



The Resurrection Gospel

Acts 2:22-41

Grace Church | 4.12.20

In June 2018, a terrible and brutal act occurred in New York City that shook not only that city but many in our country. A young man, only 15 years old at the time, “Junior” Guzman, was murdered by several members of the street gang the Trinitarios.¹ Junior was chased down by members of the gang and caught outside of a deli where he was stabbed to death. He tried to find shelter behind the counter, but the shop owner was confused and did not let him enter. Junior was killed outside while the security cameras caught it all. Now, unfortunately violent crime happens at the hands of street gangs in New York quite frequently. But this was different. Junior had done nothing to anger the gang, he should never have been killed that night. You see, Junior had been mistaken for someone else, a rival gang member. But Junior was not in a gang. His only crime was having the appearance of someone else and being in the wrong spot at the wrong time. Innocent and undeserved, his death struck a chord with many and highlighted the nature of gang life and brutal violence in New York.

This morning in our text we will find three Resurrection lenses: conviction, gospel, and response. But we cannot get to the good news of Easter resurrection without the conviction of the cross. Every Holy Week, each year as the church universal fixes her eyes towards the last days of Jesus, they remember first he faced death by a brutal mob, and yet was innocent. I don’t tell you the sad story of the murder of Junior Guzman to scare you or shock you. I tell you this story because here on Resurrection Sunday, we sit in a similar spot: face to face with a brutal and cruel injustice. A case of mistaken identity. We must wrestle, as the people of New York did, with the fact that we too are responsible in some way for the shedding of innocent blood. The Trinitarios who killed Junior Guzman had no idea who they murdered that night. They were mistaken. The Jews who killed Jesus had no idea who they had killed. And here is the question we ask ourselves this morning: do you know what your sin has wrought? Do you know who you have killed? This morning we will find that at the burning heart of the resurrection is the answer to that question. Who is this man, this Jesus, that you have killed?

In Acts chapter 2, the followers of Jesus are just seven weeks removed from his resurrection. But still in their mind is also his unjust death. Jesus died, rose, ascended to Heaven, and gave his followers a charge: go and spread the news. Be my witnesses in all the world. And I will be with

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/14/nyregion/lesandro-guzman-murder-trinitarios-verdict.html>



you, he said. But then here are the apostles and the disciples of Jesus, hiding from the world, scared. They have experienced the truth of the resurrection, but not its power. They wonder: “is it really true? It must be true! How can we be the witness of Christ when we feel so alone?” And maybe they begin to blame themselves too: “we let him be killed, didn’t we! Maybe we should’ve fought back more?” But Jesus does not leave them doubting long. You know the story: in the blink of an eye, as they pray for help and courage, the Holy Spirit falls. Like tongues of fire, the day of Pentecost comes and the followers of Jesus, every one of them, are suddenly filled with boldness and power. Many of them begin to speak in languages unknown to them, and others hear them in languages native to their own. People accuse them of being drunk, although it is just 9am. No, they aren’t drunk, but they are different. They have woken up to the good news of the resurrection, not just cognitively, but experientially. They have repented of their part in killing Christ the God-man, and now their repentance shows it’s fruit. God is still with them, his Spirit now dwells with them. They are not alone. They can be his witnesses.

That very hour, Peter then stands up to preach. It’s time for the news to get out. He stands with the other apostles beside him, acting as their representative. It is here we find the first public proclamation of the resurrection. This news can’t stay in any longer. And what is the first topic he addresses, after putting to rest the idea that the apostles are drunk? He brings the conviction of the cross.

The Conviction of the Cross

We see this is verse **22**. Notice first who this is addressed to: Men of Israel. In this context, it is not as if women are exempt. Peter might as well be saying “people of Israel, or families of Israel,” but places the emphasis on the men as the representatives of the families in this culture. So it is important that we understand Peter’s audience to be the people of Israel. Here in Jerusalem, the Jews were celebrating the feast of weeks, and so the city is packed with people. It is a perfect time for Peter to address the crowds, since so many are gathered from all the corners of Israel. And the reason it is important to address his sermon to Israel first is because his aim is to show that the Israelites are the ones without excuse. They should have recognized Jesus as messiah when he came.

