

Easter – Putting on the New Nature

Mark 16:1-8

¹When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled

back. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” ⁸So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Colossians 3:12-17

¹²As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and

admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

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Easter did not begin in joy; it began with the disturbing memories of Jesus crucifixion, death and burial. Mary and the other women likely awoke with the memory of pain upon pain, trauma on top of trauma.

Still, in faithfulness, they went early to complete Jesus' burial. It had been incomplete because the Sabbath had come and burials were not permitted on the Sabbath.

As they approached the tomb for their sorrowful task, their focus was on the stone that covered the entrance to the tomb. It was a large stone and could have weighted as much as 2,000 pounds.¹ Who would roll the stone away for them?

They were caught completely off guard when instead of stone-

covered tomb, they saw a messenger of God said to them

“...you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.”²

They had expected to find death and they were surprised by the announcement: resurrection!

Do we who live in a time of such advanced knowledge and technology still find mystery in life? Is the world all predictable, or is it possible for us to be surprised by resurrection life?

¹ From a 4/1/07 lecture at OPC by Dr. Kenneth Bailey

² Mark 16:6

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Charlotte Elliott was an embittered woman. She was only 32 years old but her health was broken and would remain so whatever time she had. When a pastor inquired into the state of her spirit, she resented it and in a violent outburst she railed against God and family. She thought that others could not imagine the mere shadow of a life that she faced.

The demon of defensiveness left her, but when the pastor next visited she grappled with seven

demons of hopelessness. She confessed that a real life seemed impossible to her and this risen savior lost to her.

The pastor's response was brief: "Come to Jesus as you are." Years later, Charlotte wrote a poem that was printed and sold as a fund raiser for poor children. It began simply

*Just as I am without one plea
But that thy blood was shed
for me
And that though biddest me
come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I
come.*

Charlotte Elliott lived to be 82 and she wrote about 150 Christian hymns. Among her final papers were over a thousand letters she had received from people who expressed their gratitude for the hope they had received from her poem.³

Charlotte Elliott was surprised by resurrection life.

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One of the challenges that Charlotte Elliott and all of us

face is that Easter life comes into a Good Friday world.

It is like today's weather: we are told that spring has come, but it sure feels like winter! ☺

What is clear is the messenger's message that Jesus was going to Galilee. That meant for his first followers that he was going to their home area. They would not find him in the Garden of Gethsemane, on Golgotha where he had been crucified, nor at the tomb of his burial. They would see him where they lived and worked, but they would have to follow him in order to see him.

³ See Robert J. Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul*, Nelson Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee, 2003, p. 112 and Max L. Christensen, *Turning Points*, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1993, p. 99-100

Friends, the Risen Jesus will not be found in a museum, nor a text book, not even some holy place on earth. Jesus will be discovered and known by following wherever he goes in our neighborhood.

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The clue for us is found in two parts. On Good Friday, we heard Scripture calling us to let go of our old life. Rather than doing what we've always done and hoping that things will somehow turn out differently, we are challenged to let go of old,

broken ways. And the second side of the Easter coin is that we are called to put on the new life, the new nature.

Easter was not just about Jesus, it was about all who follow him as well. New life possible for us.

It is what Jesus was talking about all along:

- Seek God and his kingdom rather than isolate yourself from the divine.
- Do not be caught in the trap of anger and

bitterness; rather, forgive one another.

- Break out of the prison of hatred; pray for your enemies.
- Cast off fear by trusting God.
- Get beyond yourself and use the gifts of your life for the good of others.

So how do we put on the new nature?

Remember the story of the woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years? The physicians of her day could not help her. But she must have had

within her the sense that life could be different, better. I imagine her thinking of a time when her bleeding would stop, her energy would return, and she would no longer be isolated by her condition, but embraced by all in her community.

So she resolved that she would go to Jesus. She pressed through the crowd that followed him and when she reached him she touched the fringe of his robe, only that! And the power of Jesus healed her.

What would your life look like if you received this resurrection life

that God intends for you? What would it be like to live with

Love, joy, peace
Faith, hope,
Purpose, power, and
promise

The gospel is not: struggle through this life and then get to heaven. No. it is good news because the new life starts now.

