

## **“All Things New” – Easter Sunday – 4/8/2012**

### **Dr. Matthew Cassidy**

Thanks for joining us. It is a great day, this Resurrection Sunday.

I never knew this until I came to this church but there is an official greeting. One person says, “He is risen!” and then you are to respond by saying, “He is risen indeed!” Have you ever heard that? I say, “He is risen!” You say, “He is risen indeed!”

Let me give you a bigger context so we can appreciate that. This week our church has been trying to somehow get involved in the emotions of the early church followers, the people who actually knew Jesus, walked with Him, and had meals with Him. We have been walking through this Holy Week.

Last Sunday, Palm Sunday, was when His followers saw Him riding down the Mount of Olives on a colt and people were screaming, “Hosanna!,” that He would be the coming king. That was their expectation.

Things changed throughout the week. On Tuesday, He turned the tables over in the Temple a second time.

On Thursday, we met back here as a church and shared Maundy Thursday to remember the last Passover meal and the first Communion, or Lord’s Table, where Jesus takes that meal and changes the meaning of it – that He is that lamb of God. It was a very tender moment. For those who were here, it was spiritual because we took communion in community. People were coming up [to the communion tables], sometimes with family or friends or small groups. We were trying to feel that; wow, there is a bond that happens here. After communion, we spoke of Good Friday. But on that Friday, it was not a good Friday because these men and women who followed Christ saw that Jesus was now taken from them and put on trial. Pilate ordered that these words be put there on the cross in Hebrew, Aramaic, Latin and Greek, so that everyone would understand, “This is the king of the Jews.” And Jesus dies. His followers run and hide.

We wondered – what would it be like if you put all your eggs in this one basket? If you put all your hope in one person, all of it, for meaning and purpose and life and then He dies. What would that be like? How long can you go without hope? 40 hours, maybe?

On Thursday, after the service, we left the auditorium in silence, and all the while we have been keeping vigil here. We have been reading through the Bible since Wednesday night. We are doing that because it is a spiritual moment for many of you who came here and did it with friends or family members, or even alone. We are reading these Bible passages because we are trying to hold on to these

promises that God has made. He has recorded them without error in holy writ. We are wondering what happens after Friday.

### **Summary of Jesus Christ's Life**

This Jesus taught like no one had ever taught. He loved like no one had ever loved. He lived like no man had ever lived.

On Saturday, He lay quietly but the King was busy. He had experienced death and gone to hell to preach the declaration that death would have no victory over Him. He had to go there into hostile territory to conquer it.

So on Sunday morning, He rose again because the gates of hell could not keep Him down.

Let me read from a far more articulate preacher what leads to "Christ has risen."

On Sunday, a stone got rolled away.

On Sunday, death lost its sting. Grave lost its victory.

On Sunday, hell was defeated. Death was dethroned. Darkness was de-railed.

On Sunday, the tomb was emptied and hope got fulfilled.

On Sunday, faith was vindicated. The prophets were validated. The disciples were animated.

On Sunday, sin lost. Shame died. Hope soared. Love won.

On Sunday, you got something beyond yourself to live for, something beyond your life to die for, something beyond your death to hope in after you die.

This is, therefore, the central proclamation of the greatest victory over the darkest enemy by the noblest hero for the loftiest cause in all of human history. If anything in this sorry, dark world is worthy of celebration, it is **Jesus Christ is risen!**

"He is risen indeed!"

That is the story of Jesus Christ, on Friday, on Saturday, and on Sunday.

I would like for us to keep the emotion connection intact. I want to tell you some things about the story that you might not appreciate. You could read over it quite quickly because you are projecting your own emotions on the disciples' lives.

Resurrection Sunday changed everything. It changed the meaning of life, the purpose of suffering, the way to love, the power that death can have on us. But it wasn't like maybe what you would expect.

Matthew 28 is the account of that first Sunday. Try to involve yourself in the hearts of these women, these two Mary's, and how they feel.

Matthew 28:1-9

After the Sabbath (*Saturday*), at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him.' Now I have told you."

So the women hurried away from the tomb, **afraid yet filled with joy**, and ran to tell His disciples.

Suddenly Jesus met them, "Greetings," He said. They came to Him, clasped His feet and worshiped Him.

That is what the women were feeling – they were afraid yet filled with joy.

Don't you think that Jesus' response to them is a little uneventful? Greetings. It has been a rough morning for these two women. They were going to the tomb to clean things up a bit and then there is this dramatic earthquake. They see that an angel who looks like lightning, dressed in snow white clothes, is standing over an open tomb where he had rolled away the stone. He says – don't be afraid.

Really?

The angel says: The one you seek is not here. Come here and look. Now go and tell His disciples.

