The resurrection assures us that Jesus has conquered our greatest human problems—sin and death. In him, we can have forgiveness and a new and eternal life.

What Difference Does the Resurrection Make in My Life?

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This week, I have been reflecting with gratitude on our meaningful Holy Week services, and I have been so grateful to be in a church where we celebrate with such joy the goodness, and glory, and majesty of Jesus’ resurrection.

However, I have to confess that the high of Easter is often followed by a bit of a letdown as we reenter what sometimes seems like the mundane of everyday life. I’m still facing the same challenges I had before Holy Week, and I’m aware many of you are carrying even heavier loads. So what difference does the resurrection make when you struggle with a broken body, mind, or marriage, grieve the loss of loved one, experience the sting of betrayal, or for whatever reason feel like you can’t face tomorrow?

We are in a sermon series going through the Gospel of Luke. During Holy Week, we skipped ahead to the end of the story, but, today, we pick up in chapter 13 where we left off. Jesus is traveling with his disciples on this three- to five-day journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, knowing what lies ahead.

In his book *Tell It Slant*, Eugene Peterson writes, “As they walk together those several days, he prepares them for their post-crucifixion and post-resurrection lives. There are dramatic events in the offing. Their lives are going to be changed from the inside out. At the same time, they are going to be dealing with the same people, the same routines, the same temptations, the same Roman and Greek and Hebrew culture, the same children and the same parents, the sometimes endless waiting, facing the indifference of so many about them, dealing with the maddening hypocrisies of the self-righteous, the stupidities of war, the absurdities of conspicuous consumption, and the lies of arrogant rulers. Everything will have changed and yet nothing will have changed. Jesus is preparing them to live in a world that neither knows nor wants to know Jesus. Jesus is preparing them (us!) to live a crucifixion and resurrection life patiently and without fanfare, obediently without recognition. In these Samaritan conversations, he prepares them to quietly and
courageously do all this in continuity with the way Jesus did it and the way Jesus talked about it.”

This paragraph really resonated with me as I watched the news this week. It was the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. There was another workplace shooting, a fatal car crash, and the heartbreaking accident of a Canadian junior hockey team that left 15 dead. Daily, the news reminds us that the world is filled with violence and tragedy.

So what difference does the resurrection make in a world where nothing seems to change and so many bad things keep happening? Our passage speaks to this. Listen for God’s word to you:

“At that very time, there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, ‘Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did’” (Luke 13:1-5).

Two kinds of tragedies are discussed in this passage—those caused by human hands and tragedy that happens accidentally, or what insurance companies would call an “act of God.” When bad things happen, it is human nature to speculate why. Many people in Jesus’ day believed people suffer because they have done something wrong and are being punished. Some today still believe this.

Hearing the news of several military accidents this week took me back 35 years to when my older brother died in an Air Force jet crash. If that wasn’t bad enough, two years later, my cousin was killed in a boating accident. I had to wrestle with many
questions. Is God really good? Is God in control? Why do bad things happen? Are tragedies ways God punishes people for sin? Was our family so bad that we deserved so much suffering and grief in such a short period of time? Years later, I was deeply disturbed when I heard a number of Christians say after Hurricane Katrina that God was bringing judgment on the city of New Orleans for its sinfulness. Really?

In this passage, Jesus is quick to dismiss that way of thinking. The Galileans Pilate murdered were not more terrible people than other Galileans. The eighteen who died when a tower fell were not more guilty than the other people living in Jerusalem. When I was confronted with tragedy, I had to wrestle with what I really believed about God and life and learn to let go of wrong ways of thinking.

The truth is that we live in a broken and sinful world where bad things happen. People die by the sinful acts of others, by accident, or by natural disaster. But this is not because God is playing games or cooking up some special schemes to wipe certain people out for their sinfulness.

We are human. We are vulnerable and many things can happen that are out of our control. Try as we might, none of us can protect ourselves or those we love from every danger: disease, traffic accidents, crime, emotional disorders, or random violence. We are mortal. We will not live forever in this world. Anything can happen to anyone at any time. This is the nature of life on this earth.

