



March/April 2022

Today

refresh, refocus, renew

TO
EASTER
AND
BEYOND!

ALSO: THE STORMS OF LIFE

Friends:

Storms are one of the most impressive demonstrations of nature's power. For that reason, we often describe crises in our world and in our personal lives as "storms." Today, for example, our nations and our global relations seem to face one storm after another. And many of us experience personal storms in our lives and in our relationships with others and with God. Where can we find shelter from the storms of life?



In March, chaplains Jason Zuidema and David Rozeboom, both serving in ministries to seafarers, lead us in exploring and reflecting on some of the many storms described in the Bible. These storms not only teach us about God's hand in nature but also point to the Lord as our only true refuge and Savior amid the storms we face in our world and in our lives.

Then, in April, Pastor Doug MacLeod leads us in examining the meaning of Easter. In the first half of the month we focus on the book of Mark as it leads up to Christ's death and resurrection. And for the rest of the month we look through other New Testament passages to see what Jesus' resurrection means for our lives today. These devotions remind us anew that Jesus is our Savior and that he continues calling us to follow him as the resurrected Lord of all.

I pray that you may be refreshed, refocused, and renewed as you reflect on God's Word.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Selles

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"The Storms of Life"
Jason Zuidema and
David Rozeboom



"To Easter and Beyond!"
Douglas MacLeod

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ReFrame
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To Easter and Beyond!

Douglas MacLeod

This month we journey to and beyond Easter. In the first half of the month—leading up to Easter—we are invited to meditate on a selection of stories in Mark, one of the gospel accounts about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Then, after Easter, we will reflect on other New Testament passages that help us understand the meaning of Jesus' resurrection. We see Jesus revealing himself to be our Savior and calling us to follow him as the resurrected Lord of all.

Rev. Douglas MacLeod has served as a pastor for 37 years with four CRC congregations in Michigan and Iowa. He and Cathy have been married for 42 years and are grateful for each of their three children and their six grandchildren.

ON THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM

"Whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it."
—Mark 8:35

In two weeks it will be Good Friday, when we remember Jesus' death on the cross. He gave up his own life to save us from sin and death.

In the meantime, we are wrapping up the season of Lent, a 40-day period of spiritual reflection. During Lent we focus on the purpose of Jesus' coming—to pay the price of all our sin by dying in our place, and then to rise again in victory over death so that we can have new life with God forever!

Lent is a time for self-examination, confession, spiritual exercise, discipleship training, and refreshing our perspective on what it means to follow Christ today. It is a spiritually challenging time, and it will conclude on Easter as we celebrate Jesus' victory.

Think of the Savior who went to Jerusalem to die for us. Jesus

was betrayed and handed over to the religious leaders, who condemned him to death. He was mocked, spit on, whipped, and crucified. He died and was buried. Then, on the third day he rose again, victorious over death. And he did all of this for us so that we could be forgiven and receive new, eternal life.

It was a hard path for Jesus, and it may be hard and fearful for us who follow him. This month, imagine being a disciple following Jesus on the road to Jerusalem. What do you think will happen? What will it be like? In following Christ, we may face hardships and even be called upon to suffer in his name, but he promises that it will end well.

Lord Jesus, guide me to trust in you, and give me courage to follow where you lead. Amen.

ASTONISHED AND AFRAID

The disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid.
—Mark 10:32

Jesus had been teaching about who can be saved and enter the kingdom of heaven, and his disciples were astonished, amazed. They were going to be richly rewarded for giving up everything to follow him (see Mark 10:24-31)! But other people who were following along were afraid. They were probably wondering, “What exactly does this mean?”

Then Jesus reminded his disciples about what would happen to him when he got to Jerusalem: betrayal, mockery, suffering, death, and resurrection. You’d think they would pause and wonder about all that, especially if it might mean they could be arrested too.

But instead, James and John raised a surprising question. They asked if they could have first and second place among Jesus’ followers in his kingdom. It seems they were fully

not getting it; they basically ignored the fact that Jesus was going to suffer and die when he got to Jerusalem.

Maybe they just didn’t want to face the truth. It can be difficult to deal with the realities of suffering. We can be inclined to try to cut corners, aiming to avoid the hard parts to get to the finish line. But it is better to deal with things like surgeries, repairs, grief, dying to self, and repentance than to deny that these things are needed.

Jesus will take us where we need to go. So we need not be afraid; he goes there with us.

Jesus, help me to trust that following where you lead is also a place where you will never leave me. “Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, help me stand.” Amen.

THIS WOULD BE HARD

He took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him.
—Mark 10:32

This was now the third time that Jesus told his disciples about his upcoming death in Jerusalem (see Mark 8:31; 9:31). And the grim details showed that this was going to be very hard.