Then on the women's way there, they see Jesus who says: *Greetings*. – That is like saying: *So, hi*. Or at College Station – *Howdy. What's up?*

It is more like He is saying: What did you expect? What He is saying is: I told you so. If God can create life out of nothing, He can recreate life, right? For goodness sake, if He can create life then He can recreate life, for heaven's sake.

Dale Bruner is a New Testament scholar and sometimes he teaches the children's Sunday School class. He was trying to help them understand this greeting. So, he asked them, "So, how do you think

## Emotions on Resurrection Sunday

Jesus should respond to these ladies as they come to see Him?” One of the little girls raised her hand and said, “Wait, I have it. How about this: Ta – da.” -- Isn’t that great? Ta – da, just like I told you.

What did not happen there was that everything got all better suddenly.

The Easter shenanigans and nonsense that you and I experience year after year is not what happened the first time. It wasn’t like they were all skipping around with little baskets and throwing petals of flowers around saying, “Jesus is risen. Oh, Jesus is risen indeed.” No, no, it was not spring has sprung and flowers are blooming and I get to wear some bright colors and maybe a new hat.

It was not that at all. It was scary. They were afraid. They were as afraid after the resurrection as they were before. Let me show you in the Gospels, the stories of the biography of Jesus Christ.

In Matthew 8:1-9, which I read already, they were “afraid yet filled with joy.”

Mark 16:8 puts it this way, of the women: “Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.”

John 20:19 puts it like this, “... the disciples were meeting together behind locked doors because they were afraid.”

They had good reason to be afraid. Look at what is going on here. Jerusalem is still a powder keg. It was only about 40 hours earlier that a mad mob of people were screaming about their leader, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” He was a threat to Rome and He was impinging on the religious mob, the Scribes and the Pharisees. What they did to Jesus, they would do to His followers and everyone knew that. There were execution squads running amuck. Pilate and the Pharisees themselves had already started spinning the stories of lies on how to explain Jesus missing from the tomb. – The guards fell asleep, they said, and somebody else stole the body of Jesus. Or, they went to the wrong tomb. – They had to come up with something.

When Jesus comes back, He does *not* say to them: *Okay, we win. Rome is going to roll over now. They will put down their arms and they know when they are beat.*

No, He says: Now, here is what I want you to do. Go and tell everyone this story.

That was a very scary thing. Jesus *did not* say: *Now, heaven comes down, the kingdom of God happens, and all the bad guys lose, and justice will finally rule.* He does *not* say: *The trouble is over.* Jesus says: The trouble has just begun.

If you think Easter, Resurrection Sunday, Christianity is a safe place, you are wrong. It was never meant to be a safe place. It was never the plan.

What the point of Sunday was to prove that everything Jesus said about God was true, about the power of love to even enemies was effective, what He said about himself was authentic, that He could pay for sins if you trusted that. He could actually pay off the wrath of God in this action on Good Friday and that He would be raised again. He was making that valid. He was putting a seal of truth upon that. What He was saying was: All things are new.

Watch how subtly John does this because John chooses his words very carefully when he talks about after the resurrection.

John 20:17 Jesus says, “Go instead to My brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.’”

If you have not read the Gospels much or particularly John’s gospel, this is the first time he is using these descriptive terms about Jesus’ disciples or any follower of His. In the previous parts of His biography, he called them servants, affectionately called them friends – but now, after the Resurrection, it says:

Go instead to My brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to My Father – oh that is Your Father, to my God – oh that is your God now.

Why is this dramatic change of identity taking place now? Because of what the disciples did? What did they do? They ran like little schoolgirls. They did not do anything good. They did nothing.

What happened was that Jesus did a lot. Jesus, by dying on Friday and by going to hell and preaching that He was the Messiah, and then being raised again on the third day according to what Scripture said, He changed the absolute identity of those who follow Him. Now, they are related to Him. He changed their identity with Him, and He changed the intimacy level. Jesus is saying: You can be intimate with the Father like I am intimate with the Father. You are in a new family now.

Because of this passage right here, because of the Resurrection on Sunday, you will hear people say at funerals – and I think they are misunderstanding that they are not applying this verse – John was received by Christ and he heard the words, ‘Well done my good and faithful servant.’ – No, they did not. Not after this event – because after John 20, they were received into heaven and they heard the words, ‘Well done my good and faithful son.’ -- That’s my girl. You did that right. You suffered well. You endured well. You served well. You are my girl.

That changed things dramatically. He makes all things new. That is what Sunday is about.

How does He make all things new? There is a template that has been laid in Holy Week. That is why we tried to experience that a little bit. Jesus did not want this to be a mystery and so He said: Look, if you want to be a follower of mine, take up your cross, deny yourself, and follow Me.

