

Sermon for: Trinity Lutheran Church, Manilla

Easter Sunday, March 31, 2024

Sermon Title/Theme: "Guided to NEW LIFE" (Guided to the Cross Series)

Sermon Text: Matthew 28:1-10

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

What does "new life" look like? God's creation gives us some glimpses. Easter is celebrated in the spring every year. It arrives at a time when the flowers peek out of the ground; the grass is greening again; and trees are budding (except when Easter is still in March!). To many of us with farm backgrounds, "new life" is the chick pecking out of the shell, the young calf nursing at its mother, or the anticipation of the another planting of seeds in the gardens and fields. To the expectant parents, "new life" is the first sonogram picture or the first cry at birth.

What did new life look like for the women at the tomb that first Easter? Scripture tells us that it was earthshaking—literally. There was a powerful earthquake at the tomb. The heavy stone which blocked the entry to the tomb was easily rolled away. New life looked like a mysterious messenger angel telling the women not to be afraid. The angel had appeared before the women and told them that Jesus had risen from the dead. New life was seeing the place where Jesus' dead body had been laid and seeing only the burial cloths.

New life was the risen Jesus meeting and greeting the women at the tomb. The appearance of the risen Jesus is physically affirmed as they "took hold of his feet and worshipped him." The One who had proclaimed to Mary and Martha that He was "the resurrection and the life" was true to His Word. He had risen to bring new life

Only days earlier the disciples had ran and hid in fear; the women had left the cross and the tomb in deep grief; the darkness of doubt had come upon many who had hoped that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah; John and Mary had left the cross to begin their life of mutual care. Would life ever be “normal” or “new” again for these followers?

The questions of whether life can ever be “new” again lingers. What will life look like after the divorce? After the death of a loved one? After the life-changing diagnosis or accident? After the company is downsized, the job lost, or the farm operation unsustainable? After another family life transition—an empty nest or a move to a new setting. We constantly find ourselves living in the many “old” realities of a sinful world and hopeful to the new.

The risen Jesus appears to the women, to Mary Magdalene, to the disciples, to the Apostle Paul and many others. The appearances begin on Easter morning and continue for 40 days.

Through the proclamation of these witnesses recorded in Scripture, Jesus continues to appear to us. Jesus appears to His church in baptism which brings the baptized child into Christ’s death and the new life of His resurrection. Jesus appears to His church giving the real presence of the new covenant--His body and blood for the forgiveness of our sin. We are a people whose foundation is rock solid based on the death and resurrection of Jesus. We are an Easter people who are no longer afraid of the future because we know the future belongs to Jesus. We are an Easter people who also reach out to be with Jesus and who seek to hold on to him to help us our lives. We are an Easter people who worship and praise our Savior for the life he now gives to for us to lead. We, like the women at the tomb, are compelled to go forth and tell people that Jesus is alive, and he is alive in each of us.

Often life brings changes and challenges. 94 year-old Marian Drake is a fellow member of Trinity who recently moved to the Grace Well care facility in Denison. After a lifetime of independent living, it's a challenging change for her. In a recent vision Marian honestly shared her adjustment struggles with me, but then she added, "I just need an attitude adjustment." Easter doesn't change our locations, frustrations, or situations. We are back to life's realities this afternoon or tomorrow. Easter does however give us an "attitude adjustment." We believe that Jesus is alive. We believe that Jesus is and promises "new life." Jesus' resurrection has present implications. The past weeks the cross has guided us to messages of forgiveness, hope, peace, love, trust, perseverance, humility, service, and sacrifice during our Lenten and Holy Week journey. The empty cross and the empty tomb seal and deliver all those words of promise to us. The Christ, who died on the cross, was taken from the cross, and laid in the tomb of Joseph, has come out of the tomb alive to give us new life.

Living in the blessing of this "new life" relationship with Jesus, He continues to guide us in this new life that we lead. Like the women who went from the tomb to tell the disciples of Jesus' resurrection, we go as examples and messengers of new life. Jesus takes us to places where sadness and hardship reign that we may spread joy and gladness in Him. He leads us to places of anger and hostility to bring about peace and harmony. He sends us to lonely, forsaken, and forgotten places to fill them with his presence and his great love for all.

The journey of life as an Easter person never remains in the past or the present, but always looks to the future—the future of an eternity with Jesus. In the meantime, when hard times come, we are able to look beyond the trouble to see the triumph of heaven. Nothing on this earth can take us away from the paradise that awaits us. Jesus made it very apparent to his

disciples about where their thoughts should be centered. "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; also believe in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am you may be also," (John 14:1) Jesus lays it out for us in those words. Don't look down. Look up. Keep in mind the glorious end goal of life together with Him forever.

A year ago this week (April 4) Pastor Johnson's "old" battle with cancer and all its frustrations and limitations ended. Pastor Johnson often shared his reflections on his journey through various posts and notes. He shared his faith focus and absolute confidence in the "new life" that God had in store for him. His journey might be compared to that of the women who go to the tomb in darkness early Easter Sunday morning. They were greeted by Jesus who was alive. Pastor Johnson was also greeted by Jesus who is alive and on His throne of glory. Jesus promised (Rev. 21) "Behold, I make all things new." And He did! And He will. We too will experience the "new heaven, new earth, with resurrected and new bodies" as we receive eternally the victory that Jesus, through His resurrection, has gained for us.

In the meantime, we receive and live the "new" here and now. We see the hand of God at work in our relationships with fellow believers that we might focus more on our common faith together. We notice the blessings of random acts of kindness that point to the Father's deep and lasting love for us. We feel the strength from Jesus to persevere in difficult days. We recognize when people laugh and smile and find joy in the moment. We have peace of mind even when things are not going exactly how we would expect them.

There is life at the end of every tunnel we find ourselves in because a risen Jesus is there. There is happiness after every hardship because a risen Jesus is there. There is a gift around every corner because a risen Jesus is there. He is alive, living and breathing new life into every child of God, every day. Easter is not just a moment, or a day, or a season. Easter is a way of life, an attitude adjustment, a reason for being, and a force that keeps filling us with good things to ponder and prepare for.

This Easter Day, be guided to the empty tomb. Be guided to the risen Christ. Be guided to New life—a life that is lived to honor and glorify the Lord of Life.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life to life everlasting. Amen.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Amen.