

Easter 2021

*"It's Our Resurrection, Too!"*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Revelation 21:1-6, John 20:19-22

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Well, can you believe it? Isn't it wonderful? That we could open our doors for people to worship here together for the first time in over a year. Can I get a halleluiah! Halleluiah! Now I'm sure all of us have our own unique feelings today as some of us are here, and others are worshipping from home. Many of us are joyful, many of us are thankful, and many of us are optimistic. The immense pall that has been over our lives due to the pandemic slowly appears to be lifting. And I think I can cautiously speak for most of us when I say that there seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel. So on this day, where we come to praise God, and celebrate the resurrection of his son, Christ Jesus, I think it's safe to say, that in a wonderful sense, it is the beginning of our resurrection, too.

Now I'll expand on this, but first, what is the resurrection really all about? Well, in a single word – it's hope. Hope. And our resurrection hope is based on two things. First, that our sins are forgiven. Christ was crucified and died on the cross as atonement for our sins. Never forget that. I know we don't like to think of ourselves as sinners, and happily we're not going there today. That was for Lent, today is for hallelujahs. Today, our guilt is taken away and we are forgiven, redeemed, made new!

Now the second thing our resurrection hope is based on is life – the abundant life Christ promises us. He said, "I came, that they might have life and have it abundantly." And we so desperately want that don't we? To feel that our lives are rich and full. But there is something that often prevents us from living this abundant life. And what is that? It's the demon we call fear. Think about it – we all have some cloud that hangs over our head, some fear that gnaws away at our happiness. And that fear, which is sometimes real and sometimes imagined, affects us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It truly has become the great curse of our age, and it permeates every aspect of our lives, like the fear of COVID has done for the past year. We've seen how the security we feel in this moment can be replaced in a heartbeat by the anxiety and troubles of the next moment. And so we fear – many things. Most people fear death – they are absolutely terrified by it. Some people fear their life will have no meaning, and not account for much. Some people fear that they will fail at their job, or fear they will have failed as a parent. Some fear that they will never know love. Some fear that the people and things they most trust and believe in, may let them down. There are many fears, and I'm going to pause for just a few seconds for you to think about what might be troubling you at this moment. (Pause) Now the sad truth

is, that fear not only makes us worried and stressed, but worse, fear keeps us from embracing the fullness of life, the abundant life God has promised us. But... but now comes the resurrection. And the empowering message of hope we are given at Easter. Because what does the resurrection have to do with fear? Well, with the resurrection, fear has been abolished.

How can we believe this? Well, let's go to today's Gospel reading. Earlier in the chapter, John tells us that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb where they laid Jesus, and found it empty. But then Jesus appears to her and calls her by name. So she runs back and tells the disciples what happened. Now they're in a quandary. Yes, they're amazed and cautiously optimistic about what she has told them – that Jesus has indeed been raised from the dead. But they haven't seen him yet, and so they're also uncertain, anxious and afraid. You all know that feeling very well based upon what's happened this past year. And so the disciples gather together in a house and they lock themselves inside for “fear” of the Jewish leaders. There's that word – they fear for their lives. Will they be arrested and persecuted like Jesus? But what happens? The resurrected Jesus appears, and just listen to his first word to them, “Shalom... Peace... Peace be with you.” He's told them that many, many times before because it's something we continually need to hear. “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.” “Fear not. My peace I give you.” And with that, the disciples were overjoyed. Their fear was replaced with joy, with peace. You see, what Jesus is telling and promising them, and us, is the exact opposite of what the world tells us every day in our going about, and every night on the news: that we need to be afraid, to live in fear. We don't! Because of the resurrection. Because the resurrection proves who really is in control – God. God has now proven that that he can overcome and defeat the very worst that can happen to us – death. Which means he can overcome and defeat anything, anything, we may fear. Yes, certainly there are evils and problems and troubles out there, but we can't allow those things to overwhelm us and make us fearful or angry or bitter. Instead, we are to draw on the divine peace of Jesus Christ. Because that peace leads us to trust in God, no matter what the worlds tells us or throws at us. “Peace be with you.” You know, there is so much more good and beauty in the world than there is evil and sorrow. And when we have peace in Christ, we have no fear, and then we are free to see the beauty, the blessings, the abundance of the gift of each and every day.

And just to put an exclamation point on this, look at something else Jesus promised us in today's Scripture from Revelation. “See, I am making all things new.” He assures us that God is among us, is with us, and that God will “wipe away every tear, death will be no more, and mourning and crying and

pain will be no more.” Aren’t these wonderful promises! And the thing is – these promises give us assurances, not only for the life to come, but they are really meant to affect how we live this life here and now as well. See, I am making all things new. And how can we come to know this, to trust this? Well, let’s look at the “science”... we've heard that term a lot over the past year, “it’s all about the science,” and I'm going to apply it here. After all, God is the master scientist. He created all the physical laws that govern this universe. But he also created the divine laws that govern the fulfillment of his promises. And this science is simple – it goes like this: the more you draw on the divine life, the more you will receive of that life. Let me repeat that. The more you draw on the divine life, the more you will receive of that life. And when you do, you'll find that those promises of God become real! And you then are resurrected into a new awareness and nearness to our great God, and his abundant blessings will flow upon you. And your fears will subside.

The resurrected Jesus – the one who saves us from our sin, and saves us from our fear. And you know what’s interesting – the word “Savior” comes from the Latin, “Salvator,” meaning one who brings healing. And that's why our word “salve” is closely related to the Latin “salvus,” meaning health. When our soul is healthy, it is in a living relationship with God, it is firmly rooted in the soil of meaning and abundance. When our soul is sick, our entire person becomes ill.<sup>1</sup> So draw on the divine life our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Yes, Easter is all about the forgiveness of our sins, and the freedom from fear. But what does Easter really mean for our lives? What it means is the beautiful consequence of what it's all about. Easter means that Jesus Christ lives. He lives! And because Christ lives, we too may live... free from sin, free from fear, free to live this incredibly abundant life to the fullest. Hallelujah and amen!

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Barron, Lenten Gospel Reflections