How did the disciples respond? By way of distraction or denial, they changed the subject.

How often don't we do the same thing? Many families, for example, will decline to talk about some uncomfortable reality—a financial problem, substance abuse, a health issue, a strained or broken relationship, maybe even the need to plan a funeral—the list could go on and on. Instead of acknowledging what will happen and putting it on the table, the family will only talk about what to put on the table for dinner.

It is easy, and it is human nature, to want to skip over

the hard parts. And yet here we see Jesus, who courageously faced suffering and death so that we could be forgiven and have new life with God.

Jesus went to Jerusalem even though he knew how hard it would be.

Our Lord and Savior did this for you, for me, and for all who will believe in him—in order to make our salvation possible.

Dear Jesus, thank you for not skipping the hard but necessary work that makes our salvation possible. Help us each day to honor the gift of your love for us. In your powerful name we pray. Amen.

ARE YOU ABLE?

"Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"
—Mark 10:38

Jesus' disciples are jockeying for privileged positions in his kingdom. But Jesus redirects these followers, inviting them to join him on his path and mission. "Can you drink the cup I drink . . . ?" he asks.

Without understanding all that this means, they give an answer that sounds right to them: "We can." But, really, they have no way of knowing what it means to take on the things Jesus is going to face. How could they know?

For that matter, when Jesus invites us to follow him, how can we know what will be involved? Do we have a clue how much our lives are going to be changed by accepting Jesus' invitation?

Jesus asks that we hand our lives over to him. He asks not that we just make a few minor

changes, but that we surrender our lives fully to his way.

Our walking the life of faith is not for our own glory. It's not for gaining privileged positions in God's kingdom.

Instead, Jesus calls us to join him on his mission so that we and the world may be changed—that is, redeemed and renewed. And that may be a difficult path.

What does Jesus' call mean for you in your life?

Savior and Lord, I cannot know everything that being your disciple will mean for me. But I do know that you invite me to follow you and that you will love me forever—and that is enough. Amen.

THE SON OF MAN CAME TO SERVE

"Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." —Mark 10:45

Jesus is speaking in broad terms as he describes what people in power can be like. They can intimidate, bully, threaten, and seek to control. In contrast, Jesus says, we are called to live differently. We must not follow the way of the world with its structures of privilege, race, class, gender, culture, influence, politics, or religious elitism. Jesus says we are to be servants, following his example. He came not to be served but to serve and "to give his life as a ransom for many."

All our relationships—parent-child, wife-husband, pastor-congregation, teacher-student—need to be refreshed from tendencies to control and manipulate. Instead the focus should be on serving others, helping people to flourish, and empowering everyone to honor, worship, and follow Christ.

Are you a servant in the example of Christ in your circles of influence? In what ways are you serving others as a neighbor, friend, spouse, parent, family member, teacher, or church member?

We are children of the heavenly Father and disciples of Jesus, who did not consider glory a thing to be grasped, but who humbled himself to die on a cross (Philippians 2:5-11). Because of Jesus, we offer ourselves as living sacrifices so that the name and kingdom of God are made known.

Lord, make me a servant in the example of Christ. Help me to follow Jesus faithfully, reflecting your love and goodness for all to see. Amen.

“HAVE MERCY ON ME”

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

—Mark 10:47

This wonderful story is about spiritual sight as well as physical sight. Bartimaeus, who is blind, can already see (by faith) who Jesus is, and he wants to see with his eyes too.

Bartimaeus understands that Jesus is “the Son of David”—that is, the promised Savior. And his plea, “Have mercy on me,” has become the cry of all who look to God for help. Though he is blind, Bartimaeus sees the truth about Jesus.

When Jesus asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” Bartimaeus asks for physical sight. So Jesus, in his mercy, adds physical vision to Bartimaeus’s spiritual sight.

The disciples and the large crowd following Jesus do not yet clearly see who Jesus is. But Bartimaeus, the blind man at the roadside, can see this! By faith he understands that Jesus

is the promised Savior. And in this story we see that the mission of Jesus is to meet our needs with his mercy.

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Like Bartimaeus, we can call on Jesus in faith, knowing that he can provide the grace and mercy we need.

“Open my eyes, Lord; I want to see Jesus.” I want to know the wonders of his grace for me and to follow him in faith. Amen.

JESUS IS CALLING

"Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you."

—Mark 10:49

Our online newspaper includes a puzzle showing two drawings that are almost the same. The challenge is to find at least six differences between the two drawings. And to do that, you have to look closely at the details.

In the book of Mark we need to focus on the details of Jesus' life and how people respond to him. Did you notice, for example, that Bartimaeus is described as "sitting" when Jesus comes walking by?

