

## WELCOME

Good morning! My name is Sue Sweeney and I'm part of the teaching team here at Catalyst. One year, when I was teaching 9<sup>th</sup> grade World Geography, I had a student named Michael. Michael wasn't really into school, to say the least. By the time he first crossed the threshold of my classroom, it was already his second attempt at World Geography. All of his older brothers who had come through our school had already dropped out before the end of their senior year. Michael seemed determined to follow in his brother's footsteps. He showed up in class barely often enough to keep himself out of truancy court. When he did show up to class. He sat languidly in his desk, his long arms and legs hanging out to the sides and he refused to do any work. When I protested, he pretended to work for a while and then would lay his head on his desk and fall asleep.

I told him sternly that I would not tolerate this behavior. I reviewed the rules. I went over the regulations and explained the consequences. There would be phone calls home, detentions, referrals to the principal's office, etc. All this potentially resulting in failing World Geography a second time.

Michael couldn't care less. He had no intention of attending any detentions, he already spent plenty of time in the principal's office, and he failed classes before and was still around so none of these threats were the least bit meaningful to him.

So, I changed tactics and tried to be encouraging. I tried to explain to him why he was missing out on a great opportunity by not doing any work in my class. He would always look at me blankly while I spoke and when I finished, he would return to napping at his desk.

Eventually, I gave up. As long as I left him alone, he was happy to keep to himself and snooze the class period away. Since he wasn't really bothering anyone, I just let him sleep. A couple months later, he was sent to alternative school for selling drugs out of his backpack in the hallway. After a few months away, he returned to school and got in trouble again and we didn't see him at our school anymore after that.

Unfortunately, Michael is not an unusual case. I've had a lot of students like him over the years. Anyone who has taught in one of our secondary schools in the area has had at least a few or more "Michaels" in their classrooms every year. We have thousands and thousands of Michael's in in our DFW schools, struggling and failing. The problem of chronically failing students is a problem so pervasive and difficult that often teachers and administrators feel powerless in solving it. Educators blame the community for a lack of involvement and adequate funding. The community blames educators for lack of competence and misuse of funds. Everyone blames testing although knowing at the same time that you must inspect what you expect and you can't hold people to high standards if you're never going to bother to measure their progress. For the leadership of a school district, attacks are always coming in from all sides. As a result, millions of dollars and work hours have gone toward public and private policies, programs, and initiatives which promise to improve the academic achievement of struggling students. For teachers, it

seems like barely a school year passes before their district invests tons of money into another “magic bullet” solution that seems to make things worse instead of better. In education, we call this “initiative fatigue” which describes the exhaustion teachers feel year after year as they experience a seemingly endless onslaught of programs that over-promise and under-deliver. You may not be an educator, but maybe in your work world you deal with people who are constantly pushing programs which promise to solve everyone’s problems- a magic bullet solution. Maybe personally, you’ve tried out a program which promised to make you smarter, better-looking, more efficient or more popular. Only to abandon it when the results were not as satisfactory as you had hoped.

Religion is like this too. It’s all about improvement. You walk into any Christian book store and you can find a whole section of religious self-improvement. How to pray better, how to be a better friend, spouse, or parent. As if we’re all just one 17-step program away from being the most perfect version of ourselves. But it’s a game we just can’t win. We get bogged down in step 12 of 17 and then we give up and move on to something else.

Today, we’re going to talk about how resurrection changes the game. The Good News is that we are not on our own. We don’t have to rely on an “initiative” or a “program” to see transformation in our lives. The Resurrection of Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit to help us become the people we were meant to be.

As we sing this next song, take time to reflect on how wonderful it is that the burden of solving all our problems does not rest entirely on our own shoulders. God gave us the Holy Spirit to transform us.

## **MESSAGE**

Our series this summer is called "BELIEVE". We're exploring the Apostles' Creed, one of the oldest statements about what Christians believe. We're working through statement by statement, each time asking why this belief matters. How does this belief shape us as a church and us as individuals today? These are not beliefs you must fully understand, or actually even fully believe, in order to be a part of the church. It's better to think of them as the goal of our faith. Some of these beliefs may have become deeply true and meaningful in your personal journey, but others you may not quite have embraced yet and that is ok.

This morning, we focus on the resurrection. So, let's revisit the details from the account of Jesus' death and resurrection in the Bible. This is what we all know: Jesus was crucified sometime around 30 A.D. under Pontius Pilate. He was buried in a tomb with a large stone rolled in front of it. Historians agree this is consistent with common burial practices during this time. No big deal.

