

2020: The Global Year of the Bible
The Fifth Sunday of Quarantine from COVID-19
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April 12, 2020

EASTER SUNDAY!

That first Easter morning, disciples of Jesus were separated away from everyone else – not because of a contagious virus that could lead to death, but because of their blown-apart faith in someone they thought was going to rule the world, who had just died, in a terrible shameful way. They were afraid, they were heartbroken, they were confused, they were trying to figure out what to do, “do we just go back to our lives before Jesus? They were wondering what would be next for them.

Can you see the similarities?

We are not gathered in crowds this morning. We are not making Easter dinner for the usual table-full of people. We are separated, isolated, afraid, wondering what life will be like after the main threat of this virus has passed. We are wondering what will be next for us. How will life be different after quarantine?

The disciples were hiding out of fear of a **visible** enemy – those who had unjustly tried, convicted, and crucified Jesus.

We are hiding out (so to speak) in fear of (in response to) an **invisible** enemy – a virus that could just as easily pass over you and your family as find a place to land and infect you and your family.

I want you to just think about those two Easter morning scenarios – the first Easter morning, and Easter morning 2020. See the disciples huddled together in your mind beside the picture of yourself or your family quarantined together.

But here’s the difference. We know quarantine will end. We don’t know when but we know it will. They – those first followers of Jesus – they didn’t know when or IF the bullseye on their backs would ever go away. That first Easter, they didn’t know yet that Jesus had risen from the dead. Easter morning 2020, we know that he did. And that makes ALL the difference.

Yes, we are separated from each other, grieving that we can’t be together with our families, our church family, our communities sharing Easter dinner in restaurants with friends. We are grieving that we had to cancel so much, to let it all go in order to be safe and keep others safe. Yes, we are grieving. But here, on this side of history, on this side of a tomb that was empty that first Easter morning, we do not grieve as those who have no hope. We have hope that lives no matter what. We have hope beyond today, beyond tomorrow, beyond next year, and in fact, beyond death!

Listen friends, Christmas is awesome, right? Christmas is our celebration of the birth of Jesus. Without his birth, there is no death or resurrection. So, we’re grateful Jesus was born. But what if that was it? Jesus, God made man, came to earth, lived a beautiful sinless life, and then died – just like all of us die. That would be nice, great, memorable, but would we still be remembering his birth 2000+ years later if that’s all Jesus did? Be born?

Now, let’s go a step further. Let’s say Jesus was born, lived a beautiful sinless life, did some miraculous ministry, then was betrayed & abandoned by his closest disciples, and then died a horrible death by crucifixion, fulfilling many prophecies, including the ones that claim his death would pay the price for the sins of the world. That’s amazing, right? But, 2000+ years later, as amazing as that is, would we still be remembering his death by crucifixion all over the world in a Body called the Church every day, and gathering as the church to celebrate it at least once a week as an act of love and gratitude for what he did? No, we would not. Because the

Church is the earthly expression of the Resurrected Body of Jesus Christ with Jesus himself as the Head.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the perfect sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, is key, is THE ABSOLUTE NECESSARY KEY to our faith, friends. His pulsating heart, beginning to beat inside his dead body, a stiff and still body after 3 days, is why my heart and your heart pulsates with hope, joy, love & gratitude for him every day, but especially today, because what he did, what he accomplished out of love for us, his RÉSURRECTION VICTORY opens the way for us to live victorious lives here on earth and eternally victorious lives together in Heaven forever!

Listen to these words from the apostle Paul from 1 Corinthians 15:1-20. I'm reading from the paraphrase of Scripture called The Message because it gives us more of an on-the-street sort of view of things. I do encourage you to read it on your own later today. There's a lot in there. So here goes:

15 ¹⁻² Friends, let me go over the Message with you one final time— this Message that I proclaimed and that you made your own; this Message on which you took your stand and by which your life has been saved. (I'm assuming, now, that your belief was the real thing and not a passing fancy, that you're in this for good and holding fast.)

³⁻⁹ The first thing I did was place before you what was placed so emphatically before me: that the Messiah died for our sins, exactly as Scripture tells it; that he was buried; that he was raised from death on the third day, again exactly as Scripture says; that he presented himself alive to Peter, then to his closest followers, and later to more than five hundred of his followers all at the same time, most of them still around (although a few have since died); that he then spent time with James and the rest of those he commissioned to represent him; and that he finally presented himself alive to *me*. It was fitting that I bring up the rear. I don't deserve to be included in that inner circle, as you well know, having spent all those early years trying my best to stamp God's church right out of existence.