This may seem unimportant. But it fits beautifully with the crowd's encouraging words "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." This makes sense because we have been told that Bartimaeus was sitting by the roadside.

From the original Greek text we also know that what the crowd is saying here is "Arise!"

So Mark is not just giving us an incidental detail. Mark is using the same language that will describe Jesus' resurrection, when he rises from the dead (see Mark 16:6). This carefully chosen word points to restoration, redemption, and resurrection: "Bartimaeus, cheer up! Arise! Your redemption is here; your salvation is coming!"

Bartimaeus is a man whose condition has knocked him down in life. A blind person would have no standing in the community, but the arrival of Jesus made all the difference in the world to him—just as Jesus' coming does for us.

Thank you, Jesus, for calling me and giving me the hope and promise that in you all things are being made new. By your mercy toward me, I rise to new life! Amen.

“WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?”

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.” —Mark 10:51

As we look into this story again today, let's focus on the question Jesus asks Bartimaeus, the man who is blind: “What do you want me to do for you?”

Since Bartimaeus has been begging by the roadside, we would expect him to ask for a handout—some bread or money, perhaps. But in response to Jesus' question, the man is bold enough to ask for much more. He asks to be able to see—and that means he is asking to have his life completely changed.

How would you respond to Jesus' question “What do you want me to do for you?”

We all could use a little help, or a little healing, or some additional resources to get us through another day, right? And surely we would be thankful for whatever help Jesus would give.

But let's not forget who is asking. Just as Bartimaeus could see that Jesus was the Son of David, the promised deliverer who could make all things right, we need to see that Jesus is the Lord and Savior who offers us full, new life forever.

Jesus invites us to be honest about our greatest need: the mercy of God for sinners. So we need to ask him for forgiveness and new life, that we may serve with him forever.

Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! In the richness of your grace and in the greatness of your love, grant me forgiveness and new life so that I may follow you. Amen.

THE GOSPEL IN A NUTSHELL

Throwing his cloak aside, [the blind man] jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.
—Mark 10:50

The expression “in a nutshell” describes an important point that can be shared in just a few words.

Did you notice that in the phrase about Bartimaeus “throwing his cloak aside,” this story includes a very important detail?

Bartimaeus’s cloak was probably his only possession, and he needed it for his meager life. He was blind and could not see what people might toss to him as they passed by, so he would have to spread his cloak on the ground to catch bits of food or small coins that he might receive. Then he could find them on the cloak. In other words, he needed his cloak in order to gather his income. And at night he would wrap the cloak around his body for warmth. It was his bed.

When Jesus called the first disciples, they left everything behind to follow him (Mark 1:16-20; 10:28). Similarly, Bartimaeus leaves his cloak behind as he jumps to his feet to come to Jesus, to have his life changed, and to follow Jesus.

This is the gospel in a nutshell. Bartimaeus leaves his security blanket behind as he comes to Jesus, gains his sight, and follows the Lord into a new life.

Cheer up! Jesus is calling you too!

Dear Jesus, in your mercy and with your grace, please give me new life. Help me to see that following your call is the way to live each day. Amen.

SAY, “THE LORD NEEDS IT”

“If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it. . . .’”
—Mark 11:3

As Jesus comes within a few miles of Jerusalem, he begins making arrangements for a large-scale public event. This is a strategic time, when crowds of people are gathering from all nations for the Jewish Passover celebration.

The crowd around Jesus is all excited about him. His entry into Jerusalem will not be missed—but it is misunderstood. He is not coming as a rival to the Roman king, as many in the crowd were thinking. But as the King of kings, he is coming to lay down his life as a sacrifice for everyone’s sins. Instead of being treated as an earthly ruler, Jesus will be crowned with thorns, sentenced to death on a cross, and mocked as a king of fools.

To prepare for this, Jesus sends two of his disciples to fetch a colt for him. Knowing that they will be asked about what

they are doing, he also tells them what to say.

Jesus knows what is ahead. He knows what he needs in order to fulfill God’s plan to save us. Riding a colt to proclaim peace for all nations through the blood of a new covenant (Zechariah 9:9-11), Jesus will go right to the temple, where sacrifices are offered for the forgiveness of sins.

On the first day of this important final week for Jesus, we are invited to know what we need. We need Jesus to be offered for the forgiveness of our sins.

Dear God, help us to see that Jesus knew what it would take to pay for all our sins, and that we desperately need forgiveness. In his name, Amen.