We see this in **verse 22**. Peter names Jesus by his earthly name Jesus of Nazareth. Immediately the crowd calls to mind the scoff of so many of them. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” is what they said when they heard of Jesus’ hometown. But Peter embraces it: this Jesus, from Nazareth, that humble and unimpressive lake town. Yes, this humble carpenter’s son, he is approved and confirmed by God by his mighty works. You remember him? Who just months prior was healing the sick and lame and causing the blind to see in these very streets? You know his works, you saw them, how God worked through him. How can you forget him so easily? Peter knows how they desired the signs and wonders so that they could be impressed, but when Jesus really talked of leaving everything and following him, the crowds scattered. They wanted miracles, but not the miracle worker.



But the signs were meant to serve a purpose. Not to impress, but to validate. The people of Israel are without excuse. By witnessing the signs of Jesus, they should have heard and heeded his message. But they didn't. And so many of us are in the same boat. We are attracted to Jesus because of what he can give us and show us, but are hesitant to really follow him. We are without excuse.

What happened to this Jesus, who Peter says clearly was from God? Well, **verse 23** tells us. Here we find a bit of a problem, as Peter simultaneously lays out two realities. First, the crucifixion of Christ is in the hands of God. God was not surprised by the peoples' rebellion. He was not wringing his hands on Good Friday, unsure of what to do next. He planned for the destruction of his Son. This masterful piece of rhetoric would have hit Peter's hearers just so. As Jews, they believed in the providence of God. And here Peter tells them: the crucified Jesus was God's plan. You thought you were doing God a favor, killing a blasphemer. The pharisees considered themselves the winners in Jesus' trial, as they handed him over to be killed. But it was really God who did the handing over, says Peter. You have no ultimate control in this, he tells the Jews. You are not the master of your own fate.

And neither are we, church. Before we receive the gospel of the resurrection, we must wrestle with the necessity of the cross. When we struggle to understand exactly why God would allow suffering and evil to persist in our world today, we remember that he allowed, even planned with detail and definitely, the suffering of his own Son. As the author of the great story we are living in, it is his prerogative to use whatever means necessary to achieve his ends. And if he is willing to go to the depths of death to prove and seal his love on his people, can he not plan to use your suffering and trial as a means to also prove and seal his love for you?

And yet, here lies the conviction. God may have planned the suffering of his son from eternity, but we are the perpetrators. Peter points the finger right at his audience: you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. Notice they are not secondary: they killed Jesus by the hands of others. They didn't nail the nails physically into his hands and feet. And yet, even through their secondary actions they have not escaped the hook. They sat back and let Jesus be handed over, even chanting and calling for his death. The mobs were bloodthirsty, and so the blood of the son is on their hands.

It is my duty to remind you today that the blood of Christ is not silent today either. It speaks two words, and one is guilt. The conviction of the cross reminds us that although we didn't wield any hammer and nails towards Jesus, it was our sins that held him there, not the nails. 1 Peter 2 tells us that he himself bore our sins on his body. The weight and burden he carried was not simply physical. He bore the sins of his people, enduring them for our sake. And so with every rebellion against the holiness of God, every lust in the dark, every pride in the heart, every word spoken behind the back, we sent this Jesus to his death. We did not physically deal his death blow, but in dying for our sake, we are held responsible. He died for us and for our sin.

That truth should sit heavy on our hearts, even at on Resurrection Sunday. It is why Peter, the same apostle who preaches this sermon, wept so bitterly after denying Christ. He knew that Jesus went



to the cross to suffer for Peter's sake, even as he denied him. Peter knew that he was without excuse. He saw the miracles of Christ, he heard the sermons, he felt his embrace. And yet he still delivered him over to be killed by the hands of the lawless.

The blood of Jesus speaks two words. For all those who have never repented of their sin and put their trust in Jesus by faith, it only speaks conviction. It shows just how blind we are, to be face to face with God incarnate, and yet crucify him still. And we too, as Paul tells us in Romans 1, are without excuse. No one is righteous, no not one. Instead of seeing the world around us as miraculous evidence for the grace of the creator and bowing to him, we've turned to man-made idols to center our life around. We've crucified Jesus by idolatry, and if you have not turned from that, the blood of Christ the mistaken innocent one calls out guilty, just like the blood of Abel murdered unjustly by his brother Cain.