Take up your cross. If you want Easter Sunday in your life, you have to go through Friday in your life. Jesus says: Look, I am going through this thing of death so there can be a Resurrection. You want resurrection in you, in your life? You must die. You cannot be raised unless you are down.

So, the template is death, burial, and then raised.

There is a sentence in the New Testament where Paul is writing. Succinctly he says: Here is how it works.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

Paul says: I had to be killed so that I could be born again.

People who are followers of Christ know that. They know there is stuff in them that cannot be fixed – it is to be killed -- the deep selfishness and vanity, the habits, and sometimes addictions, just the evil that you know exists within you. Christianity does not say – You need to get that worked on. It does not say – you need to get fixed. Christianity says: You need to die. You need to have a Friday so that you can have a Sunday.

In Romans 6:3, Paul is writing, trying to help everybody review about what happened in their own lives – not just in the life of Jesus. He says:

Romans 6:3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

:4 We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Paul is saying: You died and then you got better. You can't get new unless you die first.

Put another way, on Good Friday, when Jesus was on the Cross, it was a very crowded cross. Every follower of Jesus Christ was on that cross with Him. When He was buried into that tomb, it was a very crowded tomb. On Resurrection Sunday, when that tomb was empty, it was a very empty tomb.

But you can't get to Sunday unless you go through Friday. You have to deny your life in order to receive new life because Christianity is not about making men and women better; it is about making them new – all things new. Look at what this verse says. Let's read this out loud:

2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. The old is gone; the new has come!”

Do you see? He is not talking about better; he is talking about brand new. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. A new thing has come. The old is gone; it is dead. It is over.

So, you know Christians, and maybe even in your own life, where they continue to practice some of the habits they were involved in before they became believers. And they continue to do things like they did not die, like they are still alive.

The way to look at that is in your own life, that is like your zombie self. You know how zombies get killed and then you bury them but they just keep getting back up again? Then you have to kill them again. That is what is happening in the life of a Christian. Sometimes, when you find yourself in a behavior of your old dead self, you just need to call on God and say: “God, could You kill this zombie again?” It is not alive. That is why some Christians look forward to death because this old self just keeps getting up. You have seen zombies, right? They are not very good looking, very ugly, and tend to destroy life around them. That is the old self that is technically dead.

That is what Resurrection Sunday is all about.

I am going to give you an extreme example because I want you to think about this. If it can happen to this man, this death and resurrection, it can happen to you. This guy is as tough as you have ever known a human being to be.

Laura Hillenbrand, the author of *Seabiscuit: An American Legend* (2001), wrote a book about his life. Many of you have read the book about Louis Zamperini, *Unbroken* (2010).

Louis, as a teenage boy, was just a thug, a juvenile delinquent, in and out of altercations with the law. He was always stealing things. He was a runaway who would jump on trains; this is in the 1930s.

Apparently, from his running from police so much, he became quite fast. He was a prodigy. As a matter of fact, he made it to the 1926 Olympics, the ones in Berlin. He would have done better but he ate so much on the boat ride over because he was so hungry that he gained 16 pounds. He was an endurance racer and in his final lap he was such a great finisher that Adolf Hitler wanted to meet him.

Let me tell you what kind of rascal this guy was. Louis met Adolf Hitler, shook his hand, and knew he was a creepy individual. Then Louis went and climbed the flagpole that flew Adolf Hitler's personal flag and stole it and then destroyed the flag. I mean, I like this guy a lot.

Zamperini was supposed to win the gold medal in the 1940 Olympics but never had a chance because World War II broke out and he became part of the Army Air Corps in the Pacific War. He and his friends were in a reconnaissance run, trying to save a plane that had gone down, and his plane came apart in mid-air. They crash landed into the ocean and only three of his crew survived and one of those died soon after that. So it was just Louis and his pilot friend on this little dinghy, an inflatable raft out at sea. They were literally fighting off attacking sharks that would jump into the raft. If that were not bad enough, a Japanese bomber saw them and flew by on several runs and just strafed the boat with bullets. Miraculously, that did not kill either man but it punctured the boat. While that was all happening, they were hit by a terrible Pacific storm with swells 30 – 40 feet high. When you are reading this book, you just can't believe whether he is going to live or die. It is spellbinding and you are right on the edge of your seat. I don't want to ruin it for you but he lives through that. Here is how suspenseful his life is.

They finally spot an island and start paddling over to get to the island and just as they arrive, they are captured by the Japanese. Not only are they captured but they are assigned to the absolute worst concentration camp of this terrible experience called the Japanese Prisoner of War camps. The commander in charge's nickname by the camp inmates was "Bird". He was a sociopath, a sadist, who was on Douglas McArthur's war criminals list in the top 40, he was so evil. He did not like to kill his prisoners and get it over with. He liked to torture them and psychologically torment them. He liked to break them and that is why the book about Louis' life is called *Unbroken*. The ocean could not break Louis. 47 days at sea, the longest anyone had ever been out on a raft, and now he is in a POW camp for almost two years, under the worst thumb, unspeakable acts of torture, and because he was such a strong-willed individual, Bird used most of his best stuff on Louis. Louis was Bird's favorite person to torment. Again, Louis' life was withering away from malnutrition and then he was starting to see things. He lives through that too.