“IT WAS ALREADY LATE”

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve. —Mark 11:11

Jesus has just entered the temple courts in Jerusalem, riding a colt in a great procession. Inside the temple courts, Jesus looks around and sees everything that is happening there. He sees doves, lambs, goats, and more—all being sold for sacrifices. According to the Jewish law, those sacrifices were necessary each year to pay for the sins of the people. But now Jesus has come, and this means that the time of paying for sin with the blood of animals is coming to an end. The hour is late, as the Greek text of Mark puts it, and that means the time of Jesus' sacrifice to bring full forgiveness is arriving.

This is a proclamation that the stage is being set for the week ahead. Jesus sees that the time has come for these temple sacrifices to end, and for the one perfect sacrifice of the Lamb

of God to fulfill the need of all peoples.

Jesus looks around and sees everything. He sees that the time for salvation has come, and that nothing we can offer, buy, or sacrifice will really be enough to pay the debt of our sin. No other blood will do. Only Jesus, the sinless one, can pay the full price for us once and for all. His sacrifice is everything we need.

Ask God for forgiveness in Jesus' name today. His blood had paid the debt of all your sin too!

“Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,” have mercy on me! I rejoice that by your sacrifice for my sake, my sins are paid for in full. Amen.

HE ENDED THE TEMPLE SACRIFICE

Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.

—Mark 11:15

Having seen everything at the temple the day before, Jesus comes back and puts an end to all the buying and selling of sacrifices there. This creates quite a disruption.

Jesus clears out the courts so that believers from all nations can gather there for prayer. He rebukes the moneychangers and the vendors for making the Lord's temple a "den of robbers." And by toppling tables and benches, he shows that the whole system of continuous sacrifices is about to be overturned.

Jesus is here to fulfill the Old Testament law by paying for our sins once and for all. The tables of the money changers, where people got the temple currency needed to pay for temporary sacrifices for their sins, will no longer stand. Jesus will replace these with the

table of bread and wine representing his body and blood, which pays for all sin once and for all. He will personally replace animal sacrifices with the sacrifice of his own life.

Until now the temple has been the central place for sacrifices and forgiveness. But God's own Son, Jesus Christ, will now be the essential source of forgiveness for all people.

Because of Jesus, we no longer have to pay for sacrifices for our sins. Jesus has come, and he has paid the price for us all!

Lord Jesus, help me to find comfort in knowing that your sacrifice is perfect and complete for all time for me and for everyone. Thank you! Amen.

BY WHAT AUTHORITY?

"By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked.

—Mark 11:28

The three major groups of religious authorities—the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders—came to ask Jesus about his authority. But they were not really asking for information. Their question was filled with disdain and accusation.

They were not searching for understanding. They were making a hostile inquiry, seeking to undermine Jesus. Earlier in Mark 11 we read that they were “looking for a way to kill him” (v. 18)—so we know they were not looking to be enlightened, and Jesus knew that too.

Even so, their question is a good one to ask, as long as we are not hostile and we really want to know: “Jesus, how do you have the authority to do what you are doing and to teach what you are teaching?”

In a world where there are so many different teachings and authorities, it can be hard to know which way is right or true. We need to know why we should listen to Jesus and follow him. And Jesus gladly shows us the way. He is not threatened by our honestly seeking understanding.

Jesus invites us to see that he is the Son of God and that he has divine authority to heal and forgive. He also has authority to lay down his life for our sake, and to take it up again (John 10:17-18).

Jesus has done all this for our salvation, and this is the most important truth to know!

Dear Jesus, your authority over sin brings hope and gladness. Help us all to trust in you as the one and only Savior. Amen.

“THIS IS MY BODY”

Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.”

—Mark 14:22

Souvenirs and keepsakes remind us of places we have been and of people in our lives. Maybe you have a stone that you picked up on a mountain hike, or perhaps you have a seashell from a beach. Maybe you cherish an heirloom that a grandparent owned. Reflecting on it can bring back warm memories.

At the last supper, Jesus was sharing his final Passover meal with his disciples. Ever since then, the deep significance of this meal has become precious to Jesus’ followers as a sacrament in the church.

I imagine that Jesus’ disciples later thought about him and what he did nearly every time they took bread and ate it during a meal. Think of how significant it was that Jesus used this basic, universal food to remind his followers that he

gave his body to be crucified to pay for all our sin. Similarly, he used wine to remind his followers of the blood he shed.

Whenever you take a piece of bread today—maybe a piece of toast or a muffin or a bagel—or if you bite into a sandwich or a tortilla or another food made with some type of bread, may you be reminded that Jesus offered himself for us all, that we can be forgiven and have new life forever with him.

Jesus, remind me each day that you have given yourself for me. Even more than I need bread or food each day, I need you. Amen.

“SURELY THIS MAN WAS THE SON OF GOD!”

