

Easter is the celebration of a new world - new realities that change how we understand ourselves and our role in the world. Whether you are a church person or not, you can see moments like this in history.

Take, for example, 16th century Europe. Seemingly overnight, there was a burgeoning of artistic and scientific achievement. As Columbus returns from his 4th voyage to the New World (1504), Leonardo paints Mona Lisa, Michelangelo sculpts David, and the magnificent Sistine Chapel - all within ten years. If you were born in the mid-16th century, you would have seen the Protestant Reformation and the fundamental shaking in the understanding of religion and God. You would have seen Shakespeare ascending in influence; the invention of the watch, and the fine-tuning in an instrument and the measurement of daily time periods; the dissemination of the newspaper, and the wide-spread information sharing; and the observations of space and earth's relationship to other planets and stars. This creativity aligns with the discovery of the new world challenging the beliefs of the old world. Explorers challenged the long-held belief that the world was flat. The most famous challenge was Copernicus (and, later, Galileo) who challenged centuries of belief by stating the earth is not the center of the universe. A modern-day sociologist summed up this time: "Europe's imaginative capacity was unleashed not by the discovery of learning...but by the discovery of the New World...[and] the effect those new horizons had on an Old World" (Edwin Friedman). Scientist, artists, and religious reformers were infused with the belief that life was meant to be lived on new horizons.

The Resurrection of Jesus is about a new start. One thing has come to an end, and a new thing has begun. My hope for you today is that you see the new world that Jesus set in motion. And that you follow Him to find ways to bring this new world into being in your families, your work, and wherever you go.

Matthew describes the Resurrection story in chapter 28.

**After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not**

**be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." vv.1-10**

Several things catch our attention from Matthew's story. First, the creation-type language: dawn, new day, new week, and the image of light against the darkness of death (white and lightning at a grave). This is language similar to the creation story in Genesis 1.3-5. Second, this is a story marked by movement: women go to the tomb, angels come to earth, Jesus goes to Galilee, and the women run to the disciples. Lastly, there is a sense of transcendence in this story: an earthquake (a foundational shift) occurs, angels appear (heaven and earth come together), and Jesus who was dead is now alive.

This resurrection story is about a new thing happening in the world. It's summed up best by the opening phrase, "after the Sabbath." Sabbath is the first day of the week. In other words, the end of one thing, and the start of another. Moreover, it's after the Sabbath. Resurrection is what happens after the first thing. It is a new first. We have new first type events often. Think about a new job that you started. There was the search and hope before you started the job, and then that feeling of walking in on the first day, that a new season was beginning. Or think about a new discipline that you embraced to better yourself or the people around you. There was a lot of movement and a sense of transcendence - something good was happening.

So, whatever else we say or believe, it is contextualized in understanding that resurrection is about a new thing happening in the world. One thing has ended, and a new thing has begun. It is a new first.

While one group encounters creation, movement, transcendence, another group fights against it.

**While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the**

chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day. vv.11-15

The guards and religious leaders plot to explain away the Resurrection. They have a way that the world works - angels stay in heaven and messiahs stay dead. Their response to a world that doesn't work as they would like is to explain it in a way that comforts their need to control the situation.

Put another way, resurrection is a threat to the people who don't want a new world. You have encountered this in the critics that appear as you embark on new firsts. Maybe you excitedly bring new ideas that will help your group succeed, and you find strong voices that shut down potential. Perhaps you share a dream with people you love, and they launch into why it won't work. A new world is a threat to the old world.

Resurrection is not only a threat to how others view the world, but resurrection is also a threat to your willingness to accept a new world. We're far more comfortable in the old world ways. We have a surprising capacity to put up with unhealthy relationships rather than confront or end them. We willingly choose to continually embrace disempowering environments rather than make a change - because change means unsettledness. We listen to the shame-filled messages that we tell ourselves rather than believe that our identity is more glorious than we imagined. We propose plans, convene commitments, and spin stories into to maintain a pre-Easter world, which is far less unnerving to our internal peace than wrestling with what we need to do differently because Jesus is alive. But until we let go of the old world realities, we can't receive freedom.

