

REJOICE!

EASTER SUNDAY



Catalog No. 20200412
Easter Message
Scott Grant
April 12, 2020

The high school production of the musical *Mary Poppins* was supposed to run through Saturday, March 14, but the coronavirus cut it short. Closing night instead would be Friday, March 13. The performers were disappointed; they had been working so hard for so long to put on the show.

Normally, closing night packs 'em in, but attendance would be limited to one hundred spread-out patrons in order to prevent the spread of the virus. Having already volunteered to serve as an usher, I was able to see what turned out to be the closing night performance.

The coronavirus was closing in, and everyone, performers and patrons alike, was reeling. Could something take our minds off the virus? Or could it even be that there was something to celebrate while everyone was recoiling from the virus?

The performers, knowing that this was their last show and, I think, sensing the crisis, sang and danced their hearts out. It was if they poured all their preparations and all their shows into this one show. The audience, small but vociferous, erupted, especially for the show-stopping numbers, "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious" and "Step in Time." The patrons wanted something to celebrate, and the performers, bless their hearts, gave it to them. The patrons celebrated their hearts out.

Are you looking for something to celebrate today? If there's anything that's worth celebrating, it's the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If there's ever a day in the year that calls for celebration, it's Easter Sunday. If there's ever a year in which we need to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it's this year: 2020.

The first Easter Sunday

We've spent Lent in the book of Job. We have grieved with Job, the sufferer. There is, of course, "a time to mourn" (Ecclesiastes 3:4). But today is not that day, "for behold, the winter is past; / the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, / the time of singing has come" (Song of Solomon 2:11-12).

Almost two thousand years ago, on the first Good Friday, Jesus was crucified. On the first Easter Sunday, Jesus rose from the dead. Later that day, Jesus came to his disciples, who were hiding in fear, behind locked doors, worried that the authorities would do to them what they did to Jesus.

Today is Easter Sunday. We're not hiding from authorities; we're sheltering in place. Are we doing so in fear?

After Jesus came to his disciples on the first Easter Sunday, he showed them his hands, which had been pierced by nails, and his side, which had been pierced by a spear. John writes in his gospel, "Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20:19-20). They rejoiced!

Today, we celebrate. Rejoice! He is risen! Celebrate your heart out.

What does the resurrection of Jesus Christ mean for us today, especially as the coronavirus stalks the earth? It means that God is with us: comfort in the present. It also means that God will be with us: hope for the future.

First, God is with us: comfort in the present. Could you use some comfort today?

Comfort in the present

When crowds of people flocked to Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, some weeks after the resurrection, the Holy Spirit filled the followers of Jesus, evidenced by manifestations that could be seen and heard. Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, explained to the crowd what was transpiring: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing" (Acts 2:32-33).

After the resurrection, Jesus ascended to the Father in heaven, where he began to reign over the earth, and sent the Holy Spirit to fill his followers. Because of the

resurrection of Jesus Christ, we who follow him have the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, along with the Father and Son, is God himself. Together, they are the Trinity, the three-in-one God. What does the Spirit do for us?

While Jesus walked the earth, he told his disciples, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:16-17). The Spirit is “with” us and even “in” us, and he will be with us and in us “forever.” God comes to be with us, he stays with us, and he never leaves.

Loved ones are born and loved ones die. People come and people go. Shelter-in-place restrictions separate us from each other. Then again, the apostle Paul asserts, “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39). God is with us. Nothing can separate us from him.

What do we want from others when we’re suffering? Don’t we want someone to be with us?

Hike in the backcountry

In the summer of my 27th year, I lost a job, which caused me considerable consternation but which also afforded me the opportunity to take a trip that I had long dreamed about. I packed up my tent, my sleeping bag, and my fly rod and embarked on a six-week trip to Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. I camped, I fished, and I prayed.

One day, when I went for a hike in the backcountry of Yellowstone National Park, I was struck by the thought that no one in the world knew where I was at that moment. As I walked on, I remembered many scenes from my life and many of the people who had appeared in them. They were good scenes that caused my heart to swell with thankfulness, but each of them passed, fading into the next. No one person appeared in more than a scene or two. Then I was struck by this thought: the Lord had been with me in every scene. And, of course, though no one in the world knew where I was at that moment, the Lord knew where I was.

I didn’t know what I would do at the end of my trip. I didn’t have a job. I didn’t know where I would live. But

I knew that the Lord was with me. I knew that the Lord would be with me.