When the centurion . . . saw how [Jesus] died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”
—Mark 15:39

This statement by the centurion is astounding. He was a commander of soldiers, a warrior for Rome, and he was supposed to worship the Roman caesar as his god. Yet here, at the scene of Jesus' death on a cross, this non-Jewish man says Jesus is surely the Son of God. We don't know exactly how the centurion came to this conclusion. The drama of the moment may have had something to do with it; Matthew reports that there was also an earthquake (Matthew 27:54). But somehow the Spirit of God moved the centurion to speak out this truth about Jesus.

While there are people who don't believe in God, there will be a day when everyone will recognize that Jesus is the one Lord and King over all (Philippians 2:9-11). It could be at the time of their death or on judgment day, but it

will happen. All who believe in Christ will make this confession with joy and praise, but, sadly, others will admit this reality with dread. Before we die and before the day of judgment, though, we can recognize that Jesus is the Son of God. Each one of us can ask God to help us see this today.

Jesus truly is the Son of God, whether we see it or not. It is a gift to see this reality for what it is, and it is only by God's grace that we see the truth about Jesus.

Jesus, I do not know the depths of your love and sacrifice for me, and I wonder, “How can it be that you would die for me?” Help me to know you as Lord and King, and thank you for all you have done. Amen.

LAIID IN THE TOMB

Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. —Mark 15:46

This story tells us that three women—Mary Magdalene, another Mary, and Salome—and also “many other women” had been watching the crucifixion from a distance. It seems that two of them also followed to see his burial.

And we might wonder, “What was it like for them to witness all this? What were they thinking and feeling?” These people and many others had been with Jesus and had followed him through Galilee as he taught and preached. And now they had seen his suffering, his death, and his burial in a tomb. We have been told what the centurion said (Mark 15:39), and we are told of the bold and kind action of Joseph of Arimathea, but what about the people who watched from a distance?

Maybe that’s the point. For all who witness the story of Jesus from a distance—like us today—what do we think about him? From a distance of 2,000 years we have followed Jesus through Galilee, heard his teachings, and seen his healings—and now we have observed his death and burial.

How has all this affected you? What is your reaction?

Our response to Jesus is a big part of the story.

Jesus, pull us into this story to respond to you as the centurion did and to honor you as Joseph did. And since we are like the many people who watched from a distance, draw us close enough to see you as the Son of God. Amen.

"YOU ARE LOOKING FOR JESUS"

"Don't be alarmed. . . . You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him."

—Mark 16:6

The women who went to the tomb on Sunday were expecting to find a corpse. They went there to carry out the unpleasant task of anointing Jesus' body with spices, even though they were not sure if they could get into the tomb.

I like how the book of Mark says they were on their way to the tomb "just after sunrise." A new age was already beginning as the women made their way to a remarkable discovery. Instead of a closed tomb with a dead body in it, they found the stone rolled away from the entrance and "a young man dressed in a white robe." "And they were alarmed."

I imagine they wondered if they were even at the right tomb. But the angel was quick to assure them that they *were* at the right tomb and that he knew they were looking for

the crucified Jesus. And the angel announced, "He has risen!"

This would have been far more than the visitors could process quickly. So it's no wonder they were confused and afraid after hearing everything the angel had told them.

As we learn from other accounts of Jesus' resurrection, a lot more happened later (see the closing chapters of Matthew, Luke, and John). But here in Mark we are invited to wonder what would happen next. And in the coming days we'll focus a bit more on what the angel said and how we can peer into the new day that has dawned.

Christ has risen!

Lord, fill us with new life in Jesus, who rose for us.
Thank you! Amen.

“HE HAS RISEN!”

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.
—1 Corinthians 15:17

When our street was closed for a utility repair, there was only a sign that said, “Road Closed.” There was no explanation. We soon learned that a sewer line had broken, and the repair would only take a day—but the sign did not say any of that.

As we saw yesterday in the book of Mark, the angel at the tomb announced that Jesus had risen, but there was no explanation of what that meant. “He has risen” is a declaration, not an explanation. Mark 16:6 simply records the angel’s announcement.

Thankfully, the Bible includes many other passages that help to explain this announcement, and the church and believers continue to work out the implications of that message for our daily living today.

For example, 1 Corinthians 15 fills several pages with a discus-

sion of the resurrection, including the point that “if Christ has not been raised . . . you are still in your sins.”

And to put this positively, this means that because Christ has been raised, your sins have been forgiven, washed away, gone forever! This is the good news that Jesus came to bring and to make real in the lives of all who believe in him.

This declaration is true: Christ lives, and our sins are gone! Jesus arose for me and for you! Thanks be to God!

Dear God, even if I don’t fully understand how Jesus’ resurrection means that my sins are removed, help me to trust in you—and to see how powerful your love is for me. In Jesus, Amen.