Then the first century Christians made a pretty awesome claim that 36 hours later, on a Sunday morning, some women, who were followers of Jesus, went to check on the tomb and saw that the big stone out front was rolled away and the tomb was empty. The body was nowhere in

sight. Jesus was no longer a dead body in a tomb. He actually starts showing up to his disciples, alive, but they don't recognize him. When Mary Magdalene first saw Jesus after his death, she thought he was some gardener and she ignored him. For 40 days, Jesus kept popping up all over the place to see close to maybe 500 people and then the appearances stopped.

When we recite the Apostle's Creed, we say

**The third day he rose again from the dead.**

**He ascended to heaven**

**and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.**

So, what an insane thing to say! Right? We're saying this guy Jesus died, and went full zombie on everyone and came back to life. And if that's not enough, he ascended...shot up into the sky past the clouds and now sits right next to the God of the Universe!

So, it's a bit incredible. It's a lot to digest. Over the years, some theologians, like many people, found the story of the resurrection of Jesus a little too hard to believe. They argued that the account in the Bible was probably written to explain how the memory of Jesus lived on in the hearts of minds of his followers after he died, not that Jesus literally came back to life.

But, that's not what the early followers of Jesus are saying. They very literally intend to say that Jesus was dead and then he wasn't dead anymore.

And furthermore, this is not just a quaint story or a historical event. We believe today that it really happened and that the Resurrection of Jesus absolutely changed everything.

The scriptures say Jesus' followers found the empty tomb on Sunday. A few weeks ago, when JR talked about the creation narrative in Genesis, we know the poem describes the creation of the earth taking 6 days with God resting on the 7<sup>th</sup> day. This was called the Sabbath. According to Jewish tradition (because Jesus was Jewish) there was a common belief that after seemingly endless weeks of seven day cycles- Sunday through Sunday- there would eventually come a new day after the Sabbath. This would be like an 8<sup>th</sup> day where all the promises of God would be fulfilled. The early Christians believed and we believe today that this 8<sup>th</sup> day dawned with the resurrection of Jesus. This miraculous event marked the beginning of something entirely brand new. It marked the fulfillment of God's promises.

**[Put these two verses on the same screen]** When Tim talked about Jesus as God's Son, as God, he took us to John 1. John's Gospel intentionally frames Jesus' story as a new creation story. So Genesis 1 starts off with, **"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. -- Genesis 1:1"** And John 1 opens with, **"In the beginning was the Word... -- John 1:1"**

Then, when Jesus starts doing miracles, John tells us to count them. He turns water into wine at a wedding and John says, “This was the first sign Jesus did.” He heals an official’s son and John says, “This is the second sign.” So we start counting.

And the weird thing is that in John’s gospel, there are only seven miracles. In the other Gospels, Jesus is healing and exorcising and feeding and raising the dead every time he turns around. But in John, he only does seven things.

Seven. The number of days in the creation story that begins with “In the beginning...”

Jesus’ resurrection is the eighth sign. And it’s on a Sunday, the first day of the week. And the first person Jesus meets is Mary Magdalene, who thinks he’s a gardener. So on the First Day of a new creation week, we get a NEW sign and a NEW story of a man and a woman in a garden.

John is doing all of this very intentionally. Because he wants us to see that Jesus’ resurrection is the beginning of something NEW. A new creation, a new world. He’s the second Adam, who was I faithful when the old Adam wasn’t.

Resurrection Sunday was the first day of a new creation. It was the first day... but also the 8th day.

But I know you’re thinking... wait...there’s no 8<sup>th</sup> day of the week. I’m pretty sure tomorrow is going to be Monday, no matter what you say. And Sundays are nice and restful and whatever, but on Monday I have to get back to the REAL world. I have to get my kids up and dressed for camp and daycare, I have to go to work and you know, DEAL with these people out there. Yes, tomorrow is Monday. This is symbolic for Christians. Tomorrow is Monday for the rest of the world. It’s also Monday for us, but also not really.

The early Christians also understood this too. They proclaimed that Jesus was Lord, but also had to recognize the emperor of Rome as a kind of lord too, in a limited way. They say that God is their Father, but they also live within their earthly families as well.

Today, we believe that God’s promises were fulfilled with the death and resurrection of Jesus. We believe that God’s Kingdom of peace and justice and love has come into our world, but we also acknowledge that we live in a world that still is full of violence, and injustice, and hatred. God’s Kingdom is already here and at the same time, not quite here in its fullness yet.

