

During Holy Week, we usually focus on Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, but rarely do we talk about the Saturday in between. Maybe because we know how troubling it must have been. The disciples of Jesus had seen their Messiah arrested, beaten, crucified, and put in a grave. Their world was turned upside-down. And on the Saturday after, they were stuck at home, sheltered-in-place, grieving, fearful, concerned for their safety and completely uncertain about the future. They were looking for anything secure to hold on to.

We are in a similar situation. Our world has been turned upside-down. We are sheltered in our home, fearful to come out, grieving our losses, concerned for our safety and uncertain about the future. But 2,000 years ago, an announcement was made that changed everything for them and it's an announcement that can change everything for us. It was made this way:

[Luke 24:1-8] But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. ⁵ And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." ⁸ And they remembered his words.

Jesus was dead and buried, but now is alive. It is the hope and good news that changed everything for his disciples, and it changes everything for us. And it is the reason we gather to celebrate and worship this morning. But it wasn't the first time the announcement was declared. In fact, it was prophesied 700 years prior by a guy named Isaiah, in a passage referenced by Jesus just before he went to the cross to say **that's me, that's what I'm going to do, and that is what it is going to mean for you.** It was a declaration that he would live, and it tells us what we can hold on to in these unsettling times.

[Isaiah 53:10-12] ¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah spoke often of this Servant of God who would accomplish something significant but do so at a great cost to himself, and here we see that the will of God would prosper in his hand. Jesus tells us he's that Servant. He was sent by the Father to bear our sin and be crushed upon the cross, and that's exactly what Jesus did. The results of that faithfulness are what we celebrate and hold fast to this morning. We're told he shall prolong his days. He's speaking of resurrection.

The Bible says the wages of sin is death, but Jesus lived a righteous life and had no sin. He didn't deserve death so the grave could not hold him. In rising from the grave, he defeated sin and death, was exalted by the Father, and given the spoils of his victory.

[Philippians 2:8b-9] He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.

Jesus fulfilled the will of God in his life and death and God exalted him in his resurrection and reward. But the good news doesn't end there. The prospering of the will of God in Jesus' hand has eternal implications for us as well. Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus makes several things possible for us, and I want to look at three of them this morning.

Jesus gives us forgiveness.

Isaiah says the servant, Jesus, will be called the righteous one. He had a right relationship with the Father because he fulfilled all the demands of their relationship. And because he is righteous, he is able to make others be counted as righteous. This is a legal term that means we will be justified. Jesus bore our sin and took on our punishment of death upon the cross. And if our sin has been punished in him, it is paid for and we bear it no more. Our sin was placed on him, his righteousness was placed on us, and we stand not guilty before God.

The legalese may sound stale, but if you've ever been declared guilty, you know how significant this is. Have you ever been declared guilty? I have once, by a judge in the state of Kansas. In my freshman year in college (don't all great stories start that way?) I had the wonderful idea of driving a car about as fast as I could on the winding, hilly, narrow two-lane road that ran through the center of campus. Not surprisingly, I lost control of the car, slid sideways for what seemed like forever, and finally came to a stop, thanks to the tree I hit head on. I was placed under arrest and charged with reckless driving.

In my arrogance I chose to fight it in court, but as I listened to the words of the district attorney, the evidence he presented, the testimony of police and of eyewitnesses, even I, at the end of the trial, was thinking "I'm so guilty!" And I'll never forget the end. The judge looked at me and said "Mr. Pressler, I find you guilty as charged." In that moment I felt a great weight. I had no recourse. I was stuck, and I had to own it. I was guilty. And then came the sentence; a sizeable fine for an 18-year-old and I couldn't drive in the state for a year.

There is coming a day when we will all stand before a heavenly judge. If we go there on our own merit, the verdict will be the same. GUILTY! All of us are sheep who have gone astray, and the penalty is infinitely more significant than money. It's death. But if you have accepted Jesus' sacrifice and righteousness to count on your behalf, you have nothing to be afraid of. You have been justified. You have been declared righteous, and you don't even have to wait until you are before the judge to be sure. He's already spoken and rendered a verdict.

