

Easter always seems to come at the right time because we need an injection of hope. We need to be reminded of what we celebrate today because the news as of late has us all down. As you might have read, we are nearing 1,000,000 Covid deaths in this country. It is a number that seems incomprehensible, a number few of us would have anticipated as we were in the early stages of the pandemic this time two years ago. Not surprisingly, as we bear the weight of all that's happened and, for some of us, considered our own mortality more than ever before, the most recent survey of American's mental health shows 63% of adults with stress at an all-time high and 55% more burned out now than before pandemic. We have been living with the constant reminder of the condition of this world under the penalty of sin, the end we all face, and our desperate need for a Savior. So, what can we do when overwhelmed with it all? Go back to the words of Jesus, uttered just a few hours before he went to the cross:

[John 16:33] ³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

That statement is either a cruel joke or the hope of the world. Jesus is either mocking us, or he's telling us not all is lost, he's about to do something to make sure that's true, and he's inviting us to put our trust in him. The Bible says the wages of sin is death. That has been abundantly clear these last two years, but it's always been true. Each of us is destined for the grave. And while we've seen over the last two weeks how Jesus has overcome the condemnation of our sin by nailing it to his cross, how he has freed us from the power of sin by raising us to walk in newness of life, it's this last one, the penalty of sin, the guarantee of death, that Easter Sunday addresses most emphatically.

And so, this morning, my prayer is that we would all take heart, be encouraged, cheer up as we celebrate the resurrection and consider what it means for us today and in eternity. Before the cross, Jesus said he would win, and the empty tomb is a declaration of that victory. Jesus is inviting you to live in that victory.

[1 Corinthians 15:3-7] ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

The basis of our faith and the hope and peace Jesus calls us to is rooted in the heart of the gospel. If you want to know the essentials of the gospel, this is it. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day. There are secondary issues in our faith that we can disagree on. But this is non-negotiable because all we believe and hope for hinges on this being true. **If Jesus is risen, death does not have the final say.**

It reminds me of a show I watched about the food from the Italian region of Bologna. One of their specialties is a deli meat called mortadella, and they are so serious about it they passed a law that states that, in order to call it mortadella, it can only have certain, specific ingredients. If it doesn't, you know what it's called instead? Baloney. It's the same with the Gospel. For it to be

the gospel, it must start with Christ's atoning death, burial, and victorious resurrection. Otherwise, it's not the gospel.

Do you believe that's true? Have you put your faith and hope in it? Do you think the resurrection is just a nice story, something that happened long ago that we can't be sure about? Or the power of God for salvation and the only hope we have? Some try to have Jesus without the resurrection. It's too miraculous, too out there. **But you can't have the hope of the gospel without an empty tomb.** If Jesus is not raised from the dead, the gospel crumbles.

[1 Corinthians 15:17] ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

If he didn't rise from the dead, our faith is worthless, meaningless. If the tomb isn't empty, our faith and hope are. A dead Savior is a defeated Savior.

It's like a guy I went to school with who was always trying to help you with your work. There was one problem though: he didn't have very good grades. If he couldn't do much for himself, he sure could do much for anyone else. **If Jesus can't get himself out of the grave, he can't get you out of the grave.** The wages of sin is death. If Jesus is still dead, sin is not defeated, and death is not defeated. If Jesus is still dead, I have no hope for you.

But the good news we celebrate today is that he did, indeed, rise from the dead. It's not a myth. It's not a conspiracy by just a few people. It's a fact affirmed by witnesses. Paul makes sure to remind everyone that a whole lot of people saw the resurrected Jesus. If this was a court of law, the witness list would be extensive. Peter, the disciples, even James, his brother, who didn't believe, now saw him and did. That list included 500 others, many of whom were still alive when Paul was writing this letter and could confirm it.

Jesus was also affirmed by the Scriptures. The Old Testament spoke of one to come who would suffer on our behalf and come back to life in victory. It's not some guy who made up a really neat story. **The gospel is the fulfillment of a centuries-old promise of redemption.** Our God is a promise maker and a promise keeper. But before you can benefit from those promises, you have to figure out what you believe about the resurrection, because that is where our hope is found. If Jesus is alive, and he is, that changes everything.