Do you want someone to be with you and never leave you? Turn to the Lord. Acknowledge his presence. Seek him. What an opportunity the coronavirus has created for us to appreciate the presence of God in our lives. Job, toward the end of his crisis, said to the Lord, “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, / but now my eye sees you” (Job 42:5). Who knows what the Lord has for us on the other side of this crises. Whatever it is, we want to be ready for it. We want to be strong in the Lord. Don’t waste this crisis.

The resurrection of Jesus means that God is with us: comfort in the present. It also means that God will be with us: hope for the future. Could you use some hope today?

Hope for the future

Listen to what Paul says: “In him [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:13-14).

As a consequence of the resurrection, we have the Holy Spirit, whom Paul calls “the guarantee of our inheritance.” A guarantee is a down payment. It’s part of the whole, and it promises that the rest is coming. Because of the Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance, we experience something of the future in the present. The Spirit therefore gives us something to hope for: eternal life with God.

People say, “We’ll get through this.” Will we? Many have died. Many more may die. If we get through this, something else will come, and if we get through that, something else will come after that. At some point, unless Jesus comes back first, death will come for each of us, and we won’t get through that. Or will we?

In times like these, it helps to know that this is not all there is. If this is all there is, even in the best of times, we’re lost. The Spirit, not to mention the Scriptures, which were breathed out by the Spirit, promise us: this is not all there is. If you believe in Jesus, you’ll get through death.

Jesus told Martha, whose brother Lazarus had just died, “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. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26) Do you believe this? For the one who believes, Jesus makes death, well, irrelevant.

If you have nothing to look forward to, nothing to hope for, you'll lose heart for the days ahead. You can survive without hope, but you can't live without hope. The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us hope.

If this is not all there is, what is there? The Scriptures give us a vision of the future.

New bodies

Paul says that the resurrection of Christ guarantees the future resurrection of Christ's followers: "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20). The firstfruits were the first part of the harvest, which signaled that there was more to come. Christ, in his resurrection, is the firstfruits. We who follow Jesus will receive new, imperishable bodies, somewhat similar to the ones we have now but completely suited to the new and eternal age.

When the new and eternal age comes in full, no one will get sick from a virus. No one will spread a virus. No one will die from a virus. No one will die at all!

No longer needed

Another virus ravaged our land some years ago. It was human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV. It causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, or AIDS.

When I was leading a Bible study for college students in Pleasanton in the 1980s, a wheelchair-bound young man by the name of Jon Thompson attended. When he was a child, he had been struck by a drunken driver and paralyzed from the waist down. The wheelchair didn't seem slow Jon down much, though; he even entered races for the disabled. His legs were paralyzed but not his spirit.

During an operation after the accident, Jon received a blood transfusion. Years later, it was discovered that the blood he received was tainted with HIV. Jon lived with an infectious freedom, even while an infectious disease was devastating his already-mangled body. Many people drew encouragement from his oft-quoted line: "Jesus doesn't make life easy; he just makes it possible."

Jon died of AIDS-related complications a few days before his thirtieth birthday. A few days before he died, though, he had a dream in which he saw Jesus and felt the grass between his toes.

I attended Jon's memorial service. The program for the service featured a simple drawing of a wheelchair. Attached to one of the handles of the wheelchair was a tag that read, "For sale." The headline above the drawing read, "No longer needed."

We will have new bodies. Where will we be?

New creation

Remember, Paul said we will come into possession of our "inheritance." In the Hebrew Scriptures, the land of Palestine was called Israel's "inheritance." In the New Testament, the land expands to encompass the new creation: "But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13). The new heavens and the new earth—that's the new and eternal creation.

There will be continuity with this creation, but there will be discontinuity as well. The new creation will be somewhat like this creation but it will also transcend this creation. It will be similar to this creation, so that it's something to look forward to, but will be better, so it's *really* something to look forward to.

The new creation will play host to human life in its fullest potency. The new creation, in contrast to the present creation, will be big enough for dreams.

Hair-raising ride

Every once in a while in the last few years, when taking one of my daughters to see a movie with one of her friends, I've been able to slip away to watch a film that I've wanted to see. In December I saw *Ford vs. Ferrari*.

In one scene, Carroll Shelby, a car designer, takes Henry Ford II for a hair-raising ride in a racecar. At the end of the ride, Ford weeps uncontrollably for what he has experienced. "I had no idea," he whimpers. "I had no idea."

Ford had no idea that the racecar he commissioned Shelby to build was so powerful and that riding in it would be so exhilarating. Well, he had some idea, of course; he's Henry Ford II, CEO of the Ford Motor Company. He knows cars. But this car: it's different. It's similar, but it's different. It's better—way better.

The new creation is going to be similar to this creation but way better. When we step into the new creation, we'll say, "I had no idea. I had no idea."

