

## Welcome

Happy Easter! We're gathered today to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. But I'm sure it hasn't escaped your notice that today is also April Fool's Day. So I thought we could talk about how Julius Caesar messed up our calendars, if that's okay?

There's probably been some point in your life you noticed the last third of our calendar is messed up. It starts with September. "Sept" means 'seven', but September is the ninth month. The "Oct" in October means 'eight', but it's the tenth month. "Non" means 'nine', even though November is 11th, and "Dec" means 'ten', like in decimal, even though December is 12th.

It's like all the months all got pushed back by 2. Which is, actually, exactly what happened.

The Roman Calendar originally had 10 months, with a bunch of extra days in winter that weren't part of any month. Julius Caesar, the first Roman Emperor, decided this didn't make any sense, so he added January and February to the front of the year, pushing all the months later. He decided this brilliant calendar needed to be marked forever *in the calendar*. The Roman Senate renamed the month in which he was born "July" in his honor. And of course the Emperor's month couldn't be the short, so they lengthened July to 31 days, taking a day from February (so it went from 30 to 29).

This idea worked so well that Caesar's adopted son and heir, Caesar Augustus, did the same thing - renaming *his* birth month 'August' and stealing yet another day from poor February so it only had 28 days. Thus, we got July and August, and the rest of the months got pushed back by a couple of numbers, but no one bothered to rename them.

These weren't just vanity projects (naming a month after yourself *is* a vanity project but it wasn't *just* that). As the ruler of an Empire that was all about conquest and expansion, one of the ways Rome enforced its rule was by changing the calendar. They wanted to rule not just over people's lives, but their thoughts. They wanted to be in charge of how they *perceived the passing of time*.

Cultures all over the world used calendars that marked their seasons, their festivals, were named after their gods and heroes. But when Rome conquered you, you had to use *their* months, named after their gods and kings, marking *their* festivals. You slowly but surely began to see the world as a Roman did, assuming at a deep level that the sun rose and set on Rome.

Julius Caesar's calendar was a major fix to previous calendars - it was a 365-day year, with a leap year every four years, to try to keep the calendar straight.

But it wasn't quite right. It was a little bit too long, which meant that, over several hundred years, the calendar drifted. New Year's Day moved later and later in the year... and so did Easter.

By the 1500s, Pope Gregory VIII decided to fix it. He instituted an even *more* specific tweak and reset the calendar so that Easter would be in the Spring where it was supposed to be. It also meant that the New

Year once again started in the middle of winter. In his reset calendar, January 1 moved, and where the New Year used to be was now April 1.

Not everyone immediately adopted the new calendar; they insisted on using the old Julian calendar. So people made fun of them. They called them 'April Fools', and, apparently, decided to play tricks on them. Thus the unofficial holiday 'April Fool's Day' was born.

So on this April Fool's Day, I want to talk about time. Specifically, let's talk about who's in control of time. Because far too many of us are living as unwitting April Fools. We don't care too much about how our crazy calendar got to be how it is, but we *do* feel like our calendars are crazy. We wish we had the power to create some extra minutes in our days, or maybe days in our weeks. We'd take a few extra weeks in our year to get everything done.

We're living under the old Empire's way of life rather than in the new world, the new reality, the new *time* God has initiated by raising Jesus from the dead.

Today is a celebration of freedom, hope and abundant life!

### **Message**

On Easter, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. But *why* are we celebrating the fact that, nearly 2000 years ago, the crucified body of Jesus came back to life?

That's a fascinating historical fact. But if that's all it is, why make it the high point of the Christian year?

Some among us would point out that, because Jesus was raised from the dead, we get to go to Heaven when we die.

That makes more sense, but still - if what happened after Jesus died is only about what happens after we die, it's sort of strange to make a whole holiday around it.

No, Easter is about more than what happened a long time ago in a country far far away. And It's about more than what's going to happen one day in the future (also hopefully far, far away) when we die.

Today, we're kicking off a series called "Monday Messiah". We're going to explore the ways Jesus describes himself in John's Gospel, the so-called "I Am" statements.

"I Am" is a pretty good translation of God's name, Yahweh. Throughout John's story of Jesus, Jesus refers to himself as "I Am". But he also illustrates with metaphors. "I am the bread of life." "I am the true vine." "I am the good shepherd."