Right now, the old world, the world of the first Adam, is still here. But so is the new world, the world that began on Resurrection Sunday, the 8th day, the world of the new Adam.

So we have the choice to be two different kinds of people. We can be a person driven and controlled by our basic and finite human desires- the way of the first man, Adam, in the Garden of Eden described in Genesis. We can be driven toward violence, injustice and hatred. Or, we can be a person driven by the power of God’s infinite Creation. We can be people of peace and

justice and love. In Adam is sin. A couple weeks ago, Debbie Reese talked about the lead vest of sin that weighs us down. It's all that weighs us down and wears us out when we try to solve all the problems on our own. And we know this way leads us to death. It leads us away from the people God meant us to be- when we let the human part of us take control instead of the spiritual part of us.

Adam is also the world of law and legislation. It's also the way we try to control ourselves and others by imposing the lead vest of sin on other people- holding them down and keeping them from being what God intended them to be. We try to change ourselves from the Outside In. We create rules and regulations on ourselves and others. We impose programs and initiatives and plans and all we do is just add layers to the lead vest. It weighs us down until we become exhausted and burned out.

So what is the way to become a person of God's Creation? How might we live our lives in the miraculous resurrection of Jesus?

Please turn in your Bible to the book of Romans, Chapter 8 verses 1-17. If you picked up one of the Bibles off the back table, it's on page ###.

Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the Church in Rome (the capital of the Empire). The church in Rome was ethnically divided between the Jews (God's chosen people) and Gentiles (everyone else). Paul spends the first 4 chapters of the book demonstrating that it doesn't matter if you're a Jew or a Gentile - everyone is in the same boat. We're all sinners. We're all children of the first Adam.

In chapters 5-7, Paul demonstrates the difference between the first Adam and Jesus, the second Adam. He shows us how Jesus' faithfulness overcomes the unfaithfulness of the first Adam. He observes that if we live like Adam, then we are governed by the flesh. We are limited to solving big problems with only what we can muster within ourselves, apart from God. We try to make changes from the Outside-In. But Paul presents an alternative. In Jesus, the Second Adam, we can be transformed from the Inside-Out.

Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we can live as 8th Day people. Paul describes what a people of the Resurrection look like:

### **Romans 8 1-17**

1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,<sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering... <sup>11</sup> And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. <sup>15</sup> The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. <sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Paul tells us that we are not in the flesh, but we are in the Spirit. When the Spirit is within us, we live out God’s promises to the world. We live transformed lives, where we are able to work together to tackle the big problems. With the acceptance of the Holy Spirit, we usher in God’s peace, justice and love to a broken world of people who desperately...desperately need it. With the Holy Spirit, we can safely say, it’s not my job to fix everything on our own. We’re following the Spirit. It’s not up to me or us and there is no exhaustion or burnout because we’re not doing all the work. When we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us from the Inside-Out, there are no lead vests.

What comes to live in us is the exact same miraculous power that brought Jesus back from the dead to fulfill the promises of God. A couple weeks ago, Tim Basselin talked about how God’s math is different. To us,  $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$ . But, with the Holy Spirit, God’s math is different. The numbers are infinitely multiplied. Through living our lives in the Spirit instead of the flesh, we have resurrection power to fulfill God’s promises here on earth. In this world. Every day. Not just on Sunday, but on Monday too.

All we have to do is accept the Holy Spirit into our lives.

(pause)

So, how is this not just another program? How is this not just another self-improvement plan? I accept the Holy Spirit and then what? Magic happens? What are the steps? What rules do I need to follow? How do I get there? We want transformation and we want it right now. Just tell me what I need to do.

Well, actually, I can’t tell you what you need to do.

You want 10 days to a better you, 5 steps to a better spiritual life. 3 positive affirmations to tell yourself every morning in the mirror while you brush your teeth.

The answer is not in doing ALL of these things. This is the way of Adam. It’s relying on the flesh instead of the Spirit.

It's not about doing all the right things. It's about doing the ONE right thing. It's about taking time to wait and notice the Holy Spirit.

The transformative power of the Resurrection often comes when we take this time to sit back, watch, and wait.

Let me give you an example. One of the junior high schools I work with has a lot of students who struggle. They are often at the bottom when it comes to state standardized test scores. The student population is highly mobile and impoverished. Nearly one-fifth of the students who start the school year there will just move away during the school year only to be replaced by brand new students- many who are immigrants and refugees speaking only Spanish, Arabic, Vietnamese, French, and multiple languages other than English. Additionally, there are also students' parents who did not have good experiences in school and they don't expect their children to either. Discipline problems are in constant interference with classroom instruction. It doesn't take much for students to give up and quit trying in class.

