

The New Life

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**Sermon Series: The
God Who Makes All
Things New**

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

*My past can be
forgiven.*

Easter is like a church open house. It's the one time in the year when people come and see what's going on. Let me speak directly to our guests. Ordinarily, I speak to our members, knowing guests are listening in. But today, I want to address our guests, inviting our members to listen in or tune me out, whatever you are in the habit of doing!

Easter is, in my opinion, an ideal day for an open house. Easter stands at the epicenter of our beliefs. Everything stands or falls with Easter. Christ's resurrection serves as the *sine qua non* of Christianity.

Paul addresses, in his letter to the Corinthians, matters of first importance: "Christ died...Christ was buried...Christ was raised" (15:3-8).

So what, you ask? What difference does it make that Jesus was raised from the dead? I encourage you to ask "So what" of every sermon we preach from this pulpit. So, what difference does Jesus' resurrection make in my life?

I can think of three reasons. First, my past can be forgiven. Scripture declares there is something that separates us from God, what the Bible calls sin. Sin is any thought, word or deed that creates distance from God. To close this

gap, there are only two choices available to us. Either we must remove this separation ourselves or God must do it for us. Since we cannot eliminate sin from our lives, God removes the separation for us. Jesus does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Paul writes in Corinthians, "Christ died for our sins." The preposition "for" means "on behalf of" someone. Christ died on behalf of our sins. John Calvin called Christ's death for our sins "the great exchange." Christ exchanged our sins for his righteousness, our death for his life. Paul writes, "God made Christ who knew no sin to become sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). The early church patriarch St. Athanasius said succinctly, "He became what we are that he might make us what he is."

Years ago, Liz Curtis Higgs was a wild and crazy radio "shock jock." At one time in New York, Howard Stern did the morning show and Liz did the afternoon drive-home show. She was so foul-mouthed, Howard Stern once said that Liz needed to clean up her act. If Howard Stern says that to someone, you know it's got to be bad.

Liz had been burned by so many men, that she became a militant feminist. A female friend kept inviting her to church, but she kept putting her off. Finally, Liz agreed to go, one time and one time only.

***My present life
can be more
rewarding.***

The minister happened to be preaching on the passage about wives submitting to their husbands—not exactly a promising start for this militant feminist. Liz felt her blood boil as she listened to the message. Then the minister preached in the second part of the passage about husbands loving their wives, as Christ loved the church. He pointed out that Christ loved the church by laying down his life for her. When Liz heard that, she leaned over to her friend and said sarcastically, “I’d gladly give myself to any man if I knew he would die for me.” Her friend responded, “Liz, there is someone who loves you enough to die for you. His name is Jesus Christ.” It wasn’t long before Liz dropped her guard, opened her life to Jesus Christ and became one of his followers.

***My future can
be secure.***

Second, my present life can be more rewarding. The phrases “Christ died and Christ was buried” appear in aorist tense, expressing completed action. When Paul writes “Christ was raised,” he shifts tense. Christ’s resurrection from the dead happened in the past but continues into the present. He is alive!

We live in a world of hype. Much of what passes for life is not really living. Look closely at commercials. Ever notice people’s phony-baloney smiles in commercials? I mean, one can’t possibly be that happy using dish detergent or car wax. Some of what passes for happiness is a mirage. Once you acquire it, it evaporates.

I exercise in the morning at a local fitness club, using the treadmill and recumbent exercise bike. I tire of listening to the chatter on morning shows on overhead flat screen TVs, so I decided to copy down Scripture verses I was reading into a notebook, to focus on more illuminating material. One passage has captivated my thinking lately: “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Therefore, choose life so that you and your children may live.... For the Lord is your life” (30:19). A few chapters later, Moses declares, “Take these words to heart...they are not idle words—they are your life” (32:47).

Jesus is not only concerned about your afterlife but your present life, such things as making good choices, doing your job and redeeming the time.

Third, my future can be secure. Earlier, we professed allegiance to Jesus Christ using the words of the historic Apostles’ Creed, “...who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried.” Jesus died in his body, he was buried in his body and he was raised in his body.

