

Raised

Mark 14:36; Revelation 1:12-18

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This morning, we conclude the series of Renewal in the Wilderness. And it has been an opportunity for us to be able to understand, what did the Lord desire for His people to walk in His ways according to His promises and according to His purpose? This past week during this whole week of Calvary, we've been walking through, if you will, the high watermarks of Calvary week: Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and now Easter Sunday. Our desire as a pastoral team has been to walk us through these high points through the lens of one particular passage, which was Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. We've been looking at the perspective of what happens during the Calvary week through the lens of that prayer when Jesus says to His Father, "Not my will but your will be done."

As pastor PD led us on Palm Sunday, we saw how Jesus was being pressed between the agenda of those who wanted Him crucified but also the will of His Father. On Maundy Thursday, we looked specifically at how Jesus was betrayed and how even there in that moment, Jesus was faithful. And yet He knew that He must pass through that betrayal to Good Friday where He would be crushed for our iniquity. But then on Easter Sunday, He would be raised. We have pressed, betrayed, crushed, and raised.

Today, on this Easter Sunday, from the rising of the sun to its setting in the west, we are joining billions of Christians around the world who are declaring and celebrating and rejoicing in every imaginable tongue, in every imaginable corner of the world. They are proclaiming Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. We are celebrating the greatest event in human history, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

We have gathered to celebrate His being raised, but raised for what? We are here for more than just merely celebrating that by believing in the work of Jesus that we get to go to heaven and avoid hell. That is not the full gospel. That is not the complete story because what we celebrate today is the beginning of new creation. It is declared of Jesus that from the dead He would rise as the first to be born from among the dead. But born to what? Born to inaugurate new creation. But for what? It is the restoration of all things. This is what we celebrate today.

But let me remind you that we need the Holy Spirit to awaken us from our slumber, our cynicism, our truncated understanding of who God is and of His gospel that we might be renewed and reawakened to the power of God in this new creation. That is my prayer for you as it has been all week, and that is my prayer for us this morning. So let's go to the Father now as we ask Him to meet us here by His Spirit and word to make us alive to His being raised. Let's pray.

Lord, we come to you today of all days with fresh hope after a year of suffering, trial, death, loneliness, separation, depression, anxiety, anger, division, wrath, doubt, and worry. All of these things, we come to you, and we bring them all to you with the fresh hope that the power of the risen Christ by the presence of your Spirit, where two or more are gathered, may come together with the preaching of your word to awaken our hearts anew, to create in us anew a hope and a strength to celebrate the risen king and to walk in His ways. Do this, O Lord, in us. Help the teacher. In Jesus's name. Amen.

This past week, professor of New Testament theology at Wheaton College, my alma mater, wrote these words as he was invited wonderfully to write an opinion piece in the *New York Times*. He wrote these words, "Christians at their best are fools who dare believe in God's power to call dead things to life." At the Christian's best moment are fools who believe and rejoice that our God brings dead things back to life. This is the *dunamis* of the gospel, the Greek word for "dynamite." Friends, we are playing with the most powerful thing that has ever entered into the world, the only thing that has brought the dead back to life, the gospel of Jesus Christ. And we must ask you, Lord, reawaken us to this dynamite. Because when it does, it does far more than offer us forgiveness and renewal. It means to set a people free who

are willing to be fools for the sake of Christ to bring restoration even into the darkest reaches of the world.

This church and this denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America, has as part of its constitution its creeds and confessions the Westminster Confession and its longer and shorter catechisms. Those great beliefs and creeds were written by the church in the 17th century for the sake of the church to speak to itself, and it was written within the Westminster Abbey in London, a place of worship and a place of much history. Surprisingly, if you ever get to visit there, go to the western façade where you will see a relief of a Roman Catholic priest name Maximilian Kolbe. He was a Polish Catholic priest in the Franciscan order who was sent to Auschwitz because he was discovered as protecting Jews who were escaping the Nazi regime. Though in prison, he continued to act as a priest. Kolbe was subjected to violent harassment including beatings and lashings. Once, he was smuggled to a prison hospital by friendly inmates.

But at the end of July 1941, one prisoner escaped from the camp, prompting the commanding deputy officer to pick ten men to be starved to death in an underground bunker to deter further escape attempts. When one of those selected to go into this cave of starvation, this Polish Jew cried out, "My wife, my children," he cried, hoping to find mercy. Kolbe, hearing his voice, volunteered to take his place. According to eyewitnesses, one of which was an assistance janitor at the time, in his prison cell, Kolbe was said to lead prisoners in prayer. Each time the guards checked on him, he was standing or kneeling in the middle of the cell and looking calmly at those who entered. After they had been starved and deprived of water for two weeks, only Kolbe remained alive. The guards wanted the bunker emptied, and so they gave Kolbe a lethal injection. Kolbe is said to have raised his left arm and calmly waited for the deadly injection. He died on August 14, 1941. His remains were cremated. He is considered to be a venerated saint in the Roman Catholic Church. That story among so many says yes and amen, Dr. McCaulley, "Christians at their best are fools who dare believe that God's power brings that which was dead back to life."