But the blood of Christ also speaks another word, a better word than guilty and a better word than Abel. This sermon does not end at the conviction of the cross but continues into the gospel of the resurrection.

The Resurrection Gospel

Peter's tactic in this sermon is not guilt, and neither is that my tactic today. Here is good news, gospel news. We crucified Jesus, and we should've known better. But did you really think we could kill God himself? The answer, we will see, is obviously not. Read **verse 24**. The Jesus we handed over to be crucified in our place didn't stay dead. This is the second identifying marker of his identity. Not only did he perform signs and miracles to show he was who he said he was, he literally and historically got up out of the grave. I love how Peter frames the image for us: he says that God raised him. It was not by some trick or human invention that Jesus was raised. No, it was the power of God, or "deep magic" as C.S. Lewis would say.

There is some sort of mystery about the resurrection, which Lewis and his friend J.R.R. Tolkien called a "eucatastrophe". At the very moment that seems to be the darkest, the moment of catastrophe when Jesus lied dead in the grave and death had won, the catastrophe of death leads to the climax of joy to end the story. The story of Jesus begins with the hope of incarnation and ends with the hope of resurrection. It's a "good catastrophe", or as Tolkien says: "the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears."²

The sudden, happy turn of the resurrection can only come by the power of God, not the design of men. Why? Because like Peter says, "it was not possible for him to be held" by death. The resurrection is the exclamation point on Christ's work and his identity, because it shows him to be truly God, the transcendent God that cannot be bound by earth or space or time or death. The resurrection is the moment at which we see the mirror unfogged, when we realize the purpose of

² J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000), 100.



the pain. Jesus is like Samson, who in his obedience to his covenant vow could not be bound by any cord or rope, no matter how strong. Except obviously, he's truer: in his perfect obedience, not even the rope of death could tie him to the tomb.

This kind of surety of power was foretold. It shouldn't have been news to the Jews. This is what Peter hints at in **verses 25-29**. This quote comes directly from Psalm 15:8-11. Peter seems to be implying that David, in penning this psalm, is actually speaking on behalf of Christ. David is the writer, but by the Holy Spirit Jesus is the speaker. And what is the assertion of Christ in this psalm? "I saw the Lord always before me". Not even once was Christ abandoned, even in death. Not for an instant was the union of the trinity shattered or splintered.

Here we see the verification of Jesus' identity in the way the Father interacts with him. The psalm says that he will not let him abandon his soul to Hades. Hades here is not the hell of eternal punishment, but rather what the Jews would know as Sheol, the place of the dead. Sheol is not necessarily an evil place, and there is plenty of room in Scripture to associate sheol, for those in Christ, as a place of peace and paradise: the place of the righteous dead. We remember that the orthodox Christian understanding of Holy Saturday, the day between Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, tells us that Jesus, having really died in his flesh, went to the place of the righteous dead in order, as 1 Peter says, to declare his victory to every corner of existence and to all created beings: fallen angels, the unrighteous dead, and the OT saints. Holy Saturday is a day of proclamation of Jesus' victory prior to the culmination of that victory on Resurrection Sunday.

But the important piece from our text is that Peter is invoking the language of Holy Saturday, that Jesus really did go down to the place of the dead, but he did not stay there. You see, Jesus is not just any other saint who lived a great life and went to the place of paradise at his death. He is not some moral example of the reward of the righteous. No, his soul was not left in Sheol, but was reunited with a real and physical body as he leapt out of the tomb. This bodily resurrection is so central to our understanding of why the resurrection is such good news: God cares about our bodies so much that he has designed it that we will have a new and glorious one in the age to come, and even the fragility of our bodies now showcase his glory in being perfectly broken. Christ the forerunner went to death, but was not abandoned there. His soul met his new body just as all those in Christ will meet their new bodies again in the resurrection to come. Not a single one of God's children's souls will be abandoned. We are meant to glorify God in our body: imperfectly but beautifully now, and perfectly and gloriously later.