Jesus seizes this opportunity as a teaching moment. The sudden calamity that claims human lives can serve as a warning
that any of us may stand before our Maker without a moment’s notice. Physical death is a part of life. We cannot escape it, but we do not need to fear it. However, we do need to move from a temporal to an eternal perspective. Here is where we return to our question: What difference does the resurrection make in our everyday lives? The resurrection assures us that Jesus has conquered our greatest human problems—sin and death. In him, we can have forgiveness and a new and eternal life, but to enjoy this new reality requires a turn on our part.

Jesus issues a clear warning: “Unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.” Here he is not referring to physical but spiritual death, or separation from God. What is repentance? It is a change of mind that leads to a change of heart that leads to a change in action. This change involves both a turning from sin and a turning to God. Frankly, it’s easier to look at the sins of others and the problems of the world than to look at myself and my sin and my need to change. Each of us needs to ask, “What am I going to do with my sin?” We can deal with it ourselves or turn to Jesus and accept his free gift of forgiveness and eternal life.

If you haven’t turned to Jesus and trusted him as your Lord and Savior, I urge you to do so as there is nothing more urgent or more important in your life. Pete, I, and others on our staff and in our church would be glad to talk with you more about this. But don’t put it off. Now is the day of salvation.

Please understand that repentance is not a one-time experience. Following Jesus day-by-day involves daily repentance, a life of constant turning from the world to God and then turning back again from God to go into the world where there is so
much pain and brokenness. This may unsettle, even disturb us, and again we ask: “What difference does the resurrection make in my everyday life?”

The resurrection gives us comfort: Difficult and unpredictable realities of life in a fallen world are sure to happen, but the resurrection assures us that our risen and reigning Savior is present with us giving us his power and peace no matter what our circumstances. Whatever you are facing this week after Easter, be assured that Jesus is with you encouraging, supporting, sustaining you by the power of his Spirit.

Well, Jesus softens this harsh reality of coming judgment and difficulties of life in our fallen world with a parable about a fig tree. Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down!’ He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down’” (Luke 13:6-9).

People in an agrarian culture would understand why any landowner would want to get rid of a fruitless tree taking up valuable space and resources. The surprise of this story is that the tree isn’t chopped down. With more time and intention, the gardener will help it to live and grow and be what it was meant to be.
This is a parable about God and His grace. He does not give up on anyone’s life. He keeps working to make people whole.

true we may die at any moment, but, in the meantime, God keeps at it, giving us more time, more chances, offering us years of opportunities, lavishing His Spirit and His love on us.

One of the reasons this story stands out is because it is so countercultural. This week with this passage in the back of my mind, I saw many “Chop it down” reactions to situations playing out in the news. If we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that this attitude is reflected in our lives. We live in a world that moves fast and furiously and wants something to happen now. We easily lose patience with people and circumstances and want to “chop it down.” It is, after all, the easiest, quickest, and most efficient way by far to clear the ground and get on with our agendas.

As Peterson writes, “The Manure Story interrupts our noisy, aggressive problem-solving mission. In a quiet voice the parable says, ‘Hold on, not so fast. Wait a minute. Give me some more time. Let me put some manure on this tree.’ Manure?

“Manure is not a quick fix. There are no immediate results—it is going to take a long time to see if it makes any difference. If it is results that we are after, then chopping down a tree is just the thing: we clear the ground and make it ready for a fresh start….Manure is a slow solution. Still, when it comes to doing something about what is wrong in the world, Jesus is known for his fondness for the minute, the invisible, the quiet, the slow—yeast, salt, seeds, light. And manure.”
“Manure does not rank high in the world’s economies. It is refuse. Garbage. However, the observant and wise know that this apparently dead and despised waste is teeming with life—enzymes, numerous microorganisms. It’s the stuff of the resurrection.”

