

Resurrection Series# 4, The Friday Before The Resurrection

By: Stefan Nichol (for Good Friday Service)

In many ways it's been a terrible year, eh? This pandemic has resulted in multiple lockdowns, changing the way we do everything. It's disrupted the economy, changing the way we work and shop, disrupted school changing kids' routines. It's disconnected people from their friends and family due to bans of group gatherings and the fear of where even one-on-one face-to-face meetings could lead. It disturbed the story we were all telling ourselves.

People, you me, us, we see our lives unfolding in much the same way as any narrative, and we see ourselves as being in the middle of that story – there's the past, what's come before, our future plans, the way we expect things to roll out, and what we're living through now, and even here we have expectation as to the way things should be in the world. And isn't this the biggest problem the pandemic has caused for us – that it interrupted the story we were all telling ourselves? I don't know about you, but I maybe felt a little entitled to having my life, my story, unfold the way I saw it going – I was on the verge of finishing my last course at Huron, was looking forward to my G2 test in early-April, to visiting with family at Easter, to having friends out to my trailer – when the pandemic put everything on hold.

And it's not just personal stories that were affected, but the ones we told ourselves about our country, our safety. These were problems that happened elsewhere, but not here. Our geography would keep us safe. Our government would know what to do. As these old stories begin to fail us, and simply aren't working anymore, it leads to the question – now what?

When our story doesn't make sense anymore we need to find a new one. We thought we knew our story, some of us still think we know our story now, but what about the story God has for us?

When we look up at the Cross we remember God's story. Despite what we see around us and hear in the news, God's story, the one which was set in motion before time began, is still rolling out as planned. Now, I'm not trying to say that Covid was or is part of God's eternal plan for humanity, it's the devil who comes to kill, steal, and destroy, what I am saying is that the coronavirus, although it has made a mess of day to day life, it can never effect our eternal one.

What was God doing on this day? What was God doing on the Cross? This morning I am going to talk about 3 things – How this was the moment where the true measure of God's love is revealed, how the Father was in Christ reconciling Himself to the world, and how this ushered in a new way of being for us. This is the moment before everything changed. The resurrection changed everything

1) The moment where the true measure of God's love for His creation is revealed

What does Good Friday show us about God? What does this moment in time reveal about the one who stands outside of it? What kind of God creates, then chooses alongside it despite its distortion, and is moved solely by love for that creation which willingly turned from Him? What kind of God is this who wants to dwell within you, who wants to be in constant relationship with you, intimately involved in every aspect of your life? What kind of God chooses to love and continues to pursue those who were far from Him (woman at the well), those who had turned from Him (Zaccheus), even those who despised Jesus at the foot of the Cross?

If we want to understand God I suggest we need to look at how God chose to reveal Himself to the world in the event that was Jesus Christ.

John 3:16-17 tell us that God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. That God didn't send His Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it through Him. And when did God do this? After we had cleaned up our act? After we started to behave proper? After we had acknowledged Him? *1 John 4* tells us something different "This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son..." God didn't move because humanity became holy and righteous. He moved because He is Holy and Righteous. "... Because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ..." and He did this while we were still "dead in transgressions" (*Ephesians 2:4-5*), so far gone in our sins that we didn't even realize we were lost. "... what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (*1 John 3:1*). And now that we have received this love, as it says in *Romans 8:38-39*, nothing, absolutely nothing, neither death or life, angels or demons, height or depth, or anything in all of creation can ever separate us from it.

On Good Friday the battle between the Devil and Heaven was decided. We're not waiting to see if God wins. We know He's already won. This plan began before the beginning of the world. *1 Peter 1:20* tells us how Jesus was chosen before creation and revealed at the proper time for our sake. *Ephesians 1:4* goes even further telling us how Jesus chose us to be in Him before the creation of the world. And this plan ends with us at His side for eternity. *Revelation 21* tells us how there will be a resurrected earth, a Holy City where God will dwell with His people, a place where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain (*Revelation 21:1, 4*). Prior to this there's also good news. The earth doesn't go out with a bang – floods, fires, earthquakes and wars. *Habbakuk 2:14* reveals how God will end it all on earth, "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." It ends with His glory, not His wrath.

What kind of God loves like this?

Humanity's journey towards Salvation, a journey that began in time in Genesis with a conversation between God and Abraham, but one which began long before that, culminates in the Word made flesh giving up Himself for the creation that was brought into being through Him, by Him, and for Him.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends

2) In this moment, God reconciled the world to Himself (2 Cor 5:19, 21)

On to my second point. On this day 2000 years ago God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting people's sins against them... God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God"

On this day Christ took away the sins of the whole world, past, present, future, those done out of negligence, even the ones done purposefully with malice, making salvation possible for all of humanity, the entirety of creation, including you. People weren't an add on to this. God didn't decide to save everything else and at the last moment decided to throw us in too. Humanity, me, you, that's who God came to rescue, not from His wrath, but from this tyrant called Sin, and in this plan to rescue us God redeems the entirety of creation.