Keep reading here, look at **verse 27** again. Christ's soul was not left in Hades or Sheol, and neither did he see corruption. Typically Jewish belief would say that after the third day in the grave, the body was corrupted and the soul had fled completely. But Christ was not dead that long. He was pure and undefiled even in his death, a sign of divine pleasure and the seal of approval on his life. As David goes on to say, he walks the path of life, full of the gladness of God's presence. Not once was he left or abandoned or defiled by death. All the way down and back up he showed his power over it.



Now Peter moves on to the proof. How can we be sure that this Psalm speaks of Jesus, that really this no-name Nazarene really has come up from the tomb? Read **verses 29-31**. As evidence of David's meaning, Paul points to the tomb of David. He is still there, they've all seen it. No stone was rolled from that grave. This clearly shows that David was speaking not of himself in his psalm, but of his descendant, the one who would sit on the throne forever, because he is the one who lives forever. David knew this, inspired by the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt: this resurrection of this Jesus is not some novel conspiracy theory: the prophet king Jesus was foretold by the prophet king David.

Just in case we still doubt this gospel to be too good to be true, Peter goes on. Who is this Jesus? Well, **verse 32**. We saw his resurrection with our own eyes! We aren't making this up. The physical bodily resurrection of Jesus is a historical fact verified by eye-witness and the long arc of history bends in the hands of God to remind us that he who is outside of time operates in time. And if this Jesus is powerful enough to move back the clock of death eternally, he must truly be God eternal. Notice too **verses 34-35**. This better David is also now ascended to the highest throne, the one way higher than David, the throne in the heavens.

The last evidence Peter gives to the resurrection is the pouring out of the Spirit on the apostles, in **verse 33**. The exalted and risen Jesus is risen by and with the power of the Holy Spirit, a power that is now being revealed in the apostles' boldness and as they miraculously speak in the languages of the world. The power of his followers is a testament to his power, as those around them begin to glimpse the same kind of supernatural strangeness in the Christians that they glimpsed in Jesus. We will get to more in a minute as to how exactly the resurrection ties into life in the Spirit, but for now we recognize that for all those who have been truly made new in Christ, your life itself is a testament to the power of the resurrection.

In all of this, we have a sure foundation for the surety of the resurrection. We can't kill God. And Jesus was never once abandoned to death. His life, the apostolic witness, and even our lives in the spirit are all a testament to the greatest news the world has ever heard and will ever hear. He is not here, he is risen. He is not dead, even our sin couldn't keep him down. Is that remarkable to you today? Do you see the power of this sudden turn of joy? He is risen.

And the truth of the resurrection is so central to the gospel of Jesus and so central to the Christian life. It's a reality we forget all too often. This text shows us why without the resurrection we have no gospel at all. Because the resurrection truly answers the question we all must ask: Who is this man we have killed in our sin? Who is this Jesus of Nazareth? Up to this point Peter has referred to him by no other name than his givenly earthly one: Jesus. But now, by glimpsing the surety of his resurrection power, we have the skeleton key that unlocks all of our questions about this mysterious man from Nazareth. Who is he? We see in **verse 36**.

If the cross of Christ is the shorthand of the gospel, explaining in detail the love of God for sinners, then the resurrection is the certainty of the gospel. If the cross is the letter of God's love, the resurrection is the stamp of his approval, the Father's amen to the work of Christ. If you have ever



doubted the loving providence and plan of God, get your eyes on the resurrection. The proof is in the pudding as they say. And if this Jesus is not just some lowlife vagabond huckster who had a bit of a following and instead he is the victor over death, what more proof is needed? Who else have you seen rise from the dead under their own power?

Here is the best news you'll ever get: Jesus isn't dead. And since that's true, this is also true: he is Lord and Christ. He is Lord, the holder of the universe and the creator and sustainer of all things, the one who speaks planets into existence and breathes stars into the sky, the one who sees all and judges all and sits enthroned over all, the one who is not impressed by material wealth or status of power but grants every step you take and dime you make, the one who grants salvation to the repentant and pardon for the faithful sinner. Jesus is God, and that changes everything. But he is also Christ, the anointed one of God, the promised son of God, the deliverer of God's people. The resurrection shows us exactly who Jesus is, and proves it over and over: he is Almighty God and the only way to God. He is both the object of our salvation and the means to our salvation.

And so today, the good news of the resurrection is laid out before you. You crucified the wrong man, an innocent one, by your sinful rebellion against God. But good news: that innocent man is the means to your pardon. He may have gone willingly to death, but his outward weakness burns with inner strength. Lay yourself at his feet for forgiveness and grace, and he will not turn you away. The one you killed is the one who stands in your place to take the punishment that you inflicted on him. Church, you may not know it, but you need this news afresh today.

The Response of the Redeemed

What do we do with this gospel of resurrection? Peter's audience hears this spirit-driven sermon and immediately are cut to the heart, convicted in the very seat of their emotions. Reread **verse 37**. How could they hear such news and be the same? Their response shows us too what our response should be. So I'd like to close with two charges and two blessings. These come directly from **verse 38**.

Charge 1: Repent

We forget that our response to the gospel, whether we have heard it clearly one time or a thousand times, is always the same. We repent of sin. To repent is to turn away from our sin and to God. Repentance shows that we understand, it's a whole-body and whole-soul action that corresponds with faith. And there may be some watching who have never repented of your sin. To you, I tell you that the risen Christ is ready with open arms to receive you. Stop running to empty and vain idols, and run to him. And to those who have repented a thousand times, keep going. The posture of your heart is of paramount importance. The Christian life is an exercise in responding to the good news of Jesus with a repentant heart.

Charge 2: Be Baptized



Why does Peter immediately tell his hearers to be baptized? It's not because he wants to send in some great ministry numbers to his denomination. It's because he knows that baptism is the covenant sign not just that you say you repent, but that you have truly brought into this Jesus thing. Baptism is an affirmation of a local church and other believers, it's a public declaration, it's a signpost for eternity, it's the ambassadors of Christ stamping your passport as you enter into the kingdom of God. And that is why it's so vitally important, given by God as a means to showcase our repentance. We aren't opening the virtual tank today, obviously, but here is the charge. Consider this: are you really bought into this? Is the resurrection a nice thought for you, or does it cause you to want to go down deep with the local church into the depths of following Jesus?

And if you've already been baptized and are a member of this church, don't forget that your baptism signifies your participation in the resurrection. Jesus went to the grave, you went into the water. Both of you were dead. He came up from the grave, you came up from the water. Both of you live, and when you really go down in that grave, you will still live. Remember that, let that sink in. In your union with Christ you are not a spectator of the resurrection but a participant. Your baptism is the signifier of your new life, and now your call is to walk in a manner worthy of that new life.

Blessing 1: You are Forgiven

When you respond to the resurrection with true repentance, you are forgiven. Your sins are gone. Did you know that's what Resurrection Sunday is all about? It's about Jesus taking you out of the grave and your sins staying there. For those in Christ, there is no better time than now to take a look at your sins right in the eye and tell them: "see you never."

Blessing 2: You are New

All those who respond with repentance don't just lose sin, they gain God. This is what Peter means when he tells the crowds that they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. You see, the resurrection of Jesus signifies not just the surety of your salvation, it signifies the surety of your resurrection too. When the tomb broke open, it was just a few short weeks before the fire fell. On the other side of the first Resurrection Sunday, every one in Christ receives the power they need to make it to the end of all things pure and undefiled. Because the resurrection of Jesus unleashes the Holy Spirit, it means that we are never without hope and power. Right now, we are in a unique time of the church. Church historians are struggling to name any other time in history where so many Christians were isolated from one another so drastically. It's unprecedented. But get this: Jesus is still alive. By the Spirit, you are alive too, with a new life that will never die again.

In the Old Testament, the feast of Pentecost celebrated God's faithfulness in giving the harvest. At the new Pentecost, the Spirit falls, the resurrection is proclaimed, and 3000 new disciples are made. The harvest begins, not of crops, but of souls.



What does it mean for us? It means that nothing can stop God's resurrected people. We have been raised by the Spirit and we are being made perfect by the Spirit to be raised again. Can disease and loneliness and despair stop the church thriving and the gospel going out? What about death? I think you know the answer Resurrection Sunday screams to us: no chance.

