

The Day Everything Changed
John 20:1-18

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Today is Easter. We celebrate with flowers, colored eggs, bunnies fancy clothes, beautiful music, worship, and feasts with family and friends. It coincides with the arrival of Spring. But Easter is not really about any of those things. Easter is about one thing: the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried. And on the third day he rose again. Jesus is alive. Easter is the proclamation that Jesus is risen and that fact changes everything. We don't have enough time to cover everything this morning. There are plenty of other Sundays for that. What I do want to cover this morning are three wonderful changes the resurrection brought about for the first disciples and for us.

First of all, because of Easter, we have a relationship with a Living Lord. The disciples saw Jesus arrested. They heard about the so called trial. They knew the verdict. John and the women were at the cross – all the others had fled. They heard Jesus cry out and breath his last. His dead, lifeless body was taken and buried. Their hopes and dreams were crushed. Their hearts full of sorrow. How sad to end that way. The disciples would have gone on with their lives, four of them returning to fishing for a living. They would not have written down their stories. They would not have spread Jesus' words throughout the empire. They would have said their goodbyes and moved on as best they could.

But that's not what happened. Mary went to the tomb and saw the stone rolled away. Peter and John ran when they heard and found the tomb empty, the graveclothes left behind. Then, Mary saw him, the man she loved and had given her life to. She saw Jesus, who was supposed to be dead, now alive! Everything changed on that day for those who followed Jesus. Resurrection confirmed his life, all he said and did, and who he said he was. Now they aren't remembering a great man, who met a tragic and untimely end. They are still following Jesus who is alive. They still have his presence with them, but now in a way not restricted by time and space. They will now write down all he said and did. They will soon not be afraid, but boldly proclaim who Jesus is and what he has done. They will not move on with their lives, but become the church of Jesus Christ, who is risen indeed.

The same is true for us today. We don't follow a philosophy, a code of ethics, a religious system or even a leader who said and did some

profound things but died long ago. We follow the same living Lord who seeks each one of us out, calling us each by name, just like he did for Mary. She didn't recognize him; she couldn't see him, until he called her name. When Jesus did that, she knew exactly who he was, despite the impossibility of it in her mind. Mary was convinced that the Lord was alive, not by seeing his body, but by hearing his word; it convinced her because it was personal, and addressed to her by name.

Christianity isn't knowing about Jesus; it means knowing him and the power of his resurrection. When we believe in the resurrection, we too will become aware of the presence of Jesus. Can you recall a time when Jesus was speaking to you, calling your name? It may have been through an event, a sermon, a conversation, (I know someone Jesus spoke to through a license plate) in prayer, in song, in a group or alone, but whatever it was, you know in our heart and mind that it was Jesus. Those who do are not crazy or fanatical. It happens all over the world in every culture; it happens to people from all kinds of backgrounds and personalities. Many will tell you that more than any single thing in their lives, knowing that Jesus is alive and is with them has changed everything for them. Jesus is not dead. He is with us every step of the way. He promised it. "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, I am with them." "I am with you always," he said, "even to the end of the age." That changes everything for us. It brings supernatural peace into our lives.

Secondly, **Easter shows us the power of God.** God has always been Almighty God, with no power above or beside him. Nothing has ever been impossible for God, but now we know it because we've seen it in the resurrection. It appeared on Good Friday as if God has lost. But God in Jesus Christ defeated sin, evil and death. God overcame sin with righteousness, evil with good, and death with life. God fought this battle out of love for us and the suffering that sin, evil and death have caused his creatures. God won this battle because his love is strong – stronger even than death. God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now then, is anything too difficult for God?

To be a Christian is not just to expect the presence of Christ with us, but to expect the power of God in our lives. Some have interpreted this as getting rich or never having to tackle anything difficult. I don't think that's what it means. "God is not in the business of granting wishes," Barbara Brown Taylor writes. "God is in the business of raising the dead, not all of whom are willing." God does amazing things, even in the most devastating circumstances. James Chatham exhorts us "to expect resurrection---not because of human power but because of God's power; to believe that people

and communities can change and become new; to know that minds can shift and that lives can turn corners; to assert that churches and other communities can be what they have never been before.”

Easter changes any and every situation with the power of God. Do you need help? Christ is risen. Nothing is impossible for God. Have you received a frightening diagnosis? Christ is risen. Even though we die, because we are joined to Christ we live. Are you wandering aimlessly through life? Christ is risen. God has the power to give even the most hopeless of humans meaning and purpose in their lives. It may be Good Friday for you, all may seem lost. But Sunday's coming. The power of God in any situation changes everything. It brings supernatural hope.

