

“Alive—Being Alive Spiritually”

If we were each asked why we're here today we'd give all kinds of answers. "Tradition. Curiosity. I wouldn't miss Easter for the world. Celebrating the resurrection. My wife made me." Hey, whatever the reason, today is about being alive. And not just Jesus being alive, it's about you and me being fully alive.

I want to talk about what that looks like today, but before we do that let's step back and take a look at what Easter means. One of the ways I look at Easter is that it's vindication for Jesus. To vindicate somebody means that you thought that they had done something wrong, maybe committed a crime, but you later find proof that they were right, they were not guilty. **The resurrection vindicated Jesus' identity.** You see, he made some lofty claims about himself that were almost bizarre. He said, **"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35, TNIV).** He said, **"I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die" (John 11:25, TNIV).**

He said, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6, NIV).** He claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of the living God; and he claimed to be the Son of Man—the representative of the whole human race. All those claims seem very strange except when you see them in the light of the resurrection. I believe Jesus' resurrection vindicated those claims.

For me Jesus' resurrection vindicates not only what he claimed to be, but it **vindicates the life he lived.** Jesus spent lots and lots of time helping hurting, lost, broken, discarded people. In fact one of the things the religious leaders hated about Jesus was that he spent time with tax collectors that everybody hated. He spent time with drunks and associated with prostitutes, and even allowed these kinds of people to be partners in his work. Yes, he also spent time with respected people too, but he seemed to focus on reaching people that everybody else thought were disposable. He taught that God is like a father who had a son who took the money and ran away, and the father never stopped waiting for the son to come home and threw a party when he did. Jesus lived that out, and that part of his life is vindicated by his resurrection. This is what God is like!

I believe that Jesus resurrection vindicates his identity and I also believe that **Jesus' resurrection vindicates his message.** His message was so counter cultural. Blessed are the poor, blessed are the hungry, blessed are the meek, blessed are the lowly, blessed are the peace makers. He said, "Blessed are you when you are persecuted for my namesake." He said, "When the Roman soldier slaps you on the face, turn the other cheek. Forgive him. When that soldier asks you to carry his pack for a mile, carry it two miles." He said, "Don't just love the people who love you, love your enemies and pray for those who hurt you." He said, "If somebody hurts you, don't just forgive them once, or even 7 times, but 70 times 7 times." He said things like this and more, and they seemed just bizarre. How could anybody really live that way? Except for what he taught was vindicated by his resurrection.

A few years back Muhammad Ali sold the rights to his name for \$50 million. The company that bought those rights can use his name, his likeness, his words to sell whatever they want. Does anybody remember the kinds of things he used to say? He was not known for his humility! He said things like, "Float like a butterfly, sting like bee, your hands can't hit what you cannot see." I think he said this one to Joe Frasier. "If you even dream of beating me, you'd better wake up and apologize." Or, "It's hard to humble when you're as great as I am. I am the greatest." He sounded so cocky, but he had a point when he said, "It's not bragging if you can back it up." In the resurrection Jesus backed up what he said. In the resurrection he backed up what he had done.

So when Jesus said, **"I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of" (John 10:10, Msg.).** When Jesus said that, he meant it. He backed it up. That first Easter morning, he was alive. He **is** alive. And he wants you and me to be fully alive! So what does that look like? What does it look like to be fully alive?

Part of being fully alive, spiritually, is to deal with the other side of the spectrum, death. That's a huge part of Easter--Jesus defeating death. Death is the number one fear of Americans—their own death or especially the death of people we love. Let's talk about that for minute. I was given a book last year about a man named Don Piper. Don was driving his little Ford Escort on a rainy day. He was going across a bridge when a truck, coming the other way, crossed the center line and smashed into him head-on. His little car was crushed against the side of the bridge.

Another driver called in the accident and the paramedics, and highway patrol and fire trucks came to the scene. Several people were injured, and when they came to check Don, they could tell by the extent of his injuries he was dead, and his vital signs confirmed that. Paramedics pronounced him dead at the scene and they put a tarp over him in his car—his body was still pinned in his car.

Traffic was backed up for miles. And a pastor got out of his car and made his way to the accident scene. When he got to the accident he asked the police if there was anybody who needed prayer. They said, "We've taken care of these injured people and they're fine, but there's been one fatality here, you could pray for his family." That pastor went to the car where Don's body had been for 90 minutes now and somehow got in the back seat and reached over to touch the body under the tarp and pray for the man and his family. Then the pastor started to sing. He started to sing "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." As he was singing that song, the man under the tarp began singing with him.

That pastor jumped out of car, ran, ran to the paramedics and said, "Listen this guy's alive over here!" They said, "No, he's not alive. He's dead. We know he's dead; we checked his vital signs." The pastor said, "He's singing with me!" Sure enough, Don Piper was alive. They got the jaws of life and got him out and got him to the hospital.