“HE IS NOT HERE”

“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.”

—Mark 16:6

Sometimes we might wonder if the Easter story could have gone differently. Maybe something like this: “He has risen, and—look—here he is!” And then there could have been cries of amazement, hugs, tears of joy, and dancing. What a great time that could have been!

But instead the announcement was “He is not here. . . . He is going ahead of you into Galilee.”

What? He’s not here?

There is no invitation to stay at the tomb. The invitation is to go and follow where Jesus is leading.

So let’s not make a shrine of the tomb or turn the stone into a potential object of adoration. This is not where we need to stay. We need to be following the risen Lord.

As Mark’s gospel comes quickly to a close, we are directed away from the tomb to realize that the story has not ended. Instead, the story continues in the lives of everyone who will follow Jesus into the world. It is as if the resurrection is opening a doorway to an entirely new life that is yet to unfold for Jesus’ followers—including you and me.

Today, because Jesus has risen, your life can take a new course and have a new purpose.

Jesus, I can often feel like I simply want to stay where I am in life or else go my own way. Help me to live a new life, following your leading and guiding. Amen.

YOU ARE WHO GOD SAYS YOU ARE

If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! . . . Now is the day of salvation.

—2 Corinthians 5:17-6:2

A Christian magazine invited readers to summarize the gospel in seven words or less. People sent in lots of good suggestions, and here is one I remember: “We are who God says we are.”

I like that because it means I am not defined by social or cultural categories—such as education, age, finances, sexual identity, political view, body image, Facebook likes, busyness, or even how I feel about myself on a given day. This is true for each one of us. It means we are not defined in terms of what others say we are—or even first of all by categories that we might choose. Instead, we are who God—our Creator and Father who raised Jesus from the dead—says we are.

As believers in Christ, we are part of a new creation. We

are all beloved, forgiven, and blessed children of God. We are reconciled to God, who calls us to share this message with others. God calls us to be like ambassadors, who represent their nation as they live in another nation. We are called to represent God’s new creation as we work with God to bring his love into this world.

We are who God says we are. Since Christ has risen, a new creation has come, and all who believe in him are a part of it. And in God’s strength we can share this life-giving news with everyone, saying, “Now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.”

Lord, thank you for making us a new creation in Christ. Help us to share this good news for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

TELL PETER!

“Go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”

—Mark 16:7

Peter gets singled out.

Peter was the first disciple mentioned by name in the book of Mark (1:16; 3:16), and here he is the last one mentioned.

Peter had suffered an extraordinary failure when he denied Jesus three times (Mark 14:66-72). This was not a slight faith-flaw but a defiant public insistence: “I don’t know this man.”

Considering those words, we—and Peter—might think he was done for. Washed up. Unforgivable. Good for nothing but the trash heap. How many of us have ever thought of ourselves that way?

If you’ve ever totally blown it, lost it, or wasted it, then be sure to see the wonderful grace in this statement that singles out Peter. In this beautiful and essential nod to a disciple who failed, we find the indis-

putable evidence that he has been forgiven: “Tell . . . Peter”!

Replace Peter’s name with your own. Of all the great benefits of the resurrection, forgiveness is the indisputable evidence that we can understand—that Jesus has taken care of our sin and restores our relationship with him.

Jesus’ shout-out to Peter contains all the restoration and forgiveness that the Savior has earned for him—and for you!

Dear Jesus, thank you for specifically calling, by name, a disciple who failed. I am thrilled to know that you know my name and have called me to be restored too. Amen.

AT THE RESURRECTION OF THE RIGHTEOUS

"You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

—Luke 14:14

Most everyone enjoys having their back scratched. There is also an expectation that if I scratch your back, then you'll scratch mine. This describes any type of trade-off when someone does you a favor. You're expected to do a favor in return.

Jesus points out that sharing meals with people who are already our friends or family is really just a lot like swapping favors. We can anticipate that what we do for others will usually return to us. This can be a nice feature of enjoying food and spending time with family and friends in community.

But Jesus teaches that if we understand the nature of the resurrection, our hospitality will include something more. Instead of just a mutual exchange with relatives and friends, we will also show gracious generosity that does

not expect anything in return. Following God's example to us, we will freely offer food and other resources to people who are not able to repay.

This is a natural result of God's gift of new life for us. We can gladly and freely mirror God's way with us in all the ways we interact with others. We don't need or expect to be repaid now, for we already know we are guaranteed life forever at "the resurrection of the righteous."

Jesus, your resurrection gives me gladness to freely serve others with grace and goodness. Thank you. Amen.