We will have new bodies in the new creation. What will we do?

What will we do?

We will be sons and daughters and servants of the king—the beloved of God who know we're the beloved of God, who have unfiltered ears to hear and believe and embrace his words to us: "You are my son, you are my daughter, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11, Revelation 21:7).

Based on who we are, we will serve God gladly and freely and spontaneously, fulfilling his purposes in the new creation (Revelation 22:3.) We will be everything we're supposed to be. We will do everything we're supposed to do. Indeed, with new bodies and new hearts, will want to be everything we're supposed to be; we will want to do everything we're supposed to do. Earth and heaven will be one; so will our obligations and desires. The deepest desires of our hearts will be met: in our being, in our doing.

We will not be disembodied spirits. We will not be stuck in a never-ending worship service, though our capacity to appreciate something like a worship service will expand.

Look inside yourself and ask yourself, "What do I really want to do?" Whatever those deeply meaningful and deeply satisfying endeavors are, those are among the things you'll be doing, to the never-ending glory of God. Or, if you won't be doing those things, then you'll be doing everything that those endeavors, in their purest forms, represent to you.

Everything you're supposed to be and do, you'll want to be and do, and you'll be able to be and do. You will live out the passion of your heart. You will be what is most truly you. You will do what is most truly you.

The adventure will be new every morning.

Enchanting the angels

In her dying years, writer Karen Blixen, barely able to eat and weighing only eighty pounds, wrote *Babette's Feast*, a quirky short story that was made into an equally quirky film. In writing the story, Blixen was trying to

make sense of the suffering in her life. Both the book and the movie have ministered to my soul.¹

In *Babette's Feast*, an aging opera singer, long past his prime, writes to a woman he had met fifteen years earlier when visiting a small village in Norway. Back then, the woman's voice made his spirits soar. He dreamed of taking her to Paris and singing with her on the stage of the Grand Opera, but it was all too much for the woman, who felt bound to her village, her family, and her rigid Christian sect. Achille Papin, the opera singer, writes to Philippa:

*What is fame? What is glory? The grave awaits us all. And yet . . . As I write this, I feel that the grave is not the end. In Paradise I shall hear your voice again. There you will sing, without fears or scruples, as God meant you to sing. There you will be the great artist that God meant you to be. Ah! How you will enchant the angels.*²

Whatever it is God has for you in the new creation, you will be the great artist that he meant you to be. Whatever thwarts you now—fears, scruples, whatever—will be gone forever. Ah! How you will enchant the angels.

In the morning

Because of the resurrection, the present and the future are linked. The Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance, enables us to experience something of the future in the present.

While we've been sheltering in place, I've been spending a little more time with the Lord in the morning. I naturally wake up before anyone else in my family, and now I don't have to go anywhere.

I begin by taking a few deep breaths and feeling the air in my lungs. I close my eyes and listen to a Gregorian chant or something classical. I open my eyes to take in the Japanese maple in our back yard. I smell the coffee that I have just made. I take a sip of it. I turn on a little heater and feel the warmth on my bare feet. I savor every experience.

I experience the Lord through my senses. I enjoy the Lord in the present. But I also anticipate enjoying him in the future, and I remind myself that in the new creation, "every perceptive faculty shall be an inlet of delight"³

Enjoy the Lord in the present! Enjoy him forever!

Rejoice!

The resurrection of Jesus means that God is with us: comfort in the present. It also means that God will be with us: hope for the future.

If you do not yet believe in Jesus, if you have not yet given your life to him, let me ask you a question: do you want in on it? Do you want comfort in the present? Do you want hope for the future? Do you want a new and eternal body? Do you want a new creation? Do you want to be the great artist that God meant you to be? Turn from your sin, which is rebellion against God, and turn to Christ, accepting the forgiveness that God has for you in him. The Spirit will fill you with God's presence, both now and forever.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ constitutes God's victory over everything evil, which means this: this virus is going down. For a while, God has allowed it while drawing it up into his sublime purposes, but it's going down, and neither it nor any other virus—and not even a whisper of anything evil—will have any place in his new creation.

We will shelter in place, but we will never shelter in fear.

Rejoice! He is risen! Celebrate your heart out.

Endnotes

1. Equally inspiring is Leta Sundet's review of the book in *Touchstone Magazine*: www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=28-06-030-f.
2. Karen Blixen, *Babette's Feast* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 14.
3. Jonathan Edwards, *The Collected Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume Two (CCEL).

Peninsula Bible Church © 2020. This message from the Scriptures was presented at Peninsula Bible Church, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA 94306.
Phone (650) 494-3840. www.pbc.org

Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001, 2007 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.