When I was growing up, my dad taught me to ride a bike. Perhaps like your experience, my dad taught me to ride a bike by holding on to the seat behind me. I would pedal, and he would keep me upright. There is fear involved in learning to ride a bike. But I didn't fear riding a bike. I feared my dad letting go of the bike. There is a big difference. But here's the thing: if my dad never let go, I would never learn to ride. Plus, that would have been awkward as I got older. Imagine in middle school, I show up to ride bikes with my friends, and my dad still holding on and running behind! We know that to move forward in life, some moments require that we let go of the old world. The Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, said, "To let go is to lose your foothold temporarily. Not to let go is to lose your foothold forever." Resurrection is to take a risk, step forward into actions, relationships, work, marriages, parenting, rest, justice, and beyond - in ways that inaugurate a new world.

That's why Jesus did what He did next.

**Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." vv.16-20**

The disciples doubt and worship. At first reading, it seems strange. Jesus was standing in front of them. How could they doubt what happened? But it makes sense if you consider that the point of the Resurrection was not about His physical standing in front of them (though He was). The tension that the disciples felt was that Easter meant something for how they now live. They were part of a new world.

That makes sense with what Jesus did next. Jesus has all authority. He can do or command anything. And this is what He called His followers to do: Go. Go - don't stay in this location. Go to new nations, encounter new people, learn new cultures. Go - don't keep as things as they are. Look for ways to bring the new world of Easter to people who are living in an old world. When the angel said to the women at the tomb, "He is not here," it's because Easter is about going, not staying.

The disciples going was marked by baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is a lot in this phrase, but for our purposes today, baptizing is how other people are part of the movement. And the movement is centered on the fullness of God. Jesus' desire is people will have the full measure of what it means to be in relationship with the living God. They will learn a new way to live. That is the goal of what is meant by teaching.

And as the disciples went, they were not alone. Jesus went with them. Easter inaugurated the movement. The apostle Paul used an agricultural metaphor in a later letter that Jesus was like the first of a new fruit harvest (1 Cor. 15). In other words, Jesus is the new first of a Resurrection movement of people who choose to believe - and act on their belief - that the world is meant to be lived on new horizons.

God didn't have to do any of this. But He did. Jesus didn't have to die for you. But He did. Jesus didn't have to rise to bring you new life. But He did. For you.

This is where Easter becomes personal. That is why we sing about resurrection happening in us. It may seem strange or presumptuous, but Resurrection still happens today. Maybe failure has marked your story. There is a new thing on the horizon. Perhaps shame has been the loudest voice. There is a new voice speaking. Maybe defeat has consumed you. There is a new opportunity

waiting for you. The hope for you today is that the One who was dead is now alive. Today is “after the Sabbath” for you.

So, what new start do you need? Maybe there is a relationship in your life that needs to start. Perhaps you have an opportunity at work to bring about good change. Maybe your marriage needs a new start. You may have had a person or situation on your mind all morning. Listen to that. Perhaps God is calling you to a new start there and with that person.

Take some time this week to dream - what new thing do you want to see God do in your life. Pray and believe that He will show you the new thing. Ask people who care about you - what new thing would they suggest for you. We've lived with old horizons for too long. Easter beckons us into a new world.

This week, I've been listening to Symphony No. 2 by Gustav Mahler, which is labeled “the Resurrection Symphony.” Mahler's orchestration is intense as he takes you on a musical journey of life, suffering, and death. And then it comes to the dramatic fifth movement. The instrumentation opens brightly, and a soprano and chorus sing these words,

**O believe, You were not born for nothing!**

**Have not for nothing lived, suffered!**

**What was created**

**Must perish**

**What perished, rise again!**

**Cease from trembling!**

**Prepare yourself to live!**

That is Resurrection - one dies so that we can live life to the fullest. God loves you, and He set in motion a new world for you in Jesus. Choose to build your life on a new start this Easter.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC South. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

© 2019 Central Peninsula Church South, Redwood City, CA  
Catalog No. 1434-39SC

---

This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, April 21, 2019 at Central Peninsula Church South.

**[www.cpc.org](http://www.cpc.org)**