A Christian who believes in Christ who is raised, who is the firstborn from among the dead, who becomes a king of a new people, a new creation, then releases them into the world to love, forgive, and to serve, and to give their entire lives regardless of career or station for the sake of serving Him and making Him known—it is foolishness to the world. But God's foolishness is greater than the greatest of human wisdom. This is what the Lord calls us to, far more than forgiveness, but to follow Christ as our king in the new creation.

This morning as we go through three passages together as we consider the promise of Christ being raised as the new creation, I want you to know that as I go through each point, there is a set of verses which we will look at together. And in so doing, we'll see the beginning of the new creation, the power of the new creation, and the promise of the new creation. The beginning, the power, and the promise. Together, let's go.

The beginning of the new creation. We must remember the words of Mark 14:36 where we began last week and went throughout the week when Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane prayed these words, "Abba Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will but what you will." This is Jesus making a declaration in prayer of His desire to not have to suffer, yet He knows He has come to do the Father's will. And in so doing, He submits Himself voluntarily and vicariously on behalf of God's people for the sake of salvation. He gives Himself. He gives Himself to the will of the Father. But Jesus understood that He was not only giving Himself to the purpose of giving His body to the tree on the cross. He also knew that that was the only way to get to the resurrection. Through death comes life.

So the beginning of new creation begins by hearing Jesus understood that resurrection would only be possible first through death, because Jesus understood as Paul understood as we seek to declare today that resurrection is the climax of God's plan. It is the victory of God over sin and death through the substitutionary atonement of Christ His Son in whose perfect flesh, perfect obedient and faithful flesh,

Jesus received the condemnation for our sins in His flesh. Here, atonement was made, but not just atonement but for the purpose of victory. Victory over sin and death, over the dark forces of evil, over the dark realities of personal sin and brokenness.

But I must ask you a question. As you've entered into Calvary week, have you ever asked the question why this particular week? I don't mean the date. But why did Jesus choose Passover week? It's important for us to remember that we only really understand the purpose of the resurrection in light of why He did so over Passover because, you see, there is a narrative through-line from Moses in Israel to Jesus and His resurrection as the king.

Let me briefly show you. Moses in Israel first celebrated Passover because God instituted it for the sake of His people to be a sign that He would protect them by passing over them and bringing judgment on their enslavers Egypt. And so a meal was instructed to the people that they were to celebrate a roasted lamb, to take a lamb that was also sacrificed for sin and a mark of the blood over the doorframe of the homes, and God in His judgment on Egypt passed over the homes of the people that belonged to Him. But in so doing, it was a mark that God would use that moment as a statement, a point in the ground, a point in time to say, I am now going to release you from your enslavement and all that that represented. The dark forces of Egypt and their enslavement of Israel was a picture, a deeper picture, of the reality of our enslavement to sin. But God said, I will free you as my people, and Moses would lead the people of God out of Egypt wealthier than they ever could have imagined to the banks of the Red Sea. And then by God's provision, they walked through the sea onto the other side where the promise of the promised land was given to His people.

But it wasn't enough, for there we've been looking together at the commandments that God gave to His people while they were following Him in the wilderness on the way to the promise land. Our sin and brokenness kept the people of Israel, and it keeps us, out of perfect fellowship with God. We can't obey enough. And so year after year, sacrifices would be given. Year after year, even though they would remember the Passover, they would still find false gods to worship instead of the one true God. So is the same with us.

And yet what we find is that why Jesus came into Jerusalem at Passover was to demonstrate that He was about to reenact the ultimate Passover, which could be the only thing that would bring new life, forgiveness of sins, and the restoration of all things to be inaugurated. And on the night in which they would've celebrated Passover, Jesus inaugurates a new meal, and He gives bread, and He gives wine, and He then says, "This is my body given for you." "This is my blood poured out for you." And then the next day, He would go to the cross, which Jesus says is His baptism into death, and then on the third day be raised again.

Here's what I want you to see. Jesus has now enacted the ultimate Passover, the beginning of new creation. How is that? Because Jesus came to His own, enacted a new meal, and then led His people to the foot of the cross where He was baptized into death and raised on the third day. He brought His people with Him through His baptism of death and raised them with Himself on the third day. And the promise land is not a physical space or for particular land. It is a relationship with Him. And this new beginning, this new beginning, is meant to be our hope that His resurrection, His being raised from the dead to lead His people to a new way of life is what it means to have Him as the ultimate king, the firstborn from among the dead. And with Him, He leads a people out of enslavement to sin and the death which is its consequence where we can now say, "Where, O death, is your sting?" Because now Jesus is risen, and He invites us to be part of His people.