In August, 1945, Louis was set free and the biography reads: "I'm free! I'm free! I'm free!"

He goes back to the States and impulsively marries a woman who is a saint, Cynthia. As it turns out, he was not free. He was a long way from free. They did not have names on things like Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome in the 1940s and they didn't know what to do with these men who suffered so much. He would just fight the anger and the resentment and the vengefulness. He could not get the memories to leave him. He couldn't get the voices to stop, having watched his friends die in such cruel and inhumane

ways. So, he started drinking and he thought that would keep him from thinking or feeling or remembering. He obviously became an alcoholic. His marriage was all but over.

Isn't it interesting that courage comes in flavors? He had all the discipline to survive 47 days at sea. He had all the valor to endure the suffering of a POW camp. And he had the courage to face a shark jumping into his boat. But he did not have the discipline to face alcoholism. He did not have the valor to see a counselor. He did not have the courage to look in the mirror.

So his wife, Cynthia, was out of real answers. In desperation, she said – I want to take you to this guy who is coming through town. I have heard about him and his name is Billy Graham. Maybe there is hope here.

Louis did not need to be made better; he needed to be made new. He did not need to be fixed; he needed to start all over again.

So the couple went and heard Billy Graham speak on the first night and Graham talked about forgiveness, joy, and happiness. He talked about how Jesus died on the cross to pay for his sins and the sins of his captors. He talked about how Resurrection Sunday could be his too, if he chose it. The hymn "Just As I Am" was sung and they called people down the aisles to receive Jesus Christ. But Louis would not have any part of it. So Louis storms out of that revival meeting and says, I am not going back and I am done.

Cynthia said, just come back and we will negotiate this. So this was the negotiation. He said, I promise I will go back one more time, if and only if we leave during that whole invitation part. That is when we leave. I can't stand that.

They went back the next day. Graham talked about the life they could experience if they would just receive Jesus and they could have the resurrection which comes after that. He could be promised all things new again.

So, the invitation started and Louis jumped up out of his seat but he could not move. He literally could not move to the exits. He said, he started recalling all the negotiating he had made with God when he was on that raft. Then he had said, "God, if You'll just save me, if You'll just save me, I'll give You my life." On that night, God called in on his marker. God said, you give me your life; so die already. If you die, so does all your revenge, and all your hatred, and all your memories of torment and suffering. Just die, Louis. Just die. We will call it Good Friday later. Let's just call it Death Friday right now. And Louis did. He died that day. He was forgiven; he was made, not better; he was made new. All things new. Instantly, he was cured [and it doesn't always happen this way] of his alcoholism. He went down front.

Word got around about who he was and his experiences in the war. He met with Billy Graham who said: You have got to tell people that if God can break your heart, He can break other people's hearts.

Isn't this funny? The ocean could not break this guy. A POW experience under a sadistic, pathological murderer could not break this guy. But the love of Jesus Christ could.

Billy Graham said: You need to tell people that there is not that much bad about dying when you get to be born again.

Louis is 90 years old and he is still talking about this. An airport has been named after him and a football field after him. The USC tunnel was named after him. He is going to come to Fredericksburg in May and tell people about the power of God's love and how it makes people new.

So, what about you? What are you doing here today? If you think you came here to hear some fairy tale about bunnies and how to live safe, you have come to the wrong place. Christianity is not safe; it is dangerous. If you want a little excitement in your life, that is where to go. God will make a hero out of you. He will make you new. He won't make you better but new.

Here is what I would like to do. I would like to end by having us close our eyes. Here is why. I want you to listen like you are absolutely undistracted. Let's just pretend for today that you don't care one bit about what your father would ever think of you, having a conversation with God. Or what your wife might think in some decisions you are making. I want you to be void of all these other external motivations that keep you from listening to God.

Hear this. Jesus is alive. He is still forgiving sins. He gives out new identities and new hope and new purpose and He is not about to make you better. He is about to make you new. But what you have to do is get a cross, deny yourself, and die. Do you want to do that? All you have to do is pray.

Dear God, I want all things new. I am tired of trying to be a good person, trying to use my own effort to get You to wink my way. Now, I just receive this gift of the resurrection. I give You my life; take it. Give me a new life, of absolute forgiveness, of sonship, of being called your daughter or your girl, or your boy. Make me a brother or sister with the people in this room and all around the world. Make me new. I receive it just as a gift, complete. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen

