

2010 Resurrection Sunday

Jesus Transforms Lives

John 20:19-31

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Jesus Transforms Lives¹

Scripture

I remember a geography lesson I received while in Primary School in South Africa. We learned that the southernmost tip of Cape Town, South Africa is Cape Point, which has experienced treacherous storms over the centuries. For many years no one knew what lay beyond that cape, for no ship attempting to round that point had ever returned to tell the tale. Among the ancient mariners it was known as the *Cape of Storms*, and for good reason.

But then a Portuguese explorer in the fifteenth century named Vasco De Gama successfully sailed around that very point and found beyond the wild raging storms, a great calm sea, and beyond that, the shores of India. The name of that cape was later changed from the *Cape of Storms* to the *Cape of Good Hope*.

Until Jesus Christ rose from the dead, death had been the cape of storms on which all hopes of life beyond had been wrecked. No one knew what lay beyond that point until, on that first Easter morning, Jesus rose from the dead, giving us new hope for life beyond the grave.

Suddenly, like those ancient mariners, people could see beyond human death to the good hope of eternal life in heaven. More than that, we now dare to believe that we can experience in our own human bodies what Jesus experienced in his, for the risen Christ says to us, “Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19).

And because Jesus is alive, he is now in the process of transforming people. He is transforming people whose lives are so often filled with storms to lives filled with good hope.

I want you to notice how Jesus started transforming lives on the very first day of his resurrection from the dead. Please pay attention as I read to you from John 20:19-31:

¹ I preached this message on Easter Sunday 2004.

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” ²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:19-31)

Introduction

Some of you have seen *The Passion of the Christ*. Frankly, it is the most powerful movie I have ever seen. The movie portrays in graphic detail the last twelve hours of Jesus Christ. The final scene of the movie is a glimpse of the resurrection of Jesus.

Personally, I would love to see Mel Gibson do a sequel to *The Passion of the Christ* titled *The Resurrection of the Christ*. I would love to see a movie that has the same powerful, emotional impact as *The Passion of the Christ* in which we see how the resurrected Jesus transforms lives.

I don't know if Mel Gibson will ever make such a movie. But I do know that the news that Jesus was alive began to spread among his followers, at first with hesitation, and later with enthusiasm. Even his disciples did not believe the first reports, and Thomas demanded proof. But whenever people were confronted with the reality of his resurrection, their lives were transformed.

In fact, that same transforming experience can be yours today. As you learn about the changes that took place in the lives of people in today's text (John 20:19-31) ask yourself, "Have I personally met the risen Christ? Has Jesus transformed *my* life?"

Lesson

Today, I want you to see three transformations that take place in the lives of people who encounter the resurrected Christ.

I. Jesus Transforms People From Fear to Joy (20:19-23)

First, Jesus transforms people from fear to joy.

Jesus was laid in the tomb shortly after he died, and he rose from the dead three days later on Sunday, the first day of the week.

There were at least five resurrection appearances of Jesus on that first day: to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18), the other women (Matthew 28:9-10), Peter (1 Corinthians 15:5 and Luke 24:34), the two Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:13-32), and the disciples minus Thomas (John 20:19-25).

The Bible says that **on the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews** (20:19a). The disciples were filled with fear.

Their leader Jesus was dead and buried, and they were con-

cerned about what the Jewish authorities might do to them. After all, they were Jesus' associates.

So, how did Jesus transform his disciples' fear into joy? For one thing, *he came to them*. The Bible says that **Jesus came and stood among them** (20:19b). We do not know where these ten frightened men were at the time, but Jesus came to them and appeared to them. In his resurrection body he was able to enter the room without opening the doors! It was a solid body, for he asked them to touch him—and he even ate some fish (Luke 24:41-43). But it was a different kind of body, one that was not limited by what we call “the laws of nature.”

It is remarkable that these men were actually afraid. The women had already reported to them that Jesus was alive, and the two Emmaus disciples had added their personal testimony (Luke 24:33-35). But Jesus came to these fearful disciples, and revealed himself to them.

But not only did Jesus come to them, *he reassured them*. His first word to them was the traditional greeting, “Shalom—**Peace be with you!**” (20:19c). Jesus could have rebuked them for their unfaithfulness and cowardice, but he didn't. He brought peace to those who were filled with fear. **When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side** (20:20). He gave them an opportunity to discover that he was indeed their Master and not some phantom.

But the wounds were more than mere evidence for the sake of identification. They were also evidence that the price for salvation had been paid so that they could indeed have “peace with God.” The basis for peace is Jesus' death to pay for their sins.

So, Jesus appeared to the disciples. They saw for themselves that he was indeed alive, and their fear was transformed into joy.

II. Jesus Transforms People From Doubt to Faith (20:24-28)

Second, Jesus transforms people from doubt to faith.

Thomas seems to have been a person who was skeptical by

nature. He wanted physical, tangible proof that Jesus really was alive. He said, **“Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe”** (20:25b). Thomas wanted to see the nail marks and touch the body of Jesus to test and see if Jesus really was alive.

Thomas is like some skeptics today. They say, “I will not believe unless. . .” and then follows a list of conditions. They want God to do something for them or they want to see some display of God’s power *before* they will believe. They want to see this for themselves *before* they will believe. They will not accept the testimony of others.

The Bible says that the other disciples **told** Thomas, **“We have seen the Lord”** (20:25a). The word **told** in Greek means that “they kept telling him” that they had seen Jesus alive. The ten told Thomas. The women told Thomas. The Emmaus disciples told Thomas. And still he would not believe.

Now we should be careful and not judge Thomas too harshly. While we might fault him for laying down conditions before he would believe that Jesus was alive, we nevertheless should take note that he wanted a *personal* experience. He wanted to experience for himself that Jesus was alive.

Eight days later, Jesus’ disciples were inside the same house **again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe”** (20:26-27).

Immediately, **Thomas answered** Jesus, **“My Lord and my God!”** (20:28). Jesus transformed Thomas from doubt to faith. Thomas believed that Jesus was indeed alive.

III. Jesus Transforms People From Death to Life (20: 29-31)

And third, Jesus transforms people from death to life.

The Bible is very clear that every person who is not saved does not have joy, faith, or eternal life. In fact, when God looks at their hearts he sees fear, doubt, and eternal death.

Is this a description of you?

The Apostle John could not end his Gospel without bringing the resurrection miracle to his readers. We must not look at Thomas and the other disciples and envy them, as though what happened to them could not happen to us today. That was in fact why John wrote this gospel. He said that **these things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (20:31).**

Jesus came to offer life, abundant life and eternal life. And the question is: How does a person receive this life? How is a person's life transformed from fear to joy, from doubt to faith, and from death to life? John tells us that *the only way a person can receive it is through belief in Jesus Christ.*

John wrote his letter to convince us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He wrote to tell us that Jesus is the Savior of the world, the only one who can take away our sin and reconcile us to God. He alone can give us eternal life. He alone can take us to heaven.

So, how does Jesus take a person to heaven?

John tells us that you must believe in him. But how do you believe in him?

There are basically two kinds of belief. One is *intellectual faith*. This is faith that believes in the facts of the gospel.

You believe that Jesus was born of a Virgin. You believe that he lived a perfect life. You believe that he died to pay the penalty for sin. You believe that he was buried in a tomb for three days. You believe that after three days he rose again from the dead. You believe all of this, but you have never made it *personal*. It is simply an intellectual assent to the facts of history.

James 2:19 tells us that the devils have this kind of faith. They were at Bethlehem, and they saw Jesus' birth. They saw his sinless, perfect life, and try as they could, they could not get him to

sin. They saw him go to the cross. They saw him die. They saw him buried. They saw him rise from the dead. They saw him meeting with the disciples and with Peter and with the women and with Thomas. They saw all that and they believed that those things happened. They had an intellectual faith.

Well, I ask you, are they going to heaven? Are the demons saved? Of course not! Their destiny is eternal destruction in hell.

What you need is not intellectual faith but *saving faith*. This is not merely assenting to the facts of history. But it is going a step further and saying, "I believe that Jesus died and rose for *me*. I believe that he paid the penalty for *my* sin." Saving faith is trusting in Jesus Christ *alone* to get you to heaven. He is the only one who can save you and take you to heaven.

Conclusion

As I close, I ask, "Have you personally met the risen Christ? Has Jesus transformed *your* life?"

Jesus came so that you and I could have life, abundant life, and eternal life. The ten disciples were transformed from fear to joy. Thomas was transformed from doubt to faith. Now John invites you to believe in Jesus and be transformed from death to life.

Edith Burns was a wonderful Christian who lived in San Antonio, Texas. She was the patient of a doctor by the name of Will Phillips. Dr. Phillips was a gentle doctor who saw patients as people. His favorite patient was Edith Burns. One morning he went to his office with a heavy heart, and it was because of Edith Burns.

When he walked into that waiting room, there sat Edith with her Bible, earnestly talking to a young mother sitting beside her.

Edith Burns had a habit of introducing herself in this way: "Hello, my name is Edith Burns. Do you believe in Easter?"

Then she would explain the meaning of Easter, and many times, as a result of Edith Burns' explanation, people would be transformed from death to life through faith in Jesus.

When Dr. Phillips walked into his office that day he also saw

his head nurse Beverly. Beverly first met Edith years ago when she was taking Edith's blood pressure. Edith began by saying, "Hello, my name is Edith Burns. Do you believe in Easter?"

Beverly said, "Why yes I do."

Edith said, "Well, what do you believe about Easter?"

Beverly said, "Well, it's all about egg hunts, going to church, and dressing up."

Edith kept pressing her about the real meaning of Easter, and finally led her to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Dr. Phillips said, "Beverly, don't call Edith into the office quite yet. I believe there is another transformation taking place in the waiting room."

Later, after being called into the doctor's office, Edith sat down and when she took a look at the doctor she said, "Dr. Will, why are you so sad? What's wrong?"

Dr. Phillips said gently, "Edith, I'm the doctor and you're the patient." Then, with a heavy heart, he continued, "Your lab report came back and it says you have cancer, and Edith, you're not going to live very long."

Edith said, "Why Dr. Will Phillips, shame on you! Why are you so sad? Do you think God makes mistakes? You have just told me that soon I'm going to see my precious Lord Jesus, my husband, and my friends, who believed in Jesus. You have just told me that I am going to celebrate Easter forever, and here you are having difficulty giving me my ticket!"

Edith continued visiting Dr. Phillips. Eventually she had to be admitted to the hospital, as her end was near. She said to Dr. Phillips, "Dr. Will, would you please make sure that they put women next to me in my room who need to know about Easter."

Well, they did just that and women began to come in and share that room with Edith. Many women heard about Jesus' resurrection and were transformed by Jesus through Edith's witness. Everybody on that floor from staff to patients just fell in love with Edith, and they started calling her "Edith Easter." That is, everyone except Phyllis Cross, the head nurse.

Phyllis made it plain that she wanted nothing to do with Edith because she was a “religious nut.” She had been a nurse in an army hospital. She had seen and heard it all. She was the original G.I. Jane. She had been married three times. She was hard and cold.

One morning the two nurses who were to attend to Edith were sick. Edith had the flu and Phyllis Cross had to go in and give her a shot.

When she walked in, Edith had a big smile on her face and said, “Phyllis, I have been praying for you.”

Phyllis Cross said, “Well, you can quit praying for me. It won’t work. I’m not interested.”

Edith said, “Well, I will pray, and I have asked God not to let me go home until you are transformed by Jesus.”

Phyllis Cross said, “Then you will never die because that will never happen,” and curtly walked out of the room.

Every day Phyllis Cross walked into the room and Edith would say, “Phyllis, I’m praying for you.”

One day Phyllis Cross said she was literally drawn to Edith’s room like a magnet draws iron. She sat down on the bed and Edith said, “I’m so glad you have come, because God told me that today is your special day.”

Phyllis Cross said, “Edith, you have asked everybody here the question, ‘Do you believe in Easter?’ But you have never asked me that question.”

Edith said, “Phyllis, I wanted to many times, but God told me to wait until you asked, and now that you have asked. . . .”

Edith Burns took her Bible and shared with Phyllis Cross the Easter Story of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Edith said, “Phyllis, do you believe in Easter? Do you believe that Jesus Christ is alive and that he wants to transform you?”

Phyllis Cross said, “Oh, I want to believe that with all of my heart, and I do want Jesus to transform my life.”

Right there, Phyllis Cross prayed and asked Jesus Christ to transform her life. For the first time Phyllis Cross did not walk out of a hospital room; she felt like she was floating on air!

The next day Phyllis Cross came in to Edith Burns' room, and Edith said to her, "Do you know what day it is?"

Phyllis Cross said, "Why Edith, it's Good Friday."

Edith said, "Oh, no, now that Jesus has transformed you every day is Easter. Happy Easter, Phyllis!"

Two days later, on Easter Sunday, Phyllis Cross came in to work, did some of her duties and then went down to the flower shop and bought some Easter lilies. She wanted to go up and see Edith to give her some Easter lilies and wish her a Happy Easter. When she walked into Edith's room, Edith was in bed. Her Bible was on her lap. And her hands were in that Bible. There was a sweet smile on her face.

But when Phyllis Cross went to pick up Edith's hand, she realized that Edith was dead.

Edith's left hand was on John 14:2-3: "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

Edith's right hand was on Revelation 21:4, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Phyllis Cross took one more look at Edith's dead body, and then lifted her face toward heaven, and with tears streaming down her cheeks, said, "Happy Easter, Edith—Happy Easter!"

Then Phyllis Cross left Edith's body, walked out of the room, and over to a table where two student nurses were sitting. She said, "Hello, my name is Phyllis Cross. Do you believe in Easter?"

Friends, Easter is the account of Jesus' resurrection. And because of the resurrection, Jesus transforms lives. Don't leave here today without asking Jesus to transform your life. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAAYER:

Our Father in heaven, thank you for raising Jesus Christ from the dead on that first Easter Sunday morning. And thank you that because of his resurrection Jesus now transforms lives. Thank you that he transforms people from fear to joy, from doubt to faith, and from death to life.

I pray that everyone who is here today will experience the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

If you are not yet a Christian here today, you can be transformed by Jesus. Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who has paid the penalty for all your sin. Express your belief in a prayer like this:

Heavenly Father, I have rebelled against you. I have sinned in my thoughts, my words and my actions—sometimes unconsciously, sometimes deliberately. I am sorry for the way I have lived and ask you to forgive me. Thank you that Jesus died on the cross so that I could be forgiven. Thank you that I can now see clearly who Jesus is and why he came. Please send your Holy Spirit to help me follow him whatever the cost. Amen.

If you would like to talk about what it means to be a Christian today, please speak to me following the service. I have a little booklet that I would like to give you. It is called *Do You Know?* And it describes how you can be sure that you are a Christian.

CHARGE:

If you would like to talk about what it means to be a Christian today, please speak to me following the service. I have a little booklet that I would like to give you. It is called *Do You Know?* And it describes how you can be sure that you are a Christian.

And now, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.