CHILDREN OF THE RESURRECTION

"They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection."
—Luke 20:36

Researching your family tree is a popular hobby these days, with so many records available through ancestry websites. I was surprised to learn that my own family history makes a connection with a president of the United States!

In our reading for today, Jesus was challenged and mocked by some of his antagonists, who gave him a trick question about family ties after the resurrection. His reply re-routed their nonsense into a wonderful teaching about the life-changing reality that comes from the resurrection.

Instead of requiring us to sort through family names and the births and deaths of ancestors, the resurrection raises a new reality. Whether one is married or not, childless or not, or male or female, everyone matters because all believers in Christ

are children of God, "children of the resurrection."

This does not disrespect or diminish anyone's family or relationships. Family ties are enhanced in this new perspective as the resurrection redefines family and community. We are all invited to open our hearts and lives to include others whom we might not think of as part of our family. And we can join with others to become part of the worldwide family of God. Our identity as children of the resurrection is that we are all equally loved and valued as God's children.

Thanks be to God for the family of God!

Dear God, thank you for the comfort of being forever safe, loved, and cherished because of all that Jesus has done for us as your children! Amen.

A HOPEFUL CURIOSITY

When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."
—Acts 17:32

In our reading today from Acts 17, the apostle Paul was preaching in Athens, Greece, about Jesus and the resurrection. Paul told the people that he could tell they were very religious because there were statues and shrines and temples to gods in every part of the city. There was even "an altar with this inscription: 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD'" (Acts 17:16-23). So Paul used that idea to tell his listeners about God the Father and Jesus the Son, whom the people of Athens did not know yet.

In this way Paul shared the good news that God, who created everything, now calls on people everywhere to repent of their sin, because he sent his Son, Jesus, to pay the price for all our sin. Jesus gave up his life on a cross for our sake even though he had committed no sin. And then God proved his

power over sin and death by raising Jesus from the dead.

Though Paul's words were dismissed by some of the people who heard him, others were curious and wanted to hear more.

The gospel can be sneered at—or, with a hopeful curiosity, we can ask to hear more about the wonderful things God has done for us by raising Jesus from the dead.

Lord of life, though we do not understand everything about the resurrection, give us a hopeful curiosity about all that it means for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

RESURRECTION BODIES

"How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?"
—1 Corinthians 15:35

Most of us would probably admit that, ideally, we'd like to have something corrected or changed about our bodies. Perhaps we have an allergy, or a disease, or a disability of some kind. Our bodies are not perfect. Yet we also have to admit that we are not sure what a perfect body would be.

The Christian church believes in the resurrection of the dead. This means that in addition to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe that when Jesus comes again there will be a resurrection of all who have believed in Christ. Our present, imperfect, physical bodies will be raised and made whole. Somehow, by the mysterious power of God, our bodies will become immortal and spiritual and yet also be physical. Amazing!

We do not know what this transformation will look like,

but we can trust that it will be good. It will have all the necessary features that God has in mind for us.

When Jesus comes again, each of our bodies—though dead and buried and decayed or turned to dust—will be “raised imperishable . . . raised in glory . . . raised in power . . . raised a spiritual body.” Somehow too, it seems, our new bodies will have flesh and bones and be able to eat food, like the resurrected Jesus did when he met with his disciples (Luke 24:36-43). Think of all the wonders God has in store!

Lord Jesus, help me to live faithfully for you in my body now, even as I look ahead to life in my resurrected body when you come again. Thank you! Amen.

A RESURRECTION LIKE HIS

If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.

—Romans 6:5

When I have a cold or the flu, I am more aware of my body than I usually am. Symptoms such as coughs, fevers, aches, and chills cannot be ignored. Sickness makes me aware of what's wrong, and it makes me long for healing.

When we are honest with ourselves, we can see that sin is still present in our lives. We are tempted to sin, and we often fall into it and need to ask for forgiveness. And when we think about eternal life, we imagine a future when our lives will be sin-free. But there is more. In Christ, we are already being made new!

An important truth about Christ's death and resurrection is that by believing in God's power to save us, we die to our old life of sin, we are baptized with Christ into his death, and we are raised with him to "live

a new life" by the power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' death our sins have been paid for, and in his resurrection we are led by the Spirit to live a forgiven life, a grateful life.

We are not stuck in a spiritual waiting room suffering from spiritual sickness. We are already receiving the necessary healing that allows us, in God's strength, to resist sin and to live in gratitude, sharing God's love with others. In Christ's death we have died to sin, and by his resurrection we are being made new.

Lord Jesus, help me to see that your death and resurrection take my sin away and give me new life. I want to live more fully for you, knowing my sin is defeated and I am being made new. Amen.

