

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-10; Romans 12:1
Message: Ripples of Resurrection
April 12, 2020; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON
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Easter

I've shared with you before that I enjoy doing jigsaw puzzles. I find it a relaxing challenge to take 1000 little pieces and put them together into a single picture.

I was recently given a challenging puzzle. The picture on the front of the box was not the actual puzzle. It was a picture of someone looking out at something that was coming toward him. The puzzle was the picture of what was coming. Therefore the puzzle was put together by looking at a picture from a totally different angle.

Usually, with a jigsaw puzzle, the WYSIWYG factor works: What You See Is What You Get. This is usually a term used in computer systems, where editing software allows content to be edited in a form that looks just like what the finished product will be when it's printed or displayed. While editing on the screen, what you see is what you will print out, what you get.

With a jigsaw puzzle, usually the picture on the box is what you will get when you put the pieces together that are in the box. Usually.

Usually when you put a dead body into a grave, it stays there. Except not Jesus.

Or to say that when churches cannot meet in their buildings for worship on Easter Sunday, then we aren't celebrating Easter.

Nope. That's not how God works.

The resurrection is true and celebrated, whether people accept it or not, whether people gather in crowds to celebrate or only a couple people are together to watch a recorded service at home on a screen.

Nothing can deny the truth and power of the resurrection. The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!

"I believe in Jesus Christ...The third day he rose again from the dead." "I believe in the resurrection from the dead." (statements from the Apostles' Creed)

The resurrection is not just something to believe in or to profess or to accept as true. The resurrection is not just an impersonal doctrine to define or analyze. Resurrection is a life that is lived. It is actively living the new life that we have in Jesus. It is a way of life to grow into, to mature and discover as a life-long process of becoming who we are, alive in Jesus. We are born again to new life and grow into living this life.

It is knowing and believing that what you see is not what you get. We see sickness and death. It's real and painful. It's making our lives uncomfortable with social distancing and isolation and job loss and no school and so many other inconveniences. But COVID-19 is not the whole story. Nor is sickness or death the end of the story. We believe in the resurrection!

This is beautifully portrayed in Romans 12:1: “In view of God’s mercy.” God’s mercy is a simple summary in two words of what Paul has been talking about in chapters 1-11. We are sinners in need of God’s mercy. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Recognizing, admitting, confessing our sinfulness, we also hear the words “There is peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

“If we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him...Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:8,11).

“In view of God’s mercy,” in view of the assurance that Jesus has come and has died for our sins to make us right with God and has risen from the dead...then,

“Offer yourselves as living sacrifices.” A sacrifice was typically an animal that was killed and offered on an altar. We are *living* sacrifices. We offer ourselves in resurrection living. We die to sin and are raised in Christ to new life.

This is where we see the ripples of resurrection. We live out the new life that God gives us. We live the new life of love for God and our neighbour as a thankful expression of the life we have in our risen Lord Jesus Christ.

The ripples of resurrection are expressed in the evidence in our lives when we die to sin, we confess our sin, we turn away from sin, we no longer live in that sin, and we become more and more like Christ.

The ripples of resurrection are expressed in a deep trust in Jesus in a time of fear and anxiety. What if I doubt? What if I’m afraid? What if I lose my memory? What if I become isolated from my family? What if I become sick, or die? In answer to all the ‘what-if’s’ we have the assurance of the resurrection. The living Lord is with us. He has won the victory. Nothing can separate us from his love. Even death can’t win!!

God’s got this! Look at the cross and at the empty grave. God has taken our sin and taken death and defeated it. That doesn’t mean we won’t do wrong or we won’t die. We are living in that in-between time of already and not yet. Sin and death are defeated, but the victory is not yet complete.

Don’t just take my word for it. Take a look at the pictures that God gives us to assure us that his word and promise are for sure.

Consider the sign and seal of baptism. The sacrament of baptism reminds us that we go down into death with Christ and die to sin. We rise up to new life in Christ, with this new identity as children of God. The water is real. And so are God’s promises. We’re washing our hands an awful lot these days. Every time you wash your hands, be reminded that God has washed away your sins and has given you a new life, a new identity as his child.

Then come to the communion table. When we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we

remember that Jesus died for our sins. “This is my body which is for you...this is my blood of the covenant, shed for you.” We remember that the complete payment has been made for our sin. And we celebrate the new life we have with Jesus, being united with our living Lord. The Lord’s Supper is not just about the death of Jesus; it is being nourished in our faith and trust in our relationship with a Saviour and Lord who is alive and with us. He lives in us in the power of the Holy Spirit. He equips us to live a new life of obedience and faithfulness and victory over sin.

Resurrection declares loud and clear that God forgives, God has power over sin and death, and God promises ultimate eternal victory.

That’s not necessarily so obvious all around us. Despite our human scientific and technological abilities we can’t conquer how profoundly fragile and vulnerable life is on this fallen planet. As we’re all discovering, with great humility, our global economy and supply chains are deeply fragile. Our relationships are fragile. Our political process is fragile. The rapid spread of the virus is overwhelming many people.

Into that fragile world, we believe in the resurrection. We believe it and apply it with joy and confidence. This isn’t just an idea, a concept, or a doctrine. It’s the power of Jesus to take broken, fragile humanity into his “newness of life” (Rom. 6:3).

The missionary-scholar Leslie Newbigin wrote:

“Resurrection is no longer a mere doctrine: it has a living face and a name. Jesus is himself the presence of the life which is God’s gift beyond death. To be bound to Jesus by faith is to share already now the life which is beyond death. (Leslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come*, Eerdmans, p. 142)

Wow! The resurrection has a living face and a name. Resurrection puts COVID-19 and cancer and Alzheimer’s and depression into perspective. Resurrection puts death into perspective. All those things are real. We grieve. We struggle. But God has won! Jesus is alive!

May the ripples of this confidence and peace flow from your lives into your conversations, your prayers, your acts of kindness. May the hope and victory and face of resurrection shine from your life of hope and trust in the living Lord.

To God be the glory!

Amen.