And He then gives this new creation, this people that He calls to Himself, and He calls all of us. Many of you profess this faith. He has given to us then not just the new beginning of new creation. He's given us the power of new creation. Because Jesus would say as our king, "I will not leave you as orphans. I will send my spirit to be with you." And by that Spirit, we learn how to live. And this is the power of the new creation.

The question is do we know what this power is? This power is the power that raised Jesus from the dead, the work of the Holy Spirit given to His people. And when the first witnesses saw the empty tomb, they were bewildered in wonderment. They were stunned into silence. They wondered how could this be? No way. Even though Jesus had taught them, told them, reminded them. But they were still in wonder. Hear the words, John 20:1-10.

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes. [ESV]

And so we hear it in our imagination read. What John is testifying to is the same as the other companion gospels witness to which is they went back to their houses, and we heard read earlier that they were wondering how could this be? They're trying to figure out what is exactly taking place and unfolding. Why is His body not there? And He begins to appear, and still their eyes are amazed with wonderment.

What are they wondering at? I believe what they're wondering at is this. Is this what is meant by the power of God, that He makes things which were once dead back to life? Because to believe such a thing then means that if this is what Jesus has done, victorious over sin and death, then that means that power has infused everything He's ever said. "Come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." As He performed miracles and forgave sinners, as He healed, as He fed, as He served, as He gave Himself up, you begin to see all the way through the amazement in their eyes as they imagined all the things which Jesus taught them. He told them on the road to Emmaus, going through the scriptures. What are they amazed at? My goodness, the power of God has been in our midst all along, and this is what He's been about, which means the curse has been broken as far as it is found.

Jesus in His life was a perfect human. He was the pinnacle of humanity to redeem the imperfect and the broken. The resurrection demonstrates the power of God over sin and death, but it vindicates the Son of God. You see, they put a corona on His head to mock Him, but Jesus by His wounds, we have received the ultimate vaccination, for on the third day He wears a crown that no one else can wear. A king who has vanquished the dark powers of His enemies, of His ultimate enemy Satan, of the reality of sin and brokenness, and death which is its consequence. His power gives us power then and strength for new life.

But I want to tell you it's more than just new life. It's a whole new way of viewing ourselves. Do you hear what the world says is the power? "You do you." "You be yourself." "We're going to get out of the way. You need to find your place, your rootedness for your sense of dignity, value, and worth." The reality is the resurrection and the power of God comes in and seeks to remake all of our dignity, power, or value and purpose. It's that Jesus, if He's the firstborn and calls me to Himself, then His victory, His power becomes the anchor for my value, my purpose, and my dignity. I get to doubt myself. I properly doubt the world that keeps telling me I can find my dignity, value, and purpose. But I have one who is Jesus who so loved me that He gave Himself for me as my king. And look what He declares over me. My song over you is love. "Come unto me." Are you exhausted, weary? And you trying to find your value and worth in your career, through your spouse, or finding a spouse, through your children? O friends, may it not be,

for every single one of them, though valuable in and of themselves, will always leave us emptyhanded. The only one who will not is the one who takes us by the hand, who has been raised from death to life, and says, "You are mine, and I will never let you go. Nothing can separate you from my love." That is a power.

And this is what we learn from Paul when he writes these words to us.

Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin. The power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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.
[ESV]

He is inviting us to find our dignity, value, and purpose in the power of the one who has been raised from death to life. That is the only thing that can give us an anchor that is immovable and steadfast, not tied to circumstances, not tied to what we think we can do but what He has accomplished. That is a power worth knowing.

But not just beginning and not just power, but finally promise. Hear the words from Revelation as John writes,

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."
[ESV]

And in that promise is echoed that Jesus said, as the one who was raised from the death, as the beginning of the new creation, given the power of His new creation to His people through His Spirit, He also says, "I'm coming again."

Here's what this means. We don't believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus so that we get to go to heaven and avoid hell. Sure, that's a part of the story. But the problem with that whole idea that has been so much part of the warp and woof of American Christianity leads us to think that what we do now is we're just kind of waiting for the by and by. We're just kind of to muddle along. But the full gospel story tells us that the resurrection in the middle of history means that God has already begun His restoring work, and He's coming back as the glorious one in His second coming. And with Him are the keys of death and Hades, meaning He will have all power as He does now in heaven and on earth, and He will bring restoration, righteousness, justice, and all that sin and evil has broken will be undone.

