

Welcome

Welcome to Easter at Catalyst! Today, we're celebrating the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead. Resurrection is what makes relationship with God possible - so today we celebrate that God invites us to join with Jesus in death and be raised into new relationships - both with God and with each other!

So today, let's talk about relationships.

We are, by nature, relational creatures. From the time we're born, we're in relationships with other people. And it doesn't matter if you're extroverted, like me, and have a wide pool of relationships, or you're more introverted and have a few, deep relationships. We all have them. We need them. We were created for them.

So we all know relationships are hard work. Especially the more you get to know someone - you start to realize they're not like you. They don't see the world the same way you do. They don't think the same way. And it causes conflict.

In the first church where I was a youth pastor, I had a parent who was that person for me. From the day her family joined the church, it was clear she did not like me or the way I pastored our teens. And she wasn't shy about letting me know. Barely a week went by that she didn't send me an email, call me or come to my office. And of course, this was church, so I couldn't kick her out or anything. But honestly, if that was a relationship I could have walked away from, I would have in a second.

I don't think that's just me. It sure seems like a lot of us treat relationships as more disposable the older I get. Rather than work hard on our relationships, we ditch them - whether it's a break up text, icing out a coworker, the cold shoulder to a spouse, ghosting on a friendship or avoiding family reunions.

So here're the big ideas we're going to explore today:

Easter proves that God cares about relationships. And Easter matters especially when our relationships get hard. So if you have any relationships in your life that are hard right now, you came to the right place. Because God raised Jesus from the dead, and that's very good news for our relationships.

Message

Today is the day we celebrate Jesus' resurrection. Easter is the most important day in the year for us Jesus followers. And if you were to ask a lot of us why, you'd get some version of the answer, "Because now we get to go to heaven when we die." Easter is, for many people about what happens after we die. That makes some sense because, after all, the resurrection is about what happened to Jesus after he died!

But those in those first resurrection stories, no one is particularly concerned about heaven. Take, for instance, how Mary Magdalene reacted. She was one of the women who was at the cross, and one of the women who discovered the tomb was empty in the first place. She went to get two of the disciples,

who came to the tomb and saw the body missing, then rushed away again. Mary, however, stayed behind, weeping at the tomb. And it's here she encountered Jesus.

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"). -- John 20:14-16

Mary is overcome with joy that her friend and teacher has been restored impossibly to life. What's central for Mary, in this moment, is her relationship with Jesus.

The same is true of other disciples as they encounter the risen Jesus - they're afraid he's a ghost, then overjoyed that he's flesh and blood back from the dead. They eat with him. They walk with him.

And even after he's ascended to heaven, when they turn to the world, their message isn't mainly, "Here's how to go to Heaven when you die."

Take a man named Paul, who went with his friend and mentor Barnabas all over the Roman Empire starting churches. In this story, Paul is in Antioch, a city about 500 miles from where Jesus was raised from the dead. Paul is sharing about who Jesus is and what he did, he begins with the Easter story, but listen to what his focus is:

Brothers—you sons of Abraham, and also you God-fearing Gentiles—this message of salvation has been sent to us! The people in Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize Jesus as the one the prophets had spoken about. Instead, they condemned him, and in doing this they fulfilled the prophets' words that are read every Sabbath. They found no legal reason to execute him, but they asked Pilate to have him killed anyway.

"When they had done all that the prophecies said about him, they took him down from the cross and placed him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead! And over a period of many days he appeared to those who had gone with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to the people of Israel.

So there's the Easter story, pretty straight-forward. But now Paul is going to press forward, asking that "So what?" question. What does Jesus' resurrection have to do with Jews living in Antioch? And what does it have to do with us living today?

For Paul, it's about God proving that God is trustworthy:

“And now we are here to bring you this Good News. The promise was made to our ancestors, and God has now fulfilled it for us, their descendants, by raising Jesus. This is what the second psalm says about Jesus:

‘You are my Son.
Today I have become your Father.’

For God had promised to raise him from the dead, not leaving him to rot in the grave. He said, ‘I will give you the sacred blessings I promised to David.’ Another psalm explains it more fully: ‘You will not allow your Holy One to rot in the grave.’ This is not a reference to David, for after David had done the will of God in his own generation, he died and was buried with his ancestors, and his body decayed. No, it was a reference to someone else—someone whom God raised and whose body did not decay.

Paul does a fun little bit of argumentation here that's tricky for us to follow. He pulls from Psalms that were sung at the coronation of a new king of Israel. For Jews (and for us!) these Psalms are scriptures, and the promises made in them were made by God to the throne of Israel. They were promises God made to God's people.

One of those promises was, "You will not allow your Holy One to rot in the grave." Paul points out the obvious: this promise can't apply to David or any of the ancient kings of Israel, because they're all dead and buried. Rotted. So it sure looks like God didn't hold up God's end of the bargain.