This year, after the school year had already started, this junior high school hired a new Instructional Coach. She, like all of our Instructional Coaches, dedicated her time and effort to helping teachers improve instruction and working directly with the students who are struggling and need academic support.

What was a little different about this coach, was that she was determined to take on the most difficult students in the school, right off the bat. These were students who were struggling academically and were constantly disrupting class with their bad behavior. These were students whom no teacher could seem to tolerate.

Her approach was a little different. Instead of walking straight up to these students and going over the rules and regulations and revisiting the consequences for their bad behavior. Instead of imposing a plan or an initiative on them, she tried a different method.

She sat back for a while and watched these students every day while they ate lunch in the cafeteria. She saw the students they sat and ate with. She saw who their friends were and how they interacted with others. She took time to notice them. She took time to see who they really were, beyond their academic and behavior struggles. She took time to pay attention to what was important to them.

Then, she made her move. She started with the friends. She started getting to know them and inviting them to her tutoring sessions. When they came the first time, she made it seem like her tutoring sessions were about the most fun they could ever have at school. Then, when they came again, they got down to work. Once she won their friends over, the most difficult students started to realize they wanted to be a part of her tutoring groups as well.

The principals were blown away by the progress she made with these students. These were kids no one else had seemed to be able to reach.

At the end of the year, state test results came back. I would love to say that all these students just blew the test out the water, but they didn't. However, there was some improvement. Some really difficult students had a more productive year than they had in a very long time.

So, maybe you think the result is that what this Instructional Coach did was just a drop in the bucket. She helped about a dozen or so students do a little better than they would have otherwise.

Maybe it doesn't matter much in the larger scheme of things. Thousands of students across Texas and the United States are still struggling in school. It may not have mattered much when all the state test scores came back,

but it mattered to those kids.

And what she did was really very simple. She just took some time to wait and because of that, she was able to notice.

What if we were to allow the Holy Spirit to transform us from the Inside Out instead of trying to change ourselves from the Outside In?

Even though God's Kingdom is not yet here in its fullness, what if we lived like it was?

Even though we live in a world where there is violence and injustice and hatred, we allowed the Holy Spirit to move us all toward peace, justice, and love?

What if instead of being the task masters, the implementers of 7 step plans, and the enforcers of God's laws, we instead took time to sit back, wait, and notice the gentle nudging of the Holy Spirit?

Even though tomorrow is Monday, the beginning of a new week in an endless cycle of 7-day weeks, what if we were a people who were living like it was the miraculous 8<sup>th</sup> day of Creation where all of God's promises are fulfilled?

What if we truly believed that Jesus suffered greatly in a world of violence, injustice and hatred through his brutal crucifixion and after three days, rose from the dead, with the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, and triumphed over it all?

What if we believed that this same resurrection power, could also live within us?

(pause)

Let's recite the Apostles Creed together. After we recite the Creed, we will enter into a Prayer of Examen. This is an opportunity to reflect on this message today and what it means in your own life. It is a quiet time, but feel free to discuss these questions with your friends and family who

you are seated with, especially if you have children with you and you want to explain these questions a little further with them.

Let's all recite the Creed together. Please say it along with me.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit  
and born of the virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended to heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.  
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

### **PRAYER OF EXAMEN**

1. When in the last week, did you take time to seek and wait on the gentle nudging of the Holy Spirit to help you solve a problem?
2. When, in the last week, did you rely on yourself to solve a problem instead of relying on the transformative power of the Holy Spirit?
3. When in the next week, might you need to take time to wait and notice?

### **COMMUNION**

If you are willing to embark on a journey toward acceptance of the transformative resurrection power of the Holy Spirit, then we invite you to come to the Communion table this morning. Jesus ate this meal on the night before his crucifixion. Knowing he would suffer tremendous violence, injustice, and hatred in the coming hours, but ultimately triumph over it all when the Holy Spirit would bring him back to life, he took the bread at that meal, gave thanks, and broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

We will proclaim the death and resurrection of the Lord and the fulfillment of God's promises.

## **BLESSING**

Catalyst, instead of being a people who rush in with the solutions to everyone's problems, what if we were a people who took time to wait on the Holy Spirit? What if we were a people who took time to notice what it looks like for us to be a people who believe in the transformation of the Resurrection? This is your assignment for this week. Take time to wait and notice the Holy Spirit. Go in God's grace and in God's peace.