So then what is that hope? It starts with the character of God. He has kept those promises, at the expense of the suffering and death of his son, so we can trust he will see it through until the end, and that includes one more glorious promise.

[1 Corinthians 15:51-55] ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of

death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

I love how Easter is celebrated in the springtime because we have a picture of what has happened to Jesus and what will happen with us...just without all the allergens! In fall and winter, death. But in spring, new life. Martha and I had a plant that died a couple of years ago. But about a week ago we noticed a pink flower. Whatever was dead in the ground had blossomed with new life. It is a picture of what happened with Jesus, and it's a picture of what will happen with us.

Paul reveals something kept hidden in the Old Testament. If Jesus is raised from the dead, then those of us who believe in him will be raised in the same way. **His resurrection is the final declaration of victory over sin and death.** He has overcome the penalty of sin that each of us was due, and his resurrection is the guarantee of a promise yet fulfilled. There is coming a day, at the end of time, when he will return and make us new, imperishable, immortal. I'm not talking about heaven, where we are with Christ spiritually while our dead bodies decay here on earth. I'm talking about a time where our bodies, like Jesus' body, will be raised from the dead to perfection.

How different can your life be today knowing there is coming a time when there will be no more death, illness, brokenness? It will all be swallowed up like a defeated enemy because he is risen. Jesus doesn't ask us to ignore what is happening in the world. He's not dismissive of our suffering. He came to save us from it, but because he did, that changes the way we can live now.

[1 Corinthians 15:58] ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Paul tells us to hold fast and press on, to not let discouragement stop us, but to keep going in the Christian life and to making Christ known.

Make the Gospel of first importance. In other words, live a gospel-centered, Christ-centered life. Everything revolves around the good news of Jesus; your identity, your purpose, your faith and hope. That means your circumstances don't determine your reality or your future. Jesus does. How would your life be different if Christ was at the center, if the majesty of the resurrection was the hope you based your life on? Peace, contentment, hope, witness.

But to do that we have to remember the gospel says a perfect world, perfect body, a perfect life awaits us all...in the future. So let's quit trying to make this life perfect now. Our excess, comfort, investment in how we look (I am rocking the dad bod so hard these days and would have to invest a fortune to near perfection!), entertainment...all of this is distraction. All of it will pass away. All of it, therefore, is of secondary importance. Make this life about making him known. Let your life shine like a light for others to see and be drawn to. When the discouraging times come, let him remind you he won and you belong to him. We should be the most joyful and hopeful people in the world, not because we're naïve, not because we're not paying attention to all the calamity, but because our Savior is risen and has overcome it all. The world needs to see the difference Jesus makes when it looks at your life.

And if you are here this morning and have not trusted in Jesus as your Savior, I pray today is the day, because he's inviting you to do so. All of us will be raised one day. And we'll either spend eternity with God, or spend eternity separated from him. Your sin has separated you from him, but he's done everything necessary to overcome it. The life he lived was the life you couldn't, the death he died you deserve. But if you place your faith in him and let his life and his death count for you, you will be made new now and one day live the new resurrected life he lives. Talk to me, a prayer partner, Connecting Center.

Rest in peace. It's something we usually say about those who've passed, but you know who else we should say it to? Each other! The living, because you know what it communicates? **It's all going to be ok.** You know how I know? Because Christ is risen.

I am reminded of that this morning because I found out yesterday that my friend and Fellowship member Richard Ford passed away on Friday. You may know Richard. He had been in a motorized wheelchair for years, his body ravaged by disease, and you may remember I interviewed him during our Heaven series last year. Well, I invited him up, asked him a question, and he preached for 10 minutes. But Richard always moved, inspired, and encouraged me. I never heard despair. I only heard hope and peace. He was a man deeply in love with his Savior, confident in his eternal destination, and so eager to be home. And while Heaven was the initial promise he most anticipated, the promise of this passage, the promise that his broken body would one day be made whole, was so meaningful to him.

We all have the same end as Richard, but death does not have the final say for those in Christ. Because he lives, we live. **I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.** Let's live in the victory Christ has won.