But I must tell you then what does that mean for you and me? What is the promise for us? I would suggest it is far more than forgiveness of sins, and that is glorious indeed. But it is more than that. It means that now we get to be, for those who believe, who have received the beginning and the power of the new creation, we have now been given a task to be about the restoration work of Jesus.

As Martin Luther was purported to have said in response to the question, what would he do if the next day he knew that Jesus was coming again? He said, "I would plant a tree." What was he getting at?

He is getting at this fact, that the works that God has given for His people to do will have eternal effect because they're His work through His people, and they're the work of restoration. Therefore, what begins here as the promise of new creation is revolution. When you get up tomorrow morning and you go to your place of work, or if you're a stay-at-home parent, regardless of your provision or what it is that you do, you've been equipped with gifts and station and agency. And by your hands and your feet, one hour, one moment, one day, and one year after another, your good works through what the place God is giving you is about His restoration work.

And so when you move out, and you seek to teach, and nurse, and lawyer, and engineer, and care, then you bring with you the gospel of Jesus Christ, and you move toward others with a gospel of love and forgiveness and mercy. And when you forgive others as you've been forgiven, you're bringing restoration. You're planting seeds of trees. When you seek reconciliation, when you seek to forgive others as you have been forgiven, when you seek to give mercy and you seek to give water, you seek to give food, you seek to come alongside with somebody with a text and say, "I'm thinking about you today. How can I pray for you?" You are planting trees because your work is not in vain because Jesus is about restoring all things.

As Eugene Peterson says, "Everything necessary for the Christian life is now laid out before us and to be put in action in us. The way we live our lives, the impulses and desires as have, we get in on what God is doing in the wonders of creation and the mess of history. It is activated now by Jesus' resurrection." I love that. Everything we do and say is now empowered and being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Yes, there's plenty of now and not yet. We fail, and yet we also succeed until He comes again. But everything we say and do and act, empowered and reshaped by the Holy Spirit, means we are now participating in the wonders of Christ's new creation of restoration. But, also, it happens in the mess of history. And the world and history are a mess. Can I get an amen? Are you asleep? Don't fall asleep. Please don't.

I don't know how you feel about your own hearts, but sometimes my own heart is a mess. The news is a mess. Our neighborhoods are a mess. Oh, they might be well-lined, tree-lined, and trimmed, and lawns mowed, and all that good stuff. That's wonderful. And the trees are blooming. That's great. But we all know that we're a mess. And yet God in His grace through the power of His risen Son means to bring about a revolution of new creation in the heart of the mess of history, and He's given it for us to do.

So I close with this thing that I want you to know. Friends, when we come in Calvary week, and we celebrate Good Friday and Christ being given for us on the cross, and we come Easter morning and celebrate the resurrection, my friends, I encourage you, I plead with you, I pray for you as I hope you would pray for me that these would not be merely doctrines that inhabit the dusty shelves of our minds. But rather these doctrines become the script of how we live our lives in the world. Doctrine at its greatest is not mental furniture that we have in place in the event that Jesus comes back and wants to come to tour the house. No. Doctrines at their best are the enacted drama of obedience empowered by the Spirit for the sake of His glory and the restoration of all things. And this means for us that God is about remaking us and through us bringing restoration to the world around us.

This is why we went back through the commandments. It's convicting to read and preach through the Ten Commandments. But you then realize that empowered by the Spirit, through the ultimate Passover, Jesus says, "For I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of slavery to sin. And I will be your God, and you will be my people. And I have given you my Spirit." And by that Spirit, we seek to walk by the Spirit in obedience and faithfulness to Him, to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

And in the words of Romans 8, "If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies through his spirit who dwells in you." This Spirit, this power by which Jesus was raised from the dead now dwells in His people. We lack for nothing from our Father and through His Son, our king Jesus, which then enables us to sing,

really sing and really work. And to sing, although we're not singing it this morning, I think one of the greatest hymns ever written for Easter,

"Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son. Endless is the victory, though thou o'er death hast won. No more we doubt Thee. Glorious Prince of life, life is naught without Thee. Aid us in our strife. Make us more than conquerors through Thy deathless love. Bring us safe through Jordan to Thy home above. Thine is the glory, risen conquering Son. Endless is the victory, Thou o'er death hast won."

And by that same Spirit, we can say hallelujah. Hallelujah. Christ is risen. Amen. May Christ work in us for His glory and the restoration of all things. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for its power. We thank you, Father, that it grounds us in the great drama of your work of redemption. Lord, I ask that you would remake us through your risen conquering Son, that we would rejoice in our king of the new creation, the power of your Spirit in this new creation, but also its promise. Lord, we are broken people, but you have the last word. We have been restored and are being restored until you come again. And we don't wait for you. You call us to prepare the way. So Lord, now give us the Spirit to prepare the way through our words and deeds to point others to Christ. Do this, we ask. In Jesus's name. Amen.