There has been considerable interest lately in the Gnostic Gospels. These gospels form the basis of the best-selling book, *The Da Vinci Code* and the recent TV documentary, *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*.

Gnostics were chief rivals to early Christianity. They believed the spiritual world was superior to the evil, material world. Gnostics

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categorically dismissed Jesus' bodily resurrection. Jesus was raised spiritually, but not physically.

Let me set the record straight: the people martyred for their faith—who were thrown to the lions or burned at the stake—were not reading the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Judas. They were reading Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These gospels are explosive. They affirm the grave could not hold the body of Jesus. Jesus' bodily resurrection validates his mission.

In C.S. Lewis's beloved *Chronicles of Narnia*, the wicked queen has cast her spell over Narnia so that "It's always winter and never Christmas." Four children climb into a clothes wardrobe one day and wander into the land of Narnia. One of the children, Edmund, becomes a traitor to the Queen's cause. According to the laws of Deep Magic, every traitor has to die, so Aslan the Lion negotiates with the Witch to free Edmund. In exchange, Aslan is slain by the Witch on Stone Table. But when Susan and Lucy find the Stone Table broken in two and Aslan raised from the dead, Susan blurts out, "Oh Aslan, you're real, you're real! But what does it all mean?"

"It means that though the Witch knew Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and

the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward."

People don't like to talk about death. If you doubt what I'm saying, invite your friends over for dessert and suggest let's talk about death and watch what happens. Death is our ultimate enemy. But because of Christ's work on the cross, death has been defeated.

Many scientists fear we've done irreparable damage to the earth's ozone layer. We have created a hole that we may not be able to repair. Jesus created a hole in death that death can never repair. He broke its power, once and for all.

We're talking about life: past, present and future life. Your past life can be forgiven. Your present life can be more rewarding. Your future life can be secure. I know, it sounds too good to be true. Some people find it easier to believe in the Easter bunny than Easter resurrection. Maybe what I'm saying is just hype. How do you know I'm not a carnival barker hustling people?

Well, check it out. When you're in the market for a car, what do you do? You kick the tires, sit in it and test-drive it. Some of you research it on-line.

You can do the same thing with faith. You can check it out.

Go to the source. Read the Good Book. I admit, it's not an easy book to read. But the Bible grows on you.

Start with a modern version. I recommend Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message*.

Come back next Sunday. I'll be talking about Jesus' central mission of bringing justice and righteousness (Luke 4:16-21). Come and be a part of us.

I've spent lots of time with religious people over the years. Let me reassure you, some people are just getting started, so you'll find yourself in good company. Don't expect perfect people here. The church, after all, is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.

Some of you employ a fitness trainer. Why not utilize a spiritual trainer? Call a staff member on the back of today's bulletin, and we'll help get you started.

Some of you are suspicious of "organized religion." The criticism often levied against the church is that it's full of hypocrites. I wholeheartedly agree. Christians are hypocrites. We often say one thing, yet do the contrary. We are recovering hypocrites. That's what we're doing here, trying to make our profession and behavior congruent with one another.

Hypocrisy is not the exclusive possession of church people. There is a little bit of hypocrite and con artist in all of us. Everyone is guilty of saying one thing and doing another.

How can we find hope in this world of hype? Christ's life-transforming, death-defeating power can make all things new. Our church has been focusing on renewal. Jesus offers people new birth, a new covenant, a new heart,

a new spirit, a new self and a new hope. In short, Jesus offers people new life!

In Lloyd C. Douglas's classic novel *The Robe*, Marcellus becomes enamored with the person of Jesus Christ. He writes letters to his fiancé, Diana in Rome, telling her about Jesus' teachings, miracles, crucifixion and resurrection. Finally, he informs her that he has decided to become his disciple. Diana writes back, "What I feared is that it might affect you. It is a beautiful story. Let it remain so. We don't have to do anything about it, do we?"

Yes, as a matter of fact, we do; especially since our mission is following Jesus.

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