Once we know what is in God's gift bag of Easter, we come to God, like Charlotte Elliot, as we are.

We don't have to win a marathon to get the benefit of exercise and

we don't have to be Mahatma Gandhi to put on our new nature. Because it is the power of God that is at work in us, we need vision, determination, and a method.

I recently began an excellent book on getting things done. Its creative title is Getting Things Done. The author makes the startling claim that applies not only to home and office, but to the spiritual life as well.

I'm not going to tell you anything you don't already know, but if you apply these principles consistently and

systematically, you will maximize your productivity and be relaxed.⁴

The same can be said for a systematic and consistent application of Jesus' way of life. That's what Paul telling the Colossians. Put on systematically and consistently:

“compassion,
kindness,
humility,
meekness,
and patience”

in a life lived by forbearing and forgiving one another.

Friends, in putting on the new life; we begin to live the new life. We are not just doing new things, we are being changed!

Robert Mulholland Jr. gives us a great example.

He describes a painful, personal experience of a falling out that he had with a friend whom he calls Chris.⁵ After a very difficult situation Chris went to Robert and said that he no longer wanted anything to do with Robert.

⁴ See David Allen, Getting Things Done, Penguin Books, New York, 2001, p. 3

⁵ See M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., The Deeper Journey, IVP Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2006, p. 129 ff

Without any time for questions or interaction, Chris turned and walked away. As far as Chris was concerned, Robert was dead.

For about a month Robert was in deep shock and grief. He said that he awoke in the mornings with a feeling of a great, heavy weight pressing upon his chest. Eventually, the memory of this encounter with Chris began to turn poisonous; he had begun the dangerous slope to bitterness and resentment.

Realizing that he should not allow himself to go down that path, he resolved to live the

unconditional forgiveness of Jesus. He describes the beginning of that journey as tortuous. Whenever he caught himself wallowing in resentment and constructing scenarios of revenge, he had to make the effort to turn to God and seek strength to turn from that path. This process of forgiving Chris unconditionally took him several years.

Sometime later, he was called to lead a funeral for a friend who was also Chris' friend. As providence would have it, these two men drove to the funeral seated next to each other in the

front seat of a car. Chris never acknowledged Robert.

At the end of the funeral, Chris felt deeply the loss of his friend and began sob a body-shaking sob. Seeing this Robert was in a quandary: what do you do for a person who doesn't acknowledge your existence?

What would you have done?

Robert went and stood in front of Chris and held out his arms *as an offer* of comfort and support. To his surprise Chris fell into his embrace and wept.

Had Robert not had a vision of forgiveness, the intention to forgive, and a method by which God would open Robert's heart to forgive Chris, that moment of embrace would not have happened. Instead, their lives touched again and that very day their friendship that began to be restored.

Vision of the new life.

Resolve to live the new life.

Method for putting on the new life.

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We would be happy to talk with you about putting on your new nature, but let me give you an outline that is common to many.⁶

1. Set aside time each day to read Scripture, especially the stories of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
2. Pray. Scripture is God starting the conversation with us, and prayer is us continuing the conversation with God.
3. Allow the stories of other Christians to guide you and inspire you. You may read about the saints, or gather

with other Christians over some shared interest. Someone recently said to me, I could never have imagined how much meeting with other Christians has meant to me. It has challenged me, sustained me and inspired me.

In these simple ways, we begin to put on the new nature that God is renewing within us.

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21 years ago on Easter morning, my wife and I left our home at a place called Fruit Hill and drove

⁶ See John R. W. Stott, Basic Christianity, 2nd Edition, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1971, p. 130 ff

to the Maple Avenue Hospital in DuBois, Pennsylvania. After several hours new life came into this world and we named him Christopher. Because the date of Easter changes from year to year, Christopher really has two birthdays: his birth date and Easter day.

It is the same for all of us gathered here today. After our birth, we have been given a new nature, which is like a second birth.

By his faithful life and death and his glorious resurrection, Jesus broke the power of sin and death.

The stone has been rolled away and we are free to leave the tombs of our lives and to put on that new nature. God intends that we will live and grow as we walk in the light.

Thanks be to God. We have been given resurrection life in Jesus Christ!

Christ IS risen.

He is risen in deed!