Lastly, **because of Easter we are being made into new creatures now.** Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old is continually being passed away. The new has come. On Easter, the first disciples dramatically went from fear and sorrow to faith and joy. Our reading from Colossians 3:1-17 shows us what new life in Christ looks like: evil desire, greed, slander, lies, the old self dying. The new self emerging in compassion, kindness, humility, forgiveness, and above all things love. It is not easy, but because of Easter it is possible to live new lives. It is possible to be a politician and stay faithful to your spouse. It is possible for families to treat each other with love and respect. It is possible for blacks and whites, Latinos and Asians, and every other ethnic group to live together, to worship together, to be true friends to make the world a better place together. If this happens, it will be because of the resurrection power of the living Christ inside those who claim to belong to him.

Anytime we as believers in Jesus Christ, Og Mandino writes, choose to love rather than hate, choose to create rather than destroy, choose to persevere rather than quit, choose to praise rather than gossip, choose to heal rather than wound, choose to give rather than steal, choose to act rather than procrastinate, choose to grow rather than rot, or choose to live rather than die, we are undeniable proof that Christ is risen indeed. We, Jesus' followers, are the most incredible evidence of the truth of the resurrection. The Spirit of Christ lives in us and is working constantly, patiently, to make us into who he created us to be. This changes everything, for the world would be a far different place if the two billion people who claim the name Christian on this planet right now will live with the presence of Christ, the power of God, and the patient, persistent work of the Spirit in our lives. Easter changes everything, for it changes us.

In closing, I want to share the story of Edith Burns, a wonderful Christian who lived in San Antonio, Texas. Her doctor was Will Phillips.

Edith was his favorite patient. Edith had a habit of introducing herself in this way: “Hello, my name is Edith Burns. Do you believe in Easter?” Then she would explain the meaning of Easter, and many times people would believe.

Dr. Phillips was obviously sad one day that Edith came into his office. He said to her with a heavy heart, “Your lab report came back and it says you have cancer Edith. You are not going to live very long.” Edith said, “Why Will Phillips, shame on you. Why are you so sad? You have just told me that soon I am going to see my precious Lord Jesus, my husband and my friends. You have just told me that I am going to celebrate Easter forever, and here you are having difficulty giving me my ticket.” Dr. Phillips thought to himself, “What a magnificent woman this Edith Burns is!”

Edith continued coming to see Dr. Phillips until she had to be hospitalized. In the hospital, many who shared a room with Edith left very different people. Staff and other patients started calling her Edith Easter – that is everyone but the head nurse, Phyllis. Phyllis made it plain she wanted nothing to do with Edith, because Edith was a religious nut. Phyllis had been an Army nurse, had seen it all and done it all, and had no tolerance for Edith’s beliefs.

One day, because two nurses called in sick, Phyllis had to care for Edith. Edith greeted her with “Phyllis, God loves you and I love you, and I have been praying for you.” Phyllis said, “Well, you can quit praying for me; it won’t work. I’m not interested.” Edith said, “Well I will pray and I have asked God to let me live until you believe.” Phyllis retorted as she walked out of the room, “Then you will never die, Edith, because that will never happen.” Every day Phyllis would walk into Edith’s room and every day Edith would say, “God loves you Phyllis and I love you and I’m praying for you.”

One day Phyllis said she was drawn to Edith’s room as if by a magnet. She sat down on the bed, and Edith Burns took her Bible and began to share with Phyllis the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Edith then asked, “Do you believe in Easter? Do you believe that Jesus Christ is alive and the He wants to live in your heart? Phyllis said, “Oh, I want to believe that with all my heart, and I do want Jesus to live in me.” Right there Phyllis prayed and asked Jesus to come into her life.

On Easter Sunday, just four days later, Phyllis came into work, stopping at the flower shop to get an Easter lily for Edith. She wanted to be the first to wish Edith a Happy Easter. When she walked into Edith’s room, Edith was in bed. When Phyllis went to pick up Edith’s hand, she realized Edith was dead. Phyllis lifted her face toward heaven, and with tears

streaming down her cheeks said, “Happy Easter, Edith! Happy Easter!” The next day, Phyllis started her day by approaching a table where two student nurses were sitting. She said, “My name is Phyllis. Do you believe in Easter?”

Do you believe in Easter? Do you believe that Jesus Christ is risen indeed? Mary, Peter, John, and all who saw him die believed. And because they did, they experienced the presence of the risen Christ, the power of God, and the patient, persevering work of the Spirit to make them new kinds of creatures for the rest of their earthly lives. Do we really believe? They let us not make this a once a year celebration, but every morning awake to proclaim that Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. That changes everything.