?

But he doesn't do that. We have around 12 stories of what Jesus did during the 40 days that he spent on earth in between his resurrection and when God took him up to heaven. Mostly he appeared to his disciples. He ate breakfast with them. He spoke to them. He explained to them all that had happened.

You see, he wanted his disciples to understand a few things about why he had been raised from the dead. I think he wanted them to truly grasp what he said earlier in his life when he was talking with Martha, one of his disciples. This is what he told her in John 11:25-26, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."

What Jesus was saying is that when you believe in him, you follow where he goes. He is the life. He founded life. He is the resurrection. Jesus is sent into a new kind of resurrected life. Those who believe in him will follow him into that same life.

Jesus was sent into life, not for his sake. He was sent ahead as a forerunner. He was a trailblazer, sent for the sake of those who would follow. "Whoever believes in him, though he die, yet shall he live."

Jesus goes on ahead of us. Jesus paves the way for us. He is sent into life so that we can follow.

I love to hike. My family sometimes loves to hike, but sometimes they get bored with it. A few years ago we took a long family vacation to several different national parks. We had already done a lot of hiking, and my kids were a bit tired of it, and my wife was going to sit this next one out.

So I did what every good father does. I bought a bag of gummy bears. And I told my kids that for every 10 minutes of hiking we did, I'd give them a few gummy bears. So there I was, bribing my children with gummy bears to walk through one of the most beautiful national parks in the country.

I was in front, leading them, guiding them, rewarding them with something sweet so that they could experience life.

Leading is what it means to say that Jesus was sent into life. He goes first so that we can follow. As he is sent into life, we have the opportunity to follow him. He leads the way. Jesus was sent into life, not for himself, but so that we can experience the resurrection life that he began.

Invited to live

If that's the case, then Jesus being sent into life means that we have to make a decision, which has implications for us. Read how Peter concludes his summary of what happened to Jesus.

Acts 3:15:

You killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

Peter claims that he and the other disciples are witnesses of this event. They have seen something. And now Peter stands in front of a crowd to testify. He describes what he has seen. But this event that he has seen is not just something that has happened. This event has implications for the one who hears his testimony.

Peter summarizes what it means at the end of the sermon. Here is the invitation that he gives to the crowd at the temple.

Acts 3: 19-20a:

Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

Accepting an invitation means you have to leave something behind. You have to get out of bed to wake up. You have to turn away from the old life to embrace the new life. That's what it means to repent. You have to lay something down.

Peter invites this crowd to turn away from their life that is characterized by death. Allow Jesus to blot out your sins. And follow Jesus into life. Jesus has been sent into life ahead of us. His resurrection is an invitation for you to live. We are invited to live.

Think about the invitations that you have received in life. A friend is inviting you to an activity. A company or school is inviting you to join them. A couple is inviting you to their wedding. A special someone is inviting you to have your own wedding. Your child is asking “will you play with me?”

Invitations are powerful. They are full of potential and possibility. But they are also risky. You never know what might happen when you accept an invitation. You’ve probably accepted invitations that in hindsight you wish you hadn’t. We may not always like the world that we live in, but it is the world we know. What does resurrection life look like anyway?

Peter says that if we accept this invitation, we will have “*times of refreshing*.” This verse is the only place in the New Testament where this phrase is used. The word for “refreshing” means “the experience of relief from obligation or trouble, *breathing space, relaxation, or relief*.” It’s used in the Old Testament to refer to the regaining physical strength after a battle. It’s also the reason given to take a day off every week to rest.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ that we celebrate today means for you that Jesus has been sent into your death. He has gone to that unthinkable place to absorb, cover over, and “blot out your sins.”

But death could not contain the author of life. And so on Easter morning, he rose again to launch a new kind of life. Jesus has gone before us into this new kind of life, and he invites us to follow. Believe in him. Follow him. Allow him to lead you into this new kind of life. He offers “times of refreshing.” A whole new experience of life.

Just as the original life that Jesus founded was the kind of life that created more life, this resurrection life does the same. It is a life that overflows. A life that replicates itself. Jesus called it “*life to the full*.” It is a life that offers times of refreshing even during the darkest seasons.

When you put your faith in Jesus, you accept his invitation to live this new kind of life.

I hate waking up in the morning. I love the snooze button. It feels like a little gift every time I get to press the button and sleep for seven more minutes. Now I use my phone as an alarm clock, and it limits the number of snoozes I get. After a certain number, it literally tells me, “No more snoozing. Get up.” If I ever wondered whether technology was evil, in that moment I am certain.

It’s tempting to snooze through life. It’s so much easier to just hit that button and let things continue on the way they are. We manage to push the pain and death in our lives aside so that we can close our eyes for seven more minutes.

But accepting this invitation is different. When you follow Jesus into life. You aren’t starting a day that is going to wear you out and beat you down. You are entering into a life that is characterized by times of refreshing. You become connected to the one who created life that multiplies itself.

That doesn’t mean that life gets easier. In fact, sometimes God calls you into even harder places. But as you go there, you walk alongside the one who gives you life along the way. Life itself gives you life. Jesus goes with you, leading you into life and refreshing you on the journey.

It’s like that hike where you get to stop every few minutes and have a few gummy bears. Except that the life Jesus offers is so much better than gummy bears. It is a life of purpose and meaning. Individual identity and community. You are cared for, and you have the great opportunity to care for others. You are fruitful. You will live a life that gives life to others.

If you have never accepted the invitation of Jesus in your life, this is an opportunity for you to do that. You can follow him out of death and into life. You can have those times of refreshing. You can turn away from your old life. If that sounds interesting, but you don’t really know what it means, there’s a few practical things that it could mean for you. First of all, you can put your faith in Jesus. You can turn away from trusting in other things and trust in the risen Lord Jesus Christ. If you want to talk more about that, please come up and talk to Corrie Gustafson or myself or anyone up on the stage this morning.

Another way to enter into life is to become a part of the life of this community here at Peninsula Bible Church. Come back next week - we’re having a barbecue over lunchtime on our patio to celebrate the opening of our remodeled building.

Join a small group. We have small groups for men and women. We have larger groups for men on Wednesday mornings, women on Thursday mornings, young adults on Thursday night, children and middle school and high school on Wednesday nights, a newly married group that meets at the home of my wife and me, a vibrant recovery community that has a huge dinner

and concert on Friday nights and a worship service on Sunday mornings. We have senior groups and training classes and prayer opportunities and more. This is a vibrant community of people. Join our life.

Finally, in three weeks, we'll be going outside of ourselves to serve the local community that we are a part of. It's called Beautiful Day and we cancel our services on Sunday morning to worship through acts of service. We're working on projects at schools in Palo Alto, Mountain View, and East Palo Alto, and assembling teacher kits to bless the hardworking men and women who teach our children.

What does it mean to enter into life? Put your faith in Jesus and join us as we do our best to follow Jesus wherever he leads us.

You are invited to live. Don't let that invitation pass you by.

He is Risen. He is Risen. He is Risen.

Endnotes

- ¹ Hawking, Steven. "Life in the Universe." *Steven Hawking*. Web (<http://www.hawking.org.uk/life-in-the-universe.html>) Accessed Apr 2017.]
- ² Madrigal, Alexis. "Self-replicating Chemicals Evolve into Lifelife Ecosystem." *WIRED*. Web. 08 Jan 2009. (<https://www.wired.com/2009/01/replicatingrna/>). Accessed Apr 2017.
- ³ Davis, Steve. "The Purpose Of Life." *Science20*. Web. (http://www.science20.com/gadfly/purpose_life) 01 Nov 2009. Accessed Apr 2017.