BREAKING THE BARRIER

Since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. —1 Corinthians 15:21

Barriers such as walls, fences, and locked doors can serve to protect us. Or, on the other hand, they can also exclude us or keep us out. Maybe you know what it feels like to be “locked out.” We can be locked out of a room, prevented from access to education or career advancement, or banned from a social group. Being locked out can be hurtful.

When people sinned, that broke their relationship with God, creating a huge barrier that could not be crossed. So instead of being able to enjoy life forever with God, they were cut off. Sin brought struggle, toil, sorrow, disease, and death. Through Adam, the first man representing the whole human race, sin and death came into the world, and no one could break through the barrier.

So God sent his Son, Jesus, to become human and to live among us without sin. He succeeded where Adam had failed, and Jesus gave his own life to pay the debt of all our sin. By doing this, he broke through the barrier of death for us, and by his resurrection he opened for us the path to new life. Because of Jesus, we can now have full life with God forever.

When we feel hopeless and left out of God’s love, and when we realize we cannot gain eternal life because our sin is a barrier separating us from God, Jesus breaks through that barrier and changes everything.

Thank you, Jesus, for opening to us the pathway to life today and forever. Amen.

AN IMPERISHABLE BODY

With the resurrection of the dead . . . the body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable. . . . —1 Corinthians 15:42

A curious by-product of all the precautions during the COVID-19 pandemic was that colds and flu didn't spread as much as in earlier years. With more people staying home, those common diseases couldn't spread so widely. Even so, many, many people got sick with COVID-19, and many of us know someone who died from it.

Ultimately the final answer to our physical struggles—such as pain, sickness, brokenness, death, body-image issues, and more—will be realized in the resurrection. Our present bodies are perishable, imperfect, weak, and limited—but because of Jesus, all who believe in him will one day be raised to a new capacity as imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual.

In the book of Revelation we read that when Jesus comes

again, there will be no more death or mourning or pain or tears, and the tree of life will grow by the river of the water of life (Revelation 21-22). Amazing!

All of these things will be good for us, and we will enjoy life to the full—but really the main point in all this is to give greater glory to God. The resurrection of Jesus, which brings the promise of our own resurrection, shows us what God is doing to make all things new again so that all things, our bodies included, can more wonderfully declare the glory of God!

Dear Jesus, fill our hearts with the hope of living life fully with you in eternity, so that in all things we may reflect and give glory to God! Thank you. Amen.

A LIVING HOPE

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. . . .

—1 Peter 1:3

These words of Peter remind me of the need for training and practice in all kinds of sports, music programs, drama, dance, and more. Athletes, musicians, actors, dancers, and others all practice and train so that when the time comes to play or perform, they are ready.

Peter's advice is sort of like a pep talk to early Christians in the Roman Empire. He writes to encourage them to give praise to God and to focus on all the good things God has promised in Christ. "In his great mercy," God has given "new birth into a living hope" through Jesus' resurrection—and this includes "an inheritance that can never . . . fade." Peter knew that some believers in Christ were facing hardships and persecution because of their faith, so he wanted to

remind them of these reasons to praise God.

My first reaction to spiritual trouble might be to complain, curse the world, or even question God's care. Peter's regimen is to exercise our worship muscles and to offer praise to God—to stay in spiritual shape. In other words, hard times require training, and we can train best by praising God for all he has done to save us.

Here is a spiritual tip: In light of Easter and the resurrection, practice praising God now so that when tougher times come, you will be prepared to do what you need to do!

Thank you, Lord, for your mercy and for the living hope that helps us face the challenges of life in this world. Amen.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.
—Mark 16:8

These final sentences in Mark 16 have left a lot of people puzzled. (Though some Bibles include more verses, those are not included in the earliest manuscripts.) We might wonder if maybe Mark misplaced the last page of his book or if it later got lost. The ending seems hasty and even gloomy. We'd expect the women to be happy and eager to spread the news of Jesus' rising. But instead they are silent and afraid.

As noted earlier this month, we can be thankful that many other Bible passages help to explain the resurrection. And the books of Matthew, Luke, and John share other details of what happened next and how others met the risen Jesus that day and in the weeks ahead.

In blunt honesty, though, Mark describes the reality of that day: the resurrection of Jesus

was so alarming that it brought disorientation and fear. This also shows that the women did not yet have the comfort and guidance of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1-2).

Instead of leaving us thrilled, Mark's account challenges us to search out the rest of the story and to figure out how God calls us to respond to the risen Jesus. The resurrection has set in motion a new chapter that is still being told, still unfolding. And we enter into the story ourselves as we listen and follow where Jesus leads next.

How has Easter and the risen Lord affected your life?

Lord Jesus, thank you for patiently leading us, especially when we are afraid. Guide us in following you. Amen.

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