

Easter Morning – Because He Lives, I Live

Joyful, joyful we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of love

What a day for celebration!

He Rose Triumphantly in power and majesty

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We've read again how this day began so many, many years ago...

At dawn a few women went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body...

Friday had been such a blur – Jesus arrested, tried, crucified, dead, buried in a borrowed tomb. There hadn't been time or energy to bury his body properly. This morning they would anoint him with the care his body deserved.

But again today, events weren't proceeding as expected. There were strangers at the tomb: not Roman soldiers, not disciples, no one from the crowd who just a week ago had cried "Hosanna, God Save Us." These strangers wore dazzling clothes and they said strange things: "Why do you seek the living among the dead. He is not here; he has risen just as he said he would."

"What do we do now," the women thought. "Life really is turned upside down!" So the women ran to tell Peter; surely he would know what to do. Peter and John ran to the tomb; what those women were saying couldn't be true. But Peter and John too found the tomb empty. What do we do now?

What difference does Easter make anyway? What difference does Jesus' resurrection make?! Christianity is the only faith tradition that believes God reaches out toward humans. One of the speakers at the Good Friday service phrased it this way: God has an unquenchable thirst for us, for you and me! And how does God reach out to bring us back into relationship? By sending an expression of God in the form of a man to dwell with us, to teach us. We have a name for this one: Emmanuel, God With Us. We have another name for this one: Jesus. And this one, God With Us, this Jesus was arrested, tried, convicted, sentenced to death and then crucified. What he taught countered accepted beliefs of his time: he said the weak will be strong; the greatest must be a servant; we are to love one another, not dominate one another. God reaches out to us to bring us **1**

back into relationship, by becoming one of us, through Jesus' life and death on the cross. God has an unquenchable thirst for us.

"He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today"—we serve a risen Savior. The story about this hymn, especially appropriate for Easter, is that the lyrics were prompted by a question asked by a young Jew: "Why should I worship a dead Jew?" The hymn writer answered: We serve a risen Savior; He lives.

God not only sent God's only Son, Emmanuel—God With Us—in the form of Jesus, but death didn't defeat God; death didn't end the work of God to bring us back into relationship.

Jesus' resurrection is a big deal but Jesus' resurrection isn't like the opening of Lucky's Market or another retail store. When the store opens..

We have special events as we celebrate

We feel excited, curious, wanting to be part of something new  
and big

And then a few weeks later, a few months later, the store becomes just one of many stores available to us. We return to our routine, which may or may not include shopping at the new store.

Jesus' death and resurrection isn't like the opening of Lucky's Market! Jesus' death and resurrection is a BIG DEAL!! Jesus' death and resurrection should be life-changing for each of us!! Jesus' death and resurrection has eternal—forever and ever—implications.

How is your life different this morning, because of Jesus' death and resurrection? Do those around you—your neighbors, your work colleagues, your non-FBC friends—KNOW you have chosen to serve the risen Savior, Jesus Christ? Do those around you—your neighbors, your work colleagues, your non-FBC friends—see the love of God shown to us through Jesus Christ in what YOU say, in how you treat others, in the love you show for ALL people?

Three of our church family are willing to show their love for Jesus Christ this morning by following Jesus in baptism. How appropriate that we would be able to include a baptism service as part of our Resurrection Sunday, our Easter Sunday worship!

In baptism, we profess Jesus as Savior – recognizing Jesus’ death on the cross as the sacrifice given for me, you. Choosing to be baptized, our human response, is our celebration of God’s gift to us.

At the Community Good Friday Service, I spoke on Jesus’ words “It is finished” from John 19:30. The Greek word used in this verse for “finished” means complete, fulfilled. In Jesus’ death and resurrection, Jesus’—God With Us—mission and ministry on earth has been completed, fulfilled.

The Greek word for “It is finished” is a word that was written on a receipt, indicating the person’s debt had been paid in full

Our sinfulness, our disobedience, our willful disconnect from God’s authority, that’s the debt Jesus paid on the cross. It is finished: our debt has been paid in full

In baptism, we not only profess Jesus as Savior, we profess Jesus as Lord, we acknowledge God’s authority over our lives; we acknowledge we are to live in accordance with God’s commandments, commandments to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds and to love our neighbors as ourselves

In baptism, we acknowledge we need to grow in our knowledge of God and grow in a Christian life in faith. Baptism is not an end but a beginning. And today, as community, as the congregation of FBC, we baptize three people

We are one of many in the family of God

We are to encourage one another; build up one another

And as these three grow in their knowledge of God and in their Christian life in faith, we are to be right there beside them, encouraging them and assisting them.

Baptism—What we Baptist believe

1) Baptism is not required for salvation according to Baptist tradition

For we are saved by grace not works Eph. 2:8-9

Rather, we choose to follow Jesus in baptism. We choose to be baptized because Jesus was baptized.

Matthew 3:13-17 tells how Jesus came to John the Baptist who was baptizing with water for repentance

John had been preaching: “One who is to come will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. I am not worthy to carry his sandals

John asked Jesus, “You come to me?”

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And Jesus answered, “Yes, to fulfill all righteousness”

After Jesus was baptized, John saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Jesus and heard God say, “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Previously in John 1:29, 35 – we read that when John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Perhaps John was letting us know that the day would come when Jesus would be the sacrifice for all of us, to restore our relationship with God

2) Baptism is a symbol of new life through Christ by reminding us of Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection

We enter the waters of baptism, dying to our old life and remembering Jesus’ death on the cross

We are “buried,” that is immersed, in the water, remembering Jesus’ burial in the tomb

And then we come up out of the water, remembering Jesus’ resurrection on the third day –

3) Baptism is a symbol of new life through Christ, in Christ

For Baptists, baptism is by immersion, going under the water.

Again, this is based on our understanding of Matthew 3:16

The verse says, “when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water.”

The Greek work used in Matthew 3:16 for “baptized” is “baptizo,” which means “immerse”

That Greek word “baptizo” also means “to wash, cleanse”

So we Baptists believe that baptism is symbolic of being cleansed from sin. The waters of baptism wash away our sins. But this cleansing isn’t just of the body—the outer shell. It is a cleansing of our hearts, new life through Christ:

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit in me

And from both Ezekiel 36:26; Ezekiel 11:19, God promises, “I will give them a new heart and a new spirit “

In baptism, our hearts are cleansed and God’s Holy Spirit is bestowed on us

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Remember in Matthew 3:16, and also found in Luke's account of Jesus' baptism, in Luke 3:22: God's Spirit descended like a dove on Jesus when he was baptized by John the Baptist

Paul, writing in Ephesians 2:1-10, reminds us that God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which God loved us...made us alive together with Christ

By grace we are saved. We were dead but now we are alive, brought into God's unmatched holiness.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Because of God's unquenchable thirst for us, we have new life in Christ; we are restored to our relationship with something much bigger than ourselves, with the Lord God Almighty.

And we believe this new life isn't just for us after we die and leave this world. We believe that baptism initiates the reality of the new life in the midst of the present world

Luke 17:21 – The kingdom of God is among you, within you  
We have a glimpse of the joy to come when there will be no more death, no more war and violence

AND we are called to be God's people, here and now, to live AS IF God's kingdom is present, here and now. We are called to live victoriously now as we also anticipate to be in God's presence when we die

One more comment about Baptists' understanding of baptism:

Why do we practice believer's baptism, rather than baptizing infants, as some faith traditions do?

We believe that a person should be old enough to understand the choice he or she is making. We call this the "age of accountability." We believe there is an innocence, an inability to grasp what sinfulness means, until a certain point in life

Interestingly enough, psychologists talk about an age at which our values become established and once fixed are very hard to change. The age identified at which that happens is age 10.

"He's alive, He's alive, He's alive and I'm forgiven, heaven's gates are open wide"

Because Jesus is alive, because Jesus lives and sits on the right hand of God, we too can live.

Because Jesus lives, I can live: victoriously now and with eternal life to come

God has an unquenchable thirst for us. In Jesus' life, God becomes one of us, showing us how to live victoriously, In Jesus' death and resurrection we are restored to our relationship with the God whose love is so great he would be willing to suffer and die on a cross just for me, just for you.

Thanks be to God for this wonderful gift!