



For the Week of April 8, 2012

Good Questions, Straight Answers:
why Easter is such good news

Life Notes for Missional Communities

Introduction

Easter is always such a powerful week in the life of the believer. We are reminded of new life everywhere around us - and we are aware of the cost of that new life. There is no way to separate the resurrection of Jesus from the death of Jesus, just like we can't separate spring flowers from the death of winter. So we see our faith in all its fullness. And we celebrate Jesus and our forever-life as his children.

Pastor Mark led us through five reasons to celebrate - Jesus is Lord, we are forgiven, we have eternal life, we can trust Jesus and we can have peace. The following are the passages he chose for us. And this week, we'll focus primarily on Jesus as Lord and the life-changing gift of forgiveness.

The Word: John 8:28,29; 20:27-29; 1:29; Romans 4:25; John 6:40; 11:25; 14:1-3; 16:33

Jesus (to the Jewish religious leaders): *"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."* (John 8:28,29)

Jesus: *"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."*

Thomas: *"My Lord and my God!"*

Jesus: *"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* (John 20:27-29)

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him.

John: *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29)

He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.
(Romans 4:25)

Jesus: *"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."* (John 6:40)

Jesus (to Martha): *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies."* (John 11:25)

Jesus (to the disciples): *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* (John 14:1-3)

Jesus (to the disciples): *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33)

good news

We did not physically see Jesus, but we believe. And we celebrate his suffering, death, resurrection and eternal dominion during Easter each year to thank God for all that he has done and continues to do in our lives and to remind each other that God literally stepped onto this planet to reconcile us to himself. Read John 20 - a familiar story - put yourself in the place of Mary Magdalene or one of Jesus' followers.

Where are you in the story today? Whose grid are you looking through?

Imagine it is just before Easter's celebration and you're waking to yet another day of discouragement, disbelief, loss, confusion. Then a story begins to circulate.

Could it be true? Could he truly be raised from the dead or did someone steal the body?

Imagine it's the day after Mary has discovered the empty tomb or maybe days later, when you're still trying to grasp the reality of "he is risen." You've seen him appear or heard about appearances, but your mind still can't quite grasp what all of this means.

What's going on inside you if you're Mary or Thomas or Peter or John or any one of the followers or spectators?

What are you thinking?

What are you feeling?

What impact is all of this having on your life?

What is the "good news" for you?

Now, fast forward 2,000+ years to resurrection day. For us, right here, right now. We experience “Good Friday,” then it’s Sunday - followed by a lifetime of Easter celebrations and letting that reality sink in.

*What does Easter mean for you today? What is **your** good news?*

What does it matter to you today that Jesus is not in the tomb? How does the resurrection of Jesus impact your life this moment?

*If you allowed God entrance to everything about you, how **might** the resurrection of Jesus impact your life this moment?*

good news: Jesus is Lord

Jesus: *“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”*

Thomas: *“My Lord and my God!”*

Jesus: *“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* (John 20:27-29)

We are those who did not see, and yet we believe. And we daily look for ways to blend our human understanding of God into the reality of his Lordship. “Jesus is Lord” is a description of who he is - regardless of whether you or I acknowledge that or not. But when we do believe, our lives are forever changed.

If you had been watching from the corner of the upper room, what would you have seen?

If you had been Thomas or any one of the followers with him that day, what would “stop doubting and believe” have meant to you? What do you think Jesus meant?

What does “stop doubting and believe” mean for you, right now?

- Thomas doubted; but “Jesus is Lord” meant, for him, the chance to confront his doubts and yield control to Jesus.
- Peter denied; but “Jesus is Lord” meant, for him, the chance to be restored and voice his love again.
- All of Jesus’ followers lost something precious that had informed their life for three transforming years; but “Jesus is Lord” meant God’s Word is true, not just for those three years of ministry, but for eternity. The Holy Spirit would come, and both a personal and community relationship with the living God would change the course of history.

“Jesus is Lord” means transformation today and forevermore.

*Where do you need to personally embrace “Jesus is Lord” in your life today?
What do you need to release to God in order to more fully live this transformed life?*

Try an examen question.

*What is the greatest difference that living the reality of “Jesus is Lord” makes in your life each day?
What is the greatest loss you experience each day by **not** living “Jesus is Lord?”*

In short, Jesus is Lord. It’s his title, his right, his eternal place. And he himself is alive in our lives, forming an ongoing and eternal relationship with each one of us and with all of us together as his body, conforming us, slowly and steadily, into his image.

Pastor Mark said, *“The fact of the resurrection is clear evidence that Jesus is Lord. That’s good news, it’s good to be reminded that your worship is rightly placed when you bow the knee to Jesus.”*

good news: you are forgiven

We might know that Jesus died to forgive our sins and that we are called to a life of forgiveness, but knowing that and experiencing that are two very different things.

“There is nothing lacking in the sacrificial death of Jesus for our sins. The resurrection proves it worked - the way of forgiveness has been provided. Now, through faith in the risen Christ, we are justified, forgiven of our sins. The resurrection reminds us the payment of Jesus for our sins was fully sufficient, and in him, we are fully forgiven. Here’s good news...whatever your sin, the payment of Christ on the cross, is greater.” (Pastor Mark)

When God created us in his image, we enjoyed unbroken fellowship with Father, Son and Spirit. Then we chose our own images instead of worshiping him and we couldn’t find our way back. Only God could make us whole again. And he did, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus...through the incredible power of perfect love that continues to flow in and through us today. Jesus rose from the dead, ascended into Heaven and reigns today - across time and space and in our hearts. We are restored, even though we do not yet fully experience the fullness of our restoration.

Read John 18:15-27 and John 21, putting yourself in Peter’s story. Peter experienced such a personal moment of Easter’s forgiveness. He was a courageous, energetic, faith-filled friend of Jesus who found himself alone in a garden, unable to reconnect what he knew he’d broken. But Jesus found him. And Peter understood forgiveness for the first time - not a forgiveness based on his own ability to make a wrong right, but forgiveness based on Jesus as Lord.

How would you describe forgiveness?

How do you personally relate to Peter's experience?

How has Jesus forgiven you in your lifetime? This week? Today?

Who, in your life, have you had to forgive most?

Who has had to forgive you most?

Who needs to experience Jesus' forgiveness through you?

*This is a call for us to reconsider how we have been approaching our life, in light of the fact that we now, in the presence of Jesus, have the option of living within the surrounding movements of God's eternal purposes, of taking our life into his life" (Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, p. 16).*

In short. We can be renewed by forgiveness every day. And we can offer God's forgiveness to everyone around us. Our daily transformation is a reflection of Easter's transformation. And we can experience it right here, right now.

*"The well-kept secret of the ordinary is that it is made to be a receptacle of the divine, a place where the life of God flows" (Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, p. 14).*

Choose three words that best describe where you are in your life with Jesus. It doesn't matter if the words reflect pain or doubt or anger or confusion. We are all in process with God, and we can trust that process. We can trust God in that process. He has a relationship with each and every one of us, and he's 100% committed, for all eternity, to helping us live in the reality of his love.

Word #1:

Word #2:

Word #3:

for missional communities not doing life notes

Spend a few moments at the beginning or ending of your time responding to the following:

*How is your life today most transformed by the “good news” of Easter?
Where do you least allow Easter’s “good news” to change your life?*

Next Week

To prepare for more discussion in John in the coming weeks, read John 6:1-21 and pages 95-99 in Metzger’s *The Gospel of John: When Love Comes to Town*.

Don’t forget to email questions you might have on these passages in John to Pastor Mark at markc@mission68.org.

see next page for facilitator suggestions

Facilitator Suggestions

The main question for this week is “why is Easter such good news?”

So start there with your groups.

Why is Easter such good news?

See if you can guide the conversation from general comments to personal, more specific comments.

Why is Easter such good news for you?

Pastor Mark took us through these reasons: Jesus is Lord, we are forgiven, we have eternal life, we can trust Jesus and we can have peace. You might read through the various Scriptures, asking everyone to take turns. At the end of the readings, ask if there are any words or phrases that stand out or if there was anything Pastor Mark said that made a particular impact or raised a particular question.

Easter is such good news because it transformed...and transforms our lives. Particularly, Pastor Mark celebrated the good news that Jesus is Lord, we are forgiven, we have eternal life, we can trust Jesus and we can have peace. Easter ushers us into completely new relationship with Father, Son, Spirit and each other, and we are daily changing as Jesus draws us deeper and deeper into relationship. Pastor Mark reminded us that we are citizens of the kingdom of God. We don't yet have the full expression or experience of that kingdom, but we are citizens of that kingdom and we have the God of the universe leading us. He is Lord of all. And that's amazing news.

Conduct this examen with your group:

What's the greatest thing about living in this faith-kingdom with God and with each other?

What's the most difficult thing about living in this faith-kingdom with God and with each other?

Additional resources/questions for facilitators and MC groups (choose what's best for your group):

We discussed “Jesus is Lord,” so invite the group members to respond to:

In what areas is it easiest for you to allow Jesus to live as Lord in your life right now?

Where do you need to release control in your life so that Jesus can express his lordship?

We also discussed the power of forgiveness. Invite the group to respond to:

When or why is it difficult for us to receive forgiveness?

When or why is it difficult for us to extend forgiveness?

Finally, we discussed where we personally are on this faith journey with God.

What word best describes what is currently happening between you and God?

What spiritual truth is coming into clearer focus in your life?

What situation or question are you currently seeking clarity about?