In this series, we're going to explore these metaphors by asking the question, "What does this tell us about who Jesus *is* in our everyday lives?" In other words, how does God matter not just on Sundays, but on Monday?

So let's begin, appropriately enough on Easter Sunday, with a statement about resurrection. Turn with me to John 11.

Jesus' good friend Lazarus has taken ill and died. Jesus, who has become famous in part for his ability to heal, didn't show up to heal his friend. So Lazarus' sisters are understandably beside themselves with grief and anger. In this particular moment, his sister Martha is confronting Jesus outside Lazarus' tomb, where Jesus has come to grieve.

Martha knows about the "one day we'll all be raised from the dead" stuff. She knows how the story ends. That's not why she's upset. She's missing her brother NOW. So what does Jesus tell her?

Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again."

"Yes," Martha said, "he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day."

Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?" John 11:23-26

Jesus is shortly going to raise Lazarus from the dead. Right now. Not in the end, when we're all raised. Jesus saying, "I am the resurrection and the life" has real world, right now implications.

We don't catch it in just this small moment, but John is playing with time in his story of Jesus. John's Gospel starts out with "In the beginning was the Word...". That's a mirror of the first creation story, which opens with "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

That's not an accident. As you read his Jesus story, John wants you to keep the creation story in the back of your mind, God creating the world in 7 days. To keep you on track, when Jesus starts doing miracles, John numbers them. After Jesus turns water into wine, John says, "This was the first sign Jesus did." The he heals a kid and John says, "This is the second sign he did." We get it... we're supposed to count.

It turns out there are seven signs pointing to Jesus' divinity. And Lazarus is the seventh. The culmination. This thing Jesus is doing is all about new life, new creation.

The strange part, though, is that of course Jesus' resurrection is a sign, too. It's an 8th sign. And he's raised on a Sunday, which is the first day of the week.

So some early believers had some fun with this. They asked, "What if the Sunday of the resurrection isn't a first day but an 8th day?"

In other words, what if Jesus' resurrection is not another day in the old cycle of creation, but the first day in a *new* creation? What if something totally new and different is bursting forth in the midst of this old world?

Christianity is not a faith where we say a prayer, check a box and wait until we die for the good life to begin. We believe that Jesus' resurrection begins in the here and now.

## **Baptism**

[[Scripture Slide 2](#)] Turn with me to John 20. John's Gospel concludes with a stunning image of new creation. The second creation story, in Genesis 2, has God creating a man to "till and keep the garden". The first man was a gardener. And, of course, the woman was created quickly to partner with the man in the task of gardening, of cultivating God's good creation.

With that in mind, let's read the story of Mary of Magdala's first encounter with the resurrected Jesus. She has been to the tomb and found it empty. She went to get Peter and the Beloved disciple, who also see the tomb empty. But no one has seen Jesus yet. Peter and the Beloved leave to go find the other disciples, and Mary stays behind. She's certain someone has stolen Jesus' body.

Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her.

"Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him."

She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

"Mary!" Jesus said.

She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher").

"Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "

Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message. -- John 20:11-18

Mary finds Jesus and is appointed as the first Christian preacher - the first evangelist, the first witness to the resurrection.

But did you catch that part when she first sees him? She mistakes him for the gardener.

On this eighth day, the first day of a new creation week, John is telling us a story about a man and a woman in a garden. And the man is a gardener. And the woman is called to be his partner in this new work.

This is a story of recreation. Something *new* is happening. Mary is the first preacher of it.

And we are all gathered here because of her faithful proclamation. We have been wrapped up into Jesus' new reality.

Because of the resurrection, we don't have to be content in the old cycles of sin, repeating the same patterns over and over, hoping for some new result.

You've heard that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. We might modify it in light of the day to say, "Following the old ways over and over and expecting something new is foolishness."

There's a new calendar, a new reality. It's not the old calendar of Caesar, the one that looks almost right but, degree by degree takes us off course.

This new reality, inaugurated by the resurrection of Jesus, is true and good. It is life. We can be born into this new reality, freed to walk in the power of the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead!

### **Communion + Examen**

By receiving communion, we announce Jesus' death and resurrection. This is how we practice the new time

### **Assignment + Blessing**

Take back your calendar! --> Sabbath