After a very long recovery he wrote a book about that called *90 Minutes in Heaven*. It's about his experience when he died. He tells about how he remembers right before the accident and the next thing he remembers is being surrounded in light. Then he saw his grandpa, Joe--his favorite grandfather who died when he was younger. His grandpa came up to him and said, "Donny!" and wrapped his arms around him and held him tight. After his grandfather let him go he turned around and there was his best friend from childhood named Mike. Mike had been killed in a car accident when he was 19 years old. Mike gave him a big hug and Don said you could just tell there was such joy in his life. All these people were there as his welcoming committee—people who had died.

Don said there was amazing music coming from everywhere as if thousands and thousands of people were singing together. He said, "Even to this day I can close my eyes and feel that music moving through my body." He said, "Time had no bearing, no meaning there in that place. And for the first time in my life I experienced that perfect love the Bible talks about and I felt more alive than I had ever been."

Last Sunday I talked to a young woman in our church whose mother died recently. Her mom had fought a long, hard battle with cancer, she was a strong woman of faith. This young woman was very close to her mom and knows her mom is in a better place. She cried as she talked to me last week and said, "I'm fine, mom's fine, I just wish I could stop calling her. It so hard to believe she's gone."

What I want to say to anybody who's going through that is there's so much more to life than this life. Easter is about being truly alive. That when we die, we'll have that reception committee waiting for us and we will see them again. Jesus is who he said he is and he's gone ahead and prepared a place for us, if we choose to follow him there. The resurrection of Jesus means that death does not get the final word. Jesus said, **"Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19, NIV)**. Being spiritually alive means claiming that fact, internalizing that, anticipating that. Knowing that there's more life than this life affects how you live, how you think, how you love.

Being spiritually alive also means going beyond yourself. It's real important that we get this. The life that Jesus brings in the resurrection, yes, it's about you in many ways. It's about you experiencing forgiveness, it's about your slate wiped clean, your guilt and shame vaporized. Yes, it's about you, but it's not **all** about you. Christians get this wrong all the time. They connect to the reality of Jesus and then forget that being alive spiritually must be lived out in the real world. How do you that? Well, there are all kinds of ways.

Take a look at this...[**VIDEO: A Game of Hope.**

http://www.nbcdfw.com/sports/football/A_Game_of_Hope_Dallas-Fort_Worth.html.]

We can't all cheer on a football team of teen prisoners, but if the resurrection makes you alive, who **can** you cheer on? Who **can** you make feel like they are somebody who matters, who is valuable no matter what they've done? How can you step beyond your own safe little world, get off your blessed assurance, and do something that makes an impact on another life? I can't tell you exactly what that's going to look like for you, but I can say this: Do something! Jesus was who he said he was. His resurrection was real. He is alive and he's asking you to be fully alive too. To love God, to love others, to serve the world.

If you're here today and you're thinking, "This sounds cool and I want to go a little further in this faith journey, but I don't know much, I don't have it all together yet." Well listen, following Jesus isn't about getting your life perfect.

I came across this in a book a few weeks ago. I don't know if it will work on the big screen, but let's give it a try. Read this with me, out loud or to yourself. **"Accdrnig to rseearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mttar in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a total mse and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Amzanig, huh?"** (From *The Externally Focused Church*, Rusaw and Swanson).

Sometimes we assume that we need to get everything right before we can start following Jesus, that everything has to be in order; that we have to have the whole picture and have a complete understanding; and have all our questions answered before we can move forward. But the truth is the journey of following Jesus is one you build as you travel. You don't need the entire road before you begin, just enough to take the next step. And listen just by being here today, you took a step.

If you're just not sure about all this Jesus stuff and this resurrection stuff, but you're willing to take another step, know that's ok. You don't have to know it all or understand it all. I'm the lead pastor of this amazing church and I don't know it all (not even close), and I'm far from understanding it all, but I believe, and I try to take another step with Jesus every chance I get.

If today's a day to take the next step, whatever that is for you, then why not do it? There are no magic words, there's no formula, it's about you, in your own way, taking one more step with Jesus, one more step toward being fully alive.

Easter is about being fully alive. And for today that is the good news. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let's pray... Lord, thanks for celebrations like this today. Please help us to get a handle and what it means that you overcame death and in the process help us to be fully alive spiritually. Give us eyes to see death for what it is, and give us eyes to see opportunities serve others. Make us aware of your presence, your nearness to us." As you pray maybe today you want to a prayer like this..."OK, God, I don't understand it all, and I certainly don't understand the implications of it, but I choose to try to live life your way. Help me to see that way. Give me the strength to overcome my fears and my doubts. I'm going to have faith that you will lead where I need to go." We pray this in Jesus name, Amen.

Today we started a look at what it means to be fully alive and next Sunday we're going to continue to look at this. What does it mean to be alive relationally? What does it look like to be alive financially? What does it look like to be alive morally? I hope you'll come back here or find another church where you can take that next step.

I thank Rev. Adam Hamilton, Senior Pastor of the Church of the Resurrection, for resources on vindication and Don Piper for his book 90 Minutes in Heaven.