Which is why Jesus' resurrection is such a big deal for Paul. Because by raising Jesus, a son of Abraham and a son of David, from the dead, God is fulfilling the promises God made to Israel.

God's promises are a big deal. Throughout Israel's history, they've understood their suffering and exile as a result of their failure to keep their promises to God. God said, “Follow me and live.” But the people again and again were unfaithful, and they suffered the consequences of trusting other gods and nations.

Until Jesus, who was the perfect man. He kept Israel's covenant with God perfectly. But it *still* didn't lead to life for him... it got him crucified.

So what's at stake here is huge: the crucifixion asks the question, "Is God really able to keep God's promises at all?" After all, Abraham and David and all those other Israelites were far from perfect. But Jesus *was* perfect. So if even *he* died, the maybe the problem wasn't Israel... maybe it was God.

It's a fair question, and it's why Paul says, in light of the resurrection, that *now* God has fulfilled the promises made to their ancestors. By raising Jesus from the dead, God has proven faithful, loyal to God's promises. God has proven that none of us will be left in the grave. But for Paul, there's even more than that:

“Brothers, listen! We are here to proclaim that through this man Jesus there is forgiveness for your sins. Everyone who believes in him is made right in God’s sight—something the law of Moses could never do.
-- Acts 13:26-39

According to Paul, what the resurrection has really done is removed all the obstacles between us and God. Paul pointed out that the old ways of being religious - sacrifice and Temple and all that - couldn't actually remove our sin. They couldn't overcome the evil that had infected our world. They were a band-aid on a broken leg.

What God has done in Jesus is a complete overhaul, rooting out the infection at its source and healing us. God has proved that God never abandoned us, we were never alone, and God has always been at work to rescue us. Why? As Paul said, to make us 'right in God's sight' - that's a biblical way of saying 'restoring our relationship'

For Paul, Easter is all about *relationship*. First, God restoring our relationship with God. But for Paul, it doesn't end there. That's why Paul set off all over the world, planting churches and bringing together people from every background into one family. For Paul, Easter is about all of us becoming family.

In other words, God's faithfulness to Jesus is God's faithfulness to *us*. And God's faithfulness to *us* enables us to be faithful not just to God, but to each other. That's why, when Paul's writing to one of those churches he started, he calls faithfulness a fruit of the Spirit.

When we rest in God's love for us, when we receive God's faithfulness toward us, God makes us faithful to each other.

That faithfulness changes how we approach those difficult relationships. The resurrection proves God is faithful to me - I can brave the pain of dying to myself and trust God will raise from the dead. So what does that look like?

I told you about that youth parent I had who was such a thorn in my side. I prayed a lot about how to deal with her. I knew in my bones that while it would be *easier* for me if she just left, it wouldn't be better. After all, loving people who love you is easy. Everyone does that. But that's not me dying to myself

What makes us a church is that we love each other even when it's hard.

So I prayed. And as I prayed, God encouraged me to see her differently. Her husband was a military guy, and deployed overseas. I recognized that a lot of the anger and frustration I felt from her wasn't really about me - she was in a pretty tough home situation that produced a lot of stress and anxiety.

There wasn't a lot I could do about that, but I did come up with one idea. I called her one day and asked if I could mow her lawn.

She was silent for a few moments, then asked, "Um, what?"

I said, "I know you have a lot on your shoulders with your husband deployed. And since we're part of the same church family, that means your burdens are my burdens. So I'm not good at very much - I'm not very handy or anything, but I can run a lawn mower. Would that be helpful?"

She said no thanks, and that was the end of our conversation.

I was pretty defeated. I had swallowed my pride and humbled myself. I was hoping for some grand resurrection story. Not... getting turned down.

But that was the beginning of a new chapter in our relationship. We still had plenty of disagreements, but both of us saw each other through different eyes, and she became one of my biggest supporters. When I announced I was leaving that position, she was one of the first parents to express her sadness and disappointment.

Friends, this is the sort of faithfulness God calls us to: when God brings us together, it's not always easy. Actually, it's *rarely* easy, in my experience (maybe I'm just difficult). But it's beautiful. When we live in the power of Jesus' resurrection, we're wrapped into a community that loves us for who we are, not for who we pretend to be. We're embraced, warts and all. We're known and loved and rescued and redeemed.

That can only happen when we're willing to die to ourselves and live for each other. When we lay down our preferences and prejudices and live for each other. That's what Jesus did for us, and God raised him from the dead to show us that this is the way to life.

Baptism

Communion

[Communion Slide] Jesus faithfully invites us to share this table. He builds us as a community, all different, all family.

Assignment/Blessing

Commit to the mess. God is faithful. God is with us.