

Sermon 040515 Easter
Scripture 2 Corinthians 5: 1-23
John 20: 1-18
Sermon Title- Starting Over

St. Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, is the evangelist of Easter. He has nothing whatsoever to say about Christmas or Advent. Unlike the gospels, he almost never quotes Jesus or tells stories of Jesus' life. He begins with Maundy Thursday and ends with Easter. So I take my text this Easter from Paul's second letter to the church he started in Corinth, chapter 5, verse 17 which reads "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

"All things becoming new." Wouldn't that be wonderful? Staring over-beginning again. If it were only true. If we could become new, start over, wipe the slate clean, get rid of everything on the hard drive, and start fresh. All of us want a new lease on life, a second chance, a new opportunity. I hear people tell me, "If I could only do that again." or "If I could take that back." We are all aware of our own abilities to mess things up. If you are not aware of your own abilities to mess things up, I suggest you just ask someone who knows you. I am fortunate to have a wife who willingly points it out when I mess up. I read a little verse and I'm sorry, I can't remember who wrote it but it applies:

If I had Solomon's wisdom,

*Possessed all the power of Atlas,
And moved with Mercury's swiftness,
I'd find a way to mess things up,
Because I'd still be me.*

Starting over. New beginnings. How can that happen? Well, it does happen. I am, as most of you know, the husband of the Fabulous Meg. Now, I'm going to tell you a bedroom story. No, it's not about that...but I do have your attention now, don't I. My story is about Meg in the morning. Meg is a super busy person, and has been since I met her, and no doubt was long before that. She has her career as a medical professional, has two master's degrees, she's an ordained minister, she is the mother of two extraordinary young adults, and she is a loving, supportive, and enormously entertaining wife to me. Those are just the headlines. There's a lot more including a cat and a puppy with whom she carries on semi-constant conversations- without embarrassment. In all her business, one of the things that Meg says is, "I need to sleep fast." She rarely sleeps the normal 7-8 hour night. She is, of course, human and carries regrets of the day into the night just like the rest of us.

But, when she gets up in the morning, Meg is energize and optimistic. She is so excited to get onto the new day. She starts over. The morning is a new beginning, full of possibilities for

Meg, and she is thankful to God for giving her another chance. Now as a daily witness to that, it is difficult for me to approach the day with my genetically engineered Irish gloominess. I end up seeing the morning as a fresh start, too.

Now you, I expect, are all clever enough to see where this train of thought is taking us on Easter morning. Ours is the religion of the dawn. Creation begins in the morning. The women find the tomb empty in the morning, at the dawn. The morning is when it happens. I think it made it into every sermon I gave during Lent that we are in the dark. Well folks, it's Easter morning and it is time to step into the light.

The resurrection is God's invitation for us to start over. It is our blessed surprise for today. Who is content with the way things were? Who is content with ourselves as we are? Who among us does not yearn to be more loving, more thoughtful, more imaginative, more generous, more tenderhearted, more passionate, more compassionate, more forgiving, more cooperative, more useful? Who among us does not wish we could be better? Maybe you have heard the call to change and have shied away, stepped back, afraid to move into the light. Easter is the opportunity for change. Easter is the invitation to change, an invitation into the light.

Now, I certainly hope that you are open to that possibility. After all, you did come here to church this morning. A contemporary Christian writer in England as noted, “There is little good in filling churches with people who go out exactly the same as they came in.” It is a waste of your time, not to mention mine, and not to mention God’s, if you leave this church this morning exactly as you were when you arrived.

How, we might ask, does this work? Remember in our Gospel reading from John this morning, when the resurrection of Jesus occurs, nothing happens to the world. Jesus is resurrected and only a few people know about it. The sun does not stop, the rivers don’t reverse course, the wicked do not cease from troubling, the weary still do not have rest. Violence still stalks the land, people still lie, cheat, and live and die. On the first Easter day, nothing changed in the world. Peace did not break out; kissing was not done in the streets.

So what changed? That is the wrong question. The question is, rather, who changed? The heart of the New Testament is not that the world changed, but that ordinary men and women who followed Jesus, who were huddled at the foot of his cross, who fled after his death, and were astonished that he came back and was among them; it was they who changed. The disciples were ordinary befuddled, bewildered human beings who could not have

organized a one-car funeral. Yet, through the resurrection and the arrival of the Holy Spirit in them, they were changed from the ordinary into the extraordinary. The world did not change. They themselves were changed. They were no longer in awe and terrified of the powerful. They astonished people who knew them and they astonished themselves. They were transformed; got a new start and did what they thought they were incapable of doing. They surprised themselves and the world.

Paul Tillich said, “Nothing is more surprising than the rise of the new within ourselves.” Every time I have a new idea, I’m shocked. Maybe this is because I have so few of them. Also, I like the thoughts I already have, my old thoughts so much I kind of stick with them. When I have a new idea it overwhelms me and I suspect that I’m not alone in this. It is kind of like realizing that we know something that we didn’t know we knew. Everyone here has had those moments of newness, of resurrection, and new creation that overpowers us. It is a moment of light. It is a moment of starting over. It is a new beginning.

That is what Easter is and can be for every one of us. The world has taught us the old thoughts. Easter delivers the new thoughts. Hear them. Do not be defined by your past, your problems, and neuroses. The world tells us that the resurrection doesn’t make sense but it is the world that doesn’t make sense.

Easter is not about the standards of the world. Easter changes everything for me and for you.

Easter gives us the Christ, the Messiah, God's love, God's word, God's world. What is my fresh start on Easter? Where the world tells me to hate, I will love, cost what it may. Where the world tells me to stand pat, I will move into uncharted territory. When the world tells me to be prudent, fearful, and cautious, I will be foolish and courageous, no matter what. Where the world tells me that my destiny is shaped by the past, I will claim God as my future and my destiny. Easter means for me to start over again, and keep starting over and over and over until by God's grace I get it right. Your mother was right, "If first you don't succeed, try, try again. That is how my wife does it. Meg is an Easter person every morning. To start each day in light of God doesn't mean you'll get everything right or that the world will be sensible or easy. It means that you become an Easter person and you are connected to that, which is beyond yourself. That is the gospel, the good news. It is to become, for all of us to become, Easter people. Why talk when you can sing? Why smile when you can laugh? For the rest of the time that is given you, why walk when you can fly?

Here's the good news of Easter in three short steps:

1. Easter is not just about Jesus; it is about you. He has already claimed his new life; now is your chance to claim yours.
2. Easter is not about death; it is about life, and not just life after death-but life before death, right now. You do not have to die to live.
3. Easter is not just about the past, way back then, long ago. It is about the future. Literally, I say to you that your best days are ahead of you. As Paul said, “Old things pass away; behold, all things are becoming new.

The proof of the resurrection is not simply in your hands, it is literally in your life. It is there for you in this morning, this moment. Be transformed. Astonish yourself and the world. Start living it. Start claiming it. Start making it your own today, for the first time, then again and again and again. You will be the proof of the resurrection that this tired old world desperately needs. If you are in Christ, you are a new creation. “Old things pass away; behold...” You are newly created in the light of this Easter morn. Thanks be to God.
AMEN