

SUNDAY, APRIL 17, 2022
COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

I AM the RESURRECTION and the LIFE

 Let's Talk about JESUS

Sermon for Sunday, April 17, 2022
“I Am the Resurrection and the Life” | Easter Sunday
Pastor Charlie Berthoud | John 11:25

Happy Easter!

Today is the final Sunday of our series on the “I am” statements of Jesus in John’s gospel. A few of you have been in worship all seven of these Sundays, but most of you haven’t, so we’re going to review.

With the hope of learning more about Jesus so we could live with more purpose and focus as his followers, we’ve been reflecting on what it means for Jesus to say:

I am the bread of life

I am the light of the world

I am the good shepherd

I am the door

And so on....



Let's Talk about JESUS 

I AM

the **BREAD** of **LIFE**
the **LIGHT** of the **WORLD**
the **VINE** and you are the branches
the **GOOD SHEPHERD**
the **DOOR** for the sheep
the **WAY** the **TRUTH** and the **LIFE**
the **RESURRECTION** and the **LIFE**

LENTEN SERMON SERIES - MARCH-APRIL 2022



Today we hear Jesus saying, “I am the resurrection and the life.”



Last Sunday we dedicated the Resurrection Window at the columbarium.

For those who don't know, the columbarium is just outside the sanctuary, a small room which is a holy space for dozens of Covenant families. It is the final resting places for ashes of loved ones who have died.

Now we have a visible reminder of the hope of resurrection at the time of death. This is the hope:

- That somehow some way death is not the final word.
- That the worst thing is not the last thing.
- That, as Julian of Norwich says that "all will be well."

For those who are mourning, Easter is a day to remind us of hope, even as we continue to weep and feel the absence of loved ones.

But Easter isn't just about the afterlife. It's also very much about life right here and right now.

You've already heard the narrative account of Easter, from Luke 24, with the women finding the empty tomb on the first day of the week. There are three things I want to make sure you notice in reflecting on that passage

First, in a time that was much more patriarchal than ours, it was women who were at the tomb, women who were the first witnesses to resurrection, women who were the first Easter preachers. Throughout his life, Jesus welcomed and empowered those who were forgotten or oppressed.

So, the women proclaiming the first Easter is a reminder for us that the Good News comes **from** the margins—and the Good News is **for** the people at the margins, as well as the rest of us. God's resurrection love is for **everyone**.

Secondly, Luke's account tells us that the male disciples didn't believe the women; they thought the report of the empty tomb was "an idle tale." One of my seminary professors says that "leiros" the Greek word of "idle tale" could be translated at "baloney" or maybe another word that begins with the "bull" sound, but it's a word

we usually avoid in church.

The point being is that resurrection is hard to believe and following in the way of Jesus is not easy. It took those disciples a while to believe it and live it. For us, it might take more than one Easter Sunday. We are on a journey of faith—and that journey requires perseverance. One day at a time. One step at a time.

And thirdly, perhaps most importantly is the image of the women going to the tomb early in the morning on the first day of the week. They went to the place of death expecting to find death, but instead as the sun arose, as the new day dawned, they found the tomb empty, and they find themselves in a new world with new possibilities, new hope for living.

That's the gospel narrative for today, the story. The gospel lesson is just this one verse from John.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Jesus spoke these words in the context of the death and raising of Lazarus in John 11, right in the center of the gospel according to John, just before Jesus heads to Jerusalem.

A lot of you have been reading John's gospel.

During Lent, over the past 40 days, we've invited the congregation to read the gospel according to John, all 21 chapters. I think it's good for us as Christians to read at least one gospel per year. Reading John takes about two hours, the length of a short movie, or about 20 minutes a day for a week.

If you've been reading along with our devotional, you finished yesterday. Congratulations! John is probably the most challenging of the gospels.

I'm wondering if you noticed that one of the key words in the gospel according to John is the word **LIFE**.

We hear LIFE in several of the "I am" statements. Jesus said:

"I am the resurrection and the life."

"I am the bread of life."

"I am the way, the truth, and the life."

In the first paragraph of the gospel, we read:

“In him was **life**, and the **life** was the light of all people.” (John 1:4)

In the end of the gospel, we read:

“these [things] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have **life** in his name.” (John 20:31)

And right in the middle of the gospel we read:

Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have **life**, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)

The gospel is all about life—abundant life, life in all its fullness, right here and now. Jesus fed hungry people. Jesus healed sick people. He cared about life in the present.

Jesus calls us to love one another, to serve one another, to live with new purpose and meaning, right here and right now.

His ministry and message were all about LIFE.

Sadly, there is too much death in the world. Right now, we see that most clearly in Ukraine.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, like everyone else, I have been horrified by the reports and thinking about and praying for the people of Ukraine. And I have been praying for the churches in Ukraine.

This week, Father James Martin shared an image on Twitter of Ukrainians taking an image of Jesus out of a cathedral and hiding it in a



bunker. The last time this happened was World War II.

While it is certainly appropriate to protect holy artifacts in a time of war, this does not mean the power of Jesus is going into hiding.

The resurrection gives us power to resist evil and seek abundant life.

Over the past few weeks, I have seen various versions of an orthodox icon, which helps us understand Easter more deeply.

Here we see resurrected Jesus trampling the gates of hell and grabbing Adam and Eve to pull them out of tombs and out of hell.



In Western churches, we focus a lot on the fires of hell—being more inspired by Dante’s “Inferno” and 19th century hellfire and brimstone preachers than by the grace and love of God in the Bible.

In Eastern churches, there is a sense that Jesus came not to send people to hell, but to help them out of hell, and to help us resist hell on earth.

I love the way Jesus is grabbing Adam and Eve by the wrist and pulling them out.

As I look at artwork like this, I realize that sometimes we are the ones grabbed by God when we're in trouble. God does the grabbing usually through other people—people who pull us (literally or metaphorically) out of the way of danger, people who comfort us when we're sad, people who help us get back on track, people who are patient with us when we're foolish, people who have the courage to speak the truth in love.

Sometimes we are the ones who are grabbed. And sometimes we're called to be the grabbers.

An alternative title for this sermon is: Grabbed and Grabbers

Just because it's Easter Sunday, it doesn't mean everything is magically better right now. There are people in this congregation who are going through hell right now.

If you're one of them, if you're in a dark and hard place right now, I encourage you to heed the old saying: "If going through hell, keep going." And look around, because there is someone willing to grab you and help you move forward.

If you're not in a dark and hard place right now, or maybe if it's just a little dark and a little hard, maybe you need to be a grabber.

With the resurrection Jesus is grabbing us and pulling us to new life and calling us to grab and help others and find new life together.

So, with all appropriate boundaries, decency, and common sense, we need to figure out ways to grab one another, to help one another, to encourage one another, so that we can find abundant life together.

I see that kind of helping in

- Writing notes and making calls and visits, praying for one another
- Taking the time to listen to people who are hurting
- Giving generously to relief efforts and good causes
- Offering words and deeds of encouragement
- Courageously standing up for what is right

In the midst of the challenges of daily living, I saw a glimpse of goodness and new life this week.

Ben Ashlock and his wife adopted their 16-year-old son from Ukraine three years ago. (They also have 12 other children—8 biological and 5 adopted. Wow.)



They live in central Kentucky, and Ben is the general manager of a local Texas-themed steakhouse.

Because of their connections with Ukraine, after the Russian invasion in February, Ben removed one of the two Texas flags and replaced it with a Ukrainian flag.

Note: he did NOT take down the American flag.



But in this age of internet rumors and political divisiveness, as of last Saturday April 9, the restaurant started getting harassing phone calls and social media posts.

They were called unpatriotic, and many people said they would never eat there again. Soon after, there was an avalanche of hateful messages, such as:

“Take that trash flag down! May Ukraine be leveled to the ground!”

“I prefer my steak without a side of Nazi.”

And so on....

Employees were brought to tears by these messages.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/04/15/kentucky-restaurant-ukraine-flag/>

But just as Jesus’ death was not the end of the story, the hatred of these posts and calls is not the end of the story. People all over the country have responded with love.

Just yesterday, the manager posted on the restaurant Facebook page:

“I would love to tell you that we heard our last negative comment today or

that we had our last employee reduced to tears over someone saying something mean to them about our situation. But that would be lying. But here is an absolute truth; love won today! We were flooded with well wishes today and quickly those well wishes turned into random acts of kindness. People calling in from all over the country buying other people dinner. Random people, firefighters, police officers, and homeless shelters were fed by anonymous people from across our great country.

<https://www.facebook.com/ColtonsBardstown>

Then he wrote that he was continuing to share updates with friends in Ukraine, and closed with a photo of his Ukrainian born son and a quote from Proverbs

“The generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.” (Proverbs 11:25 NIV”)



I don't know if the general manager is a Christian or not, and it doesn't really matter.

Even with all the bitterness and craziness and conspiracy theories, goodness is alive and well in the world.

The manager is right: Love wins.

Our closing song today is one of my favorite Easter songs, and there's a part in the third verse which I love:

Break the bread of new creation where the world is still in pain
Tell its grim demonic chorus: "Christ is risen! Get you gone!"

That's our Easter task: with our words and deeds to stand against evil and hurt and pain and say "get outta here." And then live as new people.

The good news of Easter is that through the resurrection of Jesus, in the midst of all the struggles and hardship and pain, God is bringing new life and new hope to the world, right here and now, to us and through us--and for everyone.

Happy Easter. Amen.