¹⁰⁻¹¹ But because God was so gracious, so very generous, here I am. And I'm not about to let his grace go to waste. Haven't I worked hard trying to do more than any of the others? Even then, my work didn't amount to all that much. It was God giving me the work to do, God giving me the energy to do it. So whether you heard it from me or from those others, it's all the same: We spoke God's truth and you entrusted your lives.

¹²⁻¹⁵ Now, let me ask you something profound yet troubling. If you became believers because you trusted the proclamation that Christ is alive, risen from the dead, how can you let people say that there is no such thing as a resurrection? If there's no resurrection, there's no living Christ. And face it—if there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors. Not only that, but we would be guilty of telling a string of barefaced lies about God, all these affidavits we passed on to you verifying that God raised up Christ—sheer fabrications, if there's no resurrection.

¹⁶⁻²⁰ If corpses can't be raised, then Christ wasn't, because he was indeed dead. And if Christ weren't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever. It's even worse for those who died hoping in Christ and resurrection, because they're already in their graves. If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot. But the truth is that Christ *has* been raised up, the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries.

Since I was 17 years old, I have lived my life based on the Truth, verified over and over and over again throughout history, attested to by over 500 in-person witnesses, and confirmed in faith, hope, and love by billions in the last 2000+ years, the Truth that Jesus Christ was born, lived a perfect sinless life, died unjustly taking your sins and mine as his own into the depths of hell, and three days later ROSE UP from death so that anyone who believes in him can do the same!

If what I believe is true, (and I believe it is), then whenever my last breath happens here, my next breath is taken in a perfect place called heaven where I will be reunited with so many saints who have gone before. And I tell you, as I get older, Heaven is looking better all the time! However, if what I believe is not true, then I would have lived a life for the sake of others, sharing faith, hope, and love in good measure. End of story.

Let's flip it.

Let's say you are someone who doesn't believe in Jesus – that he was and is exactly who he said – the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Savior who alone can save us from eternal death apart from God – you don't believe that, in fact, you don't believe there even is a God. Let's just say that's you, that's been you and maybe your whole family your whole life. I understand. It's hard to believe something you can't see, touch, or hear. But today, just today, Easter Sunday, stuck in your house with no big dinner to cook, what if just today, you said, "Ok God. You know I'm not tracking with you, I don't really believe in you, but I'm willing to open my heart to the possibility that you're there, that you're alive, and that you have something for me. Jesus, come into my life and wake me up, raise me up to living a life of faith, hope, and love. I do as Romans 10:9 says, "I confess with my lips that you are LORD and I believe in my heart that God raised you from the dead." Amen.

Let's just say you do that. And nothing happens because Jesus isn't real and billions of people over the centuries have put their faith in a myth. Nothing lost, right? Especially right there in your own home where you can give this a shot without outing yourself, right?

But let's just say that today you choose to take that step of faith and you die tomorrow. I hope that's not true, but I could die tomorrow. Everyone is going to die at some point. Let's just say you die tomorrow and when you take your last breath here you find that your next breath is taken in the presence of a very real God – a perfectly just and perfectly merciful God who asks you, "Why should I let you in?" Having remembered what you heard here today, knowing that you took that step of faith on Easter Sunday 2020, all you have to say is "Jesus opened the way for me." "Jesus opened the way for me." Or quite frankly all you really have to say is the name of Jesus! The name of Jesus is perfect. The name of Jesus is the key to Heaven. The gates swing open and the name of Jesus and you're home FREE. Free from all the fears and doubts and worries and uncertainties and heartaches of this life. Free from all the fear about what's going to happen after you die.

Jesus said as recorded in John 8:36, "When the Son sets you free, you are free indeed."

I could say so much more. So much more. But let me conclude with this: With all of my being, I believe. I could stand here and tell you story after story after story describing to you the ways I have seen the resurrection power of Jesus Christ alive and well in my life, in the lives of so many I know and love, and in the church that I serve. Ways that cannot be explained except to say, "God did that. God intervened right there. God revealed that to me. God healed that, God gave that, God moved that mountain."

Today, on this Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020, in the middle of a global pandemic caused by the coronavirus, I celebrate the NEW LIFE God has given to me through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son, my Savior, Jesus Christ. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life!"

May you remember this time of quarantine not for what you lost, but for what you gained, right here, right now – for all eternity. Amen.



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**BECAUSE HE LIVES
WE CAN FACE TOMORROW
AND ALL ETERNITY!**