

## **Thinking Resurrectionally**

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First Baptist Church Birmingham  
Online Easter Worship  
April 12, 2020

John 20:1-18  
Psalm 96

### **Welcome**

Welcome to our Easter morning worship service! This day communicates the story at the heart of the whole Christian faith. It is the most important day in our history. Perhaps it can be considered our First Day, our New Year's Day.

However, it is a painful week in the wilderness that led Jesus to this day. He had been arrested, was tortured and killed in a humiliating public way for everyone to see on a cross.

And Jesus' story has us recall our own wilderness experience and consider how we might see light or hope beyond. Let's watch a short video that helps transition us into a season of new life.

### **Poetic Meditation**

"Where The Earth Kisses The Sky"  
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### **Prayer**

Dear God, we are gathering together this morning in separate places but with one heart and one mind to worship you. We are here in that space where the earth kisses the sky to declare our hallelujahs! for your resurrection from the dead — for bringing new life out of what was dead — for restoring what was destroyed — for redeeming what was lost — and for retuning what was stolen. We celebrate this morning how you are making all things new and giving us a new story to tell and a new life to live. On this Easter morning, we come with grateful hearts for what you have done in each of us, and among us as a community.

Now, please join me in the Lord's Prayer

### **Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who is in Heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into a time of trial but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom

and the power and the glory forever. Amen!

Easter reminds us that God has been at work throughout history, going all the way back to Abraham, working a plan to restore and heal. In a minute Suzy is going to read Psalm 96 that talks about how God's judgement is not so much about punishment, but often about bringing a fresh expression of goodness and righteousness into the world.

### **Psalm 96 (NRSV)**

*O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.*

*Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples.*

*For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods.*

*For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.*

*Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.*

*Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.*

*Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts.*

*Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth.*

*Say among the nations, "The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.*

*He will judge the peoples with equity." Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it.*

*Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth.*

*He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.*

We are called in this season to declare the new work of God in the Easter event — the point when God's new world broke into the present one. This day calls us to face squarely God's goodness, fully on display in the resurrection.

We are about to hear a dramatic reading of this story from the Gospel of John. As we listen and watch, I invite us to allow the Holy Spirit to help us think resurrectionally. What I mean is that once we grasp what Jesus' resurrection really means, everything about our lives and the world begin to take new shape.

At the core, Easter is about hope for the long awaited point when God's resurrection power will set all things right and make all things new. And even while future oriented, it has everything to do with our lives now as well.

Here is where it begins.

### **Dramatic Reading of John 20:1-18**

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#### **John 20:1-18 (NRSV)**

*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.*

*Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.*

*But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not*

*yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"* Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Easter Day is not so much the end of the Lenten season of contemplation, introspection, and evaluation, or the end to the pain of Jesus' journey through arrest, abuse, and death on the cross.

Instead, Easter is the first day of a new season — the beginning of a new creation, a whole new age. Because of Jesus, we have a newly embodied life in a newly reconstituted creation.

Jesus' resurrection launches this new creation.

To help us grasp this, let's look for a minute at what the early church understood about Jesus' resurrection.

The Greek word for "resurrection" is *anastasis*, which literally means "standing up." In that first century, this word was never used for what we think of as life after death, or what will happen to us when we die.

Resurrection wasn't understood as something that happened to us immediately after we die. Consider that even with Jesus, there were three days of time that went by between Good Friday when he died, and Easter morning when he "stood up" or was resurrected from the dead. And even after he was alive again, Jesus told Mary not to touch him because he hadn't yet been to the Father to receive his resurrection body.

So there is a difference between being alive and having a resurrection body. Having that resurrection body is key here.

While he was there hanging on the cross, Jesus had a conversation with the thief hanging next to him. In that conversation, Jesus told the man that today you will be with me in Paradise. Paradise wasn't understood as Heaven, but as a peaceful place God provides for those who are awaiting their resurrection bodies.

The New Testament writings and for centuries afterward, the Church taught that Jesus' resurrection on Easter will happen to all God's people at the end when, with new bodies they will share with Jesus in the renewal of all creation.

The early church did not think of people going to some other place

separate from this one after death, but enjoying a re-creation of this very world in which we live at some future point. God would not do away with this world, but make it anew in the future.

But we begin to get a glimpse of this new world now in Jesus. Among other places, in his first letter to the young church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul writes that Jesus' resurrection is the "first fruits" of God's new creation.

It was understood that later those who belong to Jesus would be given new bodies just like his resurrection body and share in the recreated and healed world.

Certainly sin and pain mark our current world, but that doesn't negate the fact that God made it good from the beginning.

The Christian hope is that God will finally put aright what has been damaged and wounded on this planet. God will breath new life into what was old, redeem and re-establish creation itself.