Gregory of Nazianus, an Eastern Orthodox theologian, argued that the unassumed is the unhealed/unsaved. As Pastor Zach mentioned on Sunday, the devil had held people in bondage over their fear of death (*Hebrews 2:14-15*), but Jesus didn't simply take on our body, mind, and soul, on that Friday so long ago, in that moment where God made clear that He was choosing not to be God without us, choosing not to be God unless He was God for us, He also took on our death, fully experiencing it, and now there is no place where God has not been, no aspect of our being which has not been touched by His eternal love. We will still die, but because of the Resurrection it is no longer fatal. Christ has made a way for each of us to experience life after life.

In this same section of Scripture Paul goes on to write that God, "... has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (v20). At this point I want to take a minute to ask: what does God reconciling Himself to the world look like in your life? What did it look like in that moment when you acknowledged this to be true? What does it look like now, in your workplace, in your neighbourhood, in your friendships?

Lately, in large part because of the people at Impact Church, what reconciliation looks like in my world is bringing people, and their pets food and water, bringing these treasures who have become lost in dark places (*Isaiah 45:3 kind of*) a warm breakfast sandwich on a Saturday morning, a blanket or winter jacket to get through a cold night like Sunday's or this past one, boots to those who somehow ended up walking the street in socks. But this is about more than meeting a person's immediate need. So much more. If Jesus had come to simply feed the poor He could have turned the rocks to bread (*Matthew 4:3*), but what He came to do was way bigger. Everything He did was undertaken in order to reveal the love of God. And that's what we've been doing as a church. Meeting immediate needs is important, but through this we are revealing God's love to some of the most marginalized in London. We are restoring hope to those who had none. Not a hope for a job, or even for housing, but a true Christian hope based on knowing that Jesus is with them, that they have not been abandoned by God, nor are they separate from Him.

3) In this moment, Jesus ushered in a new way for us to be in the world

This takes us to my third point. Jesus ushered in a new way for us to be in the world. Pastor Zach said a line on Sunday that's been sticking with me all week – we need to quit trying to become through religion what we've already been made through the resurrection. We don't have to strive to become right with God. As a result of the resurrection, as a result of accepting the sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf, we now have that same thriving indestructible life that raised Him from the dead, residing within each of us. You have been grafted into Jesus, and are in complete union with Him, seated both here and with Him in Heavenly Places. As a direct result of the actions that took place over this weekend 2 millennia ago our relationship to our Heavenly Father is no longer based upon our behaviour, our ability to keep the Law. From the moment the Resurrection took place your relationship has been and forever will be founded upon the great and undying love God has for you.

In this moment Jesus pulled us out from under the weight of Law, tearing us free from the grip Sin had held on humanity since leaving the Garden of Eden. Christ redeemed us from this curse by becoming a curse for us (*Galatians 3:13*), restoring humanity to the place Adam had forfeited, placing us back in right relationship with our Heavenly Father, lifting us up alongside Him as a co-heir in God's eternal Kingdom.

Paul puts it this way in Romans 8:1-4

... there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. 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. And so, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Christ removed the obstacles of Sin and death that were keeping humanity, keeping us, from experiencing and living life the way God intended. But this moment in time isn't merely about what the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus freed us from, this moment is also about what He freed us for.

During the Last Supper, The Gospel of John records Jesus as having said

John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another

Christians are to love one another, and not just love, but love one another as Christ loves us.

How does Jesus love...

- love one another as I have loved you, scepter of Kingdom is a towel, servant leadership,

This sounds like a tall order and it might even seem a bit overwhelming at first – love others as Jesus loves you – but the Word made Flesh, He didn't just utter a command, through His Death and Resurrection Christ made the way, He provided the means, for us to fulfill it.

Because of the resurrection we have the power in us to manifest Jesus here, now, wherever we find ourselves.

Scripture reminds us of this change that has taken place within us, repeatedly telling us that those who have died with Christ have also been raised up with Him into new life. This new life that's spoken of doesn't start after we die. It begins the moment we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. I like how Paul puts it in *Galatians 2:20*, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God..." In 2 Corinthians 5:17 he explains it this way, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new has come." In the NLT it says, "This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person" And now you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you (*Philippians 4:13*).

Even the strength to love those you find annoying, the patience to speak up for the voiceless, standing by those who are sometimes difficult to be around, the power to be present in awkward situations, all in order to help those who are still lost in darkness to experience the goodness of the one who called us into His marvelous light (*1 Peter 2:9* kind of) for themselves.

[Pastor Zach quote; Romans 8:1-4, John 13:34]

Lead into Communion with:

This morning, as we take Communion, I invite you to not only remember God's story, but also how He made a way for you to be a part of that eternal story. On this day 2000 years ago your role in it was made possible. Jesus passed your audition for you.

During the Jewish Passover it was the lamb that was inspected, not the person who brought it. If the lamb was good, you were good. Christians have the perfect lamb, one without flaw, who was sacrificed once and for all for us.

During the night of the first Passover the angel looked for the blood over the doorposts, not on the worthiness of those within. Those who have accepted Christ have been forever covered by his blood.

Never doubt God's love for you. And never doubt your salvation. You have been forever reconciled to God. He made you right with Himself. There's nothing you can do to disqualify yourself once you've accepted this eternal truth as true for you. Everything has already been done. Live out of the fullness of what Jesus did for you on this day.