God knows that this counter-cultural call to slow down is hard for those of us who are impatient to get things done. So we find repeatedly in God’s prayer book, the Psalms, a call: “O give thanks to the Lord for He is good; His steadfast love endures forever” (Psalms 106:1; 107:1; 118:1; and others). We are called to remember that God is patient, kind, and long-suffering. In other words, His love never quits.

Manure reminds us that God is not in a hurry, and we are called to not be in a hurry either but to “wait for the Lord” (Psalms 27:14, 37:7-9, 40:31, 130:5-6). That is not counsel that is readily accepted by followers of Jesus in America who have been conditioned by promises of instant gratification. After extensive experience with the violence in two world wars, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy wrote, “The greatest temptation of our time is impatience, in its full original meaning: refusal to wait, undergo, suffer. We seem unwilling to pay the price of living with our fellows in creative and profound relationships.”

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Over 70 years later, it’s still true. It was good this week after Easter to reflect on this manure story. Life isn’t always ecstatic or dramatic. The manure story reminds us it’s often slow and
messy. So let’s return to our question: What difference does the resurrection make in our lives?

I would propose that the resurrection motivates us to live with intention in allowing God’s grace to accomplish for us what we cannot accomplish on our own in becoming even more fruitful in our lives. The parable of the fig tree invites us to ask ourselves, “What are the slow messy ways God’s grace works in our lives to bring about growth and transformation?” I want to propose that spiritual disciplines or practices are God’s means of spreading His grace into our lives to make us more fruitful.

Offering yourself to God is what worship is all about. We allow time and space to experience the real, living presence of the risen Lord together with others and keep the vision of who we are in Christ before us so that we can live faithfully in the kingdom in the days between Sundays, between Easters.

Scripture (word of truth): In a world filled with false beliefs and false ways of acting, we need to spend time reading, studying, meditating, and memorizing God’s word of truth so the Holy Spirit can knead into our hearts, souls, minds, and bodies so we can be strengthened to love God and love our neighbors.

Prayer is not something we do as much as it is a way of being with God and cultivating our ongoing friendship with Him. This is resurrection living as we learn to “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).
And finally, spiritual friendships help us live the reality of the resurrection in our everyday lives. “Real spiritual friendship is about helping one another know, love, serve, and resemble God in deeper and deeper ways” (Tim Keller). When we are weak, we need others who are strong. When we suffer, we need others who will hold us up. When we sin, we need others who will speak the truth in love.

These are spiritual practices that may seem mundane and inconsequential. We are tempted to give our time and attention to things that are more interesting, exciting, captivating or simply require less time and energy. However, these spiritual practices are like manure. They are slow and messy, but they are also life-giving ways God gives grace to work out the reality of the resurrection in our ordinary, everyday lives.

I don’t want to leave you with the impression that it’s all about us and our experience of the resurrection. If Christ rose from death, reigns in power, and is coming back again, we should be the most motivated people on earth. Not only are we motivated to rely on God’s grace for ourselves. The resurrection also motivates us to help others thrive right here, right now, because we believe in victory, redemption, and transformation.

How can we help others thrive? There are many ways, but I’ll share what I have shared before in just four words: Prayer. Care. Share. Dare. Each of us can identity and engage in prayer for the people around us. We can care for them—first by simply getting to know them and spending time with them and coming alongside them to care for them in helpful ways. We can trust God to open doors of opportunities to share our story of how God has worked in our lives and the good news of

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salvation in Jesus. We can make time to share our lives over the long haul to help them grow in Christ. In a world with so much unkindness and downright meanness, we can *dare* to speak up and stand up against injustice when we see it in big or small ways. These seemingly small shifts in attitudes and actions are like manure on a tree. They can make a huge difference in bringing about change and growth in the lives of others and even in our hurting world.

What difference does the resurrection make in my life? We are called to become like Christ together for the world. It’s not a slogan. It’s our mission. It’s not easy. It doesn’t happen overnight. It’s slow going, but our risen and reigning redeemer is with us and wanting to work in and for and through us by the power of his Holy Spirit. The only question is whether we are willing to wait on him and wanting to cooperate with him. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! Jesus is alive, and he wants to live his resurrection life through us.