It is clear that this new world is not yet fully established. Thirty seconds of any newscast these days will tell us so.

This is why we can pray the lament with the psalmist "When Lord, will

you make all things new and put a new song in our hearts!"

Even amid the pain and suffering, and perhaps because of the pain and suffering of people and creation, God is diligently working even now for the redemption of all creation.

Jesus' physical bodily resurrection on Easter gives us assurance that God is actively restoring all things — setting free all of creation from corruption, decay and death.

When we read the resurrection story in John we are reminded twice that Jesus' resurrection happened on the first day of the week. It is pretty clear that this means the beginning of something new.

It is like we are standing in the doorway looking out into a new day, but the light, the fresh air, and the cool breeze from that new day is blowing into this space where we are.

There is also this very interesting detail included in this story about Mary Magdalene thinking Jesus is the gardener. Perhaps this isn't a mistake since God, through Jesus, is the Master Gardener, cultivating and growing something new.

I have here some fresh hyacinth flowers from my backyard. Their smell is permeating the space where I now sit, and it is wonderful. These are one of the first flowers that burst through the ground in the Springtime. They are a first sign that more flowers are coming soon, and beyond flowers, it means more warmth, more colors, more hours of sunshine, more time spent outside, more of the fullness of summer yet to come. They are a sign of new things on the horizon which are not yet here.

Jesus' resurrection body is the reminder that Good things are coming, that God is now at work. Since the first Easter morning, the door was opened giving us a taste of the future Springtime.

Why, we wonder, is there an overlap of the old and new world today. If God's new world has broken into this one, why is there still suffering?

Well, certainly God isn't the sort who just brings in the bigger tank and rolls over the enemy. That's not God's character.

Instead, God sends in the poor, the sick, the meek, those who grieve, and those who long for justice — and this produces a change in the world, a real change where hope can be seen.

- How many newly painted windows have you seen recently declaring “Hope” during this health crisis?

- How many driveways have you walked by to see sidewalk chalk messages of encouragement for our beloved health care heroes?

- How many people have called you simply to say they are thinking about you in the past month?

New things are happening that have never happened before.

- It is common for hospitals to play a particular tune throughout the hospital when babies are born. Now some hospitals are playing a new song when someone comes off a respirator. They are creating “victory boards” declaring the numbers of saved lives. People who were sick are now well! They are celebrating resurrection!

- We see in unprecedented ways people cheering, honking, waving, smiling, thanking, celebrating the people who are sacrificing for the well being of others.

- I was walking in the neighborhood about a week ago and saw people sitting in their driveways all down one street with fires burning. They were practicing social distancing, yet in solidarity

being together to celebrate neighborhood relationships that are important.

You probably have seen other new activities that speak to some foundational aspect of what it means to be human — sacredness of relationship and human connection.

These things are changing the world for the better, and our public conscience is being transformed!

Let us see with new eyes in this season — seeing resurrectionally with a new Easter filter for how God is now making all things new.

### **Offering**

I want to thank all of you again this week who have continued to give to the church and those of you who have given for the first time. Your offering is very appreciated.

If you want to follow through with your commitment to support the mission of this church financially, you can give in three ways:

1. You can click the “Donate” link at the website:  
“FirstBaptistBirmingham.org.”
2. You can mail a check to the church. We will be checking the mail.

3. You can set up a “bill pay” arrangement with your bank.

Thank you for giving generously!

### **Closing Song** “Lord Of The Dance”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YV15StV6TK0&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR0vB-Eosw0kMwfEO23yof3-NOWSzsC4Pnjpe2gzBRQRwSfrXRtpux6xpEo>

### **Announcements**

- **Children’s Time Online** — Please let other parents who have small children know that we get together each week on Tuesdays at 11 am on Zoom. <https://zoom.us/j/339660239>
- **Stay In Touch** — The best way to beat the isolation blues is to be in touch with one another. I certainly have celebrated that this is happening and I also know that the longer that we linger in social distance mode, the more important it becomes. Let me know if you want a Zoom session to connect with friends or family. I’ll set it up for you.
- **Men’s Breakfast** — Connect with a group of men through Zoom

each Wednesday morning for breakfast at 8 am. <https://zoom.us/j/2486440550>.

- **Community Connection Time** —  
In a moment we will stop the recording and all of you are welcome to stay in the Zoom session to connect and share with one another. We will begin this time together in prayer.

### **Closing Blessing**

May God's resurrection power birth within you a new world and a new life — that you might steward this world with gentleness, enabling creation to flourish with fruitfulness. That you might live in such a way as to make the way it is in heaven the way it is in this world. life might be a glowing example of what is possible in this world and a reflection of God's intention for creation.