[Romans 8:1] There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

If this is true, let's live like it's true. You are free from the guilt of your sin. All you have done has been nailed to the cross. You don't have to bear it anymore. Jesus has done that for you. You are forgiven.

But his work goes beyond a legal status. It also changes our identity. **Jesus gathers us as family.**

Isaiah says, "When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring." Not only will he experience new life himself, but he will produce spiritual children born into the family of God. Righteousness is a legal term but it's also relational. Jesus has restored for us a right relationship with God.

[John 1:12] But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

What does that mean for us? New life. Fresh start. Part of a family. We were once rebels and enemies, separated by sin, but because he paid for that, we have been reconciled to him to have a relationship with him and with the other members of the family.

This is of particularly good news these days. I know the hardest thing for a lot of you is the separation from one another. But the good news is we are never alone. Jesus has made possible a personal, intimate relationship with God who loves and accepts you unconditionally, who wants you to know him more and more, and who adores you. Zephaniah says God rejoices in gladness over you! And he has connected us with each other. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. I know we can't gather right now, but I hear wonderful stories about how we are staying in touch with each other. There seems to be a collective growing appreciation for community, a fulfillment of being part of God's family that has grown over the last several weeks. All of this is possible because of Jesus.

And because you have been declared righteous for all time and are a permanent member of God's family, **Jesus guarantees us forever.**

That phrase "prolong his days" is a Hebrew phrase for an enduring life, and it has echoes of eternity in it. Jesus will not experience death again and says as much in a vision of John the Apostle [Revelation 1:17b-18a] "**Fear not, I am the first and the last,¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore.**"

What an amazing truth we can hold on to in these times. **If the life he lives is eternal, the life he gives is eternal.** That's the hope we can live with today, regardless of circumstances.

God is writing a story and he's already told us the end. It's like a movie or a book that tells you the ending in the beginning. You may not want it to be given away, but as the details of the story unfold, it actually helps you endure through. **The beauty of the Gospel is that we may not know what is coming tomorrow, but we do know what is coming in eternity.** And because of that, we can keep going because he keeps his Word. If you struggle with that, come back to this passage. 700 years before Jesus walked the earth, Isaiah prophesied about who he was and what he came to do. Isaiah didn't know the details. He didn't know all of what God was doing. But

what he wrote came true. We are in the same place today. God has written in his Word that there is a glorious eternity where we will be resurrected with Christ, made new, and live with him for eternity. We don't know the details of what will happen between now and then, but we can believe that what God's Word says is true. That certainty of our future enables us to endure the uncertainties in our present. We will be with God forever.

So what do we do with this? I close with a story...a true one, found in Acts 8. Jesus has been resurrected, walked the earth for 40 days and ascended to heaven, and the Church has started thanks to the sending of the Holy Spirit. God sends Philip, one of the twelve, out of Jerusalem, and as he's traveling, he encounters an Ethiopian official reading aloud from Isaiah 53. Philip asks if he understands it and the guy says he needs some help understanding who the writer is talking about. Philip, using this passage, told the Ethiopian about the good news of Jesus. And as they were going along, they passed by some water and the Ethiopian said he wanted to be baptized to express his belief in Jesus. As they came out of the water, God took Philip away and we're told the Ethiopian went on rejoicing. My prayer is that we would respond like the Ethiopian.

If you are with us this morning and hearing about this Jesus and want to receive forgiveness and be born into a new family and live forever, know you can leave today with all those things. You don't have to earn it. You simply must confess that you've fallen short of God's standards and, in faith, tell him that you want what Jesus did on the cross to count for you. And for all of us, even in the midst of these dark days, my prayer is that we would go away from this service rejoicing and telling. I'm sure many heard about Jesus when that Ethiopian got home, and I pray that, out of our joy would come an insatiable desire to tell others about Jesus, to tell them the Good News found in Isaiah 53. Our Savior has come, he has paid the price of our sin, and because he lives, we can too.