

**The Great Reversal**  
**April 20, 2014**  
**Easter Sunday**

**Introduction – The World is Broken**

The world is broken. I know. That's strange way to start a sermon an Easter Sunday – this most celebrated of all Christian days. (And Diane told me to keep it positive, so I'm already in trouble!) But the conclusion that we live in a broken world is unavoidable. Consider these recent occurrences:

- Russia invaded Crimea a month ago and is massing troops on the border of Ukraine. Their motivations do not appear to be friendly. Just a few days ago, in one of the cities of eastern Ukraine, Jewish people were told that they needed to register with the government and account for all of their property and possessions. Sounds ominous. It sent shivers up my spine when I read about it.
- A few weeks ago, a crazed soldier killed three people and injured dozens more at Fort Hood. Hasn't that base received enough traumatization with the shooting that killed thirteen soldiers just three years ago?
- Since 9/11, terrorist threats are part of our new reality. Students entering high school this year have known nothing else but a world set on edge by the constant worry of terrorist plots.
- Evil people are always trying to steal your information and identity or to destroy your computer.
- Children no longer freely play out in the street or on playgrounds like I did growing up. The fear of predators has destroyed the innocence of childhood that we once knew.
- Aberdeen is nice town, but too many in our community are under the bondage of dangerous drug use.
- Trafficking in sexual slavery is a world-wide plague that affects not only our major cities, but also our State of South Dakota.
- Even nature itself, is broken. We see the devastating mudslide in Washington last month and in recent years we've had devastating hurricanes, tornados and tsunamis.
- Our bodies are broken with sickness that deplete our hopes and crush our spirits.
- There's heartbreak of broken families...

I don't really need to go on...this world is broken. You don't need any convincing.

And so, this is Easter: the day that is supposed to celebrate Christ coming alive after he had been dead in the grave for three days.

But what if there was no resurrection? What if, like so many have asserted, that Christ didn't really rise from the dead, but that his body was stolen by his followers. Or one theory has stipulated that Christ didn't really die, but he fainted on the cross and the coolness of the tomb revived him. What if? I mean, the resurrection is not natural. It doesn't fit into the normal scientific scheme of things. What if Christ didn't rise from the dead?

Then all of this and our preaching are pathetic and useless. Your Christian faith is useless. And all the Apostles lied and the Church has engaged in centuries of deception. If Christ wasn't raised then we are all under condemnation. Even those Christians who died believing that they would have eternal life have perished! What of the millions of martyrs who have died painful deaths believing that Christ rose from the dead? And if we have hope in Christ only for this life, then we are the most miserable people in the whole world! (Based on I Corinthians 15:19)

### **But now...**

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. (I Corinthians 15:20-22) (NKJV)

Let me explain...

### **Sin entered into the world**

Most of us know the story of Adam and Eve from the book of Genesis. God made them in his image and had special plans for them. Adam and Eve and their children were to be stewards of the earth and enjoy a close friendship with God and the bounty of his Creation. Inconceivable for us now, but they were made to live forever.

But they rebelled against God. That's called sin. And the consequences of sin is the brokenness of this world of which we spoke a few minutes ago and ultimately, death. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 5:12, "...sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." What Adam and Eve did when they sinned was to take the world and hand it over to Satan – the Devil. And in so doing, they turned it upside-down. Genesis 3 tells of the curse that the world would live under Satan's dominion.

### **The Cross – The great climactic battle.**

Our world is broken. But since the beginning, God didn't intend for it to stay that way. He would send a deliverer who would take on all the powers of evil and Satan and defeat him. And that is exactly what Jesus did on the Cross. Just days before he was crucified, John's Gospel reveals Jesus' purpose:

“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

John 12:27-32

He took upon himself the fullness of evil in this world and all that the Devil could throw at him. And at the moment of judgment, as the Father turned his face away, Jesus screamed in the darkness, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Since...the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Hebrews 2:14-15

The Apostle Paul put it this way:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Colossians 2:13-15

That is **the great reversal!**

### **The Resurrection completes the battle**

But had Jesus stayed in the grave, his death would have only been a martyr’s sacrifice. But Jesus is unique. He is the only one who has died and come back to life never to die again. Others have died and been resuscitated or resurrected. But all of them eventually died again. Jesus’ resurrection was unto eternal life – never to die again.

His resurrection was the inauguration of a new day. The Scripture says that he is the “first-fruits.” I like the way theologian NT Wright puts it:

“The power that has tyrannized the old creation has been broken, defeated, overthrown. *God’s kingdom is now launched, and launched in power and glory, on earth as it is in heaven....* Now there is a completely different way to live, a way of life and reconciliation and healing and hope. It’s a way nobody’s ever tried before, a way that is unthinkable to most human beings and societies as – well, as resurrection itself. Precisely. That’s the point. Welcome to Jesus’ new world” (NTW, *Simply Jesus*, p. 193-194).

A lot of times we ask the question, “If you died tonight, do you know where you will spend eternity?” Certainly, the Christian has hope beyond the grave. I’ll speak to that in a moment. But Christ’s resurrection means more than just a ticket to heaven after you die. Easter is not an end. It is a beginning. A beginning of a new kind of life *right now*. God’s kingdom and will being done in your life, here – now – “on earth as it is in heaven!”

In a few moments three people are going demonstrate through baptism the power of the resurrection and new life in Christ. I don’t know why you came this morning. Easter is always a good time to come to church. But I want to ask everyone here a question:

*Are you experiencing that new kind of life in Christ that we are talking about?*

Do you know the power of God in your life to overcome your own sin – that sin that keeps you from having a relationship with God? That’s why God created you in the first place – to be united with him. This morning, before the people are baptized, they will make several affirmations in a very simple litany. The words that they say – indeed, what we will say together – express the heart of what it means to become a Christian. If you’ve never received Christ as your Savior – to experience the new life that you were created for – I encourage you to say those words with us from your heart. And then indicate on a yellow response card that you would like to become a Christian. We would love to help you on your journey in your new life in Christ.

### **Death is Swallowed Up in Victory**

The Book of Ecclesiastes has a very strange set of verses:

A good name is better than precious ointment,  
and the day of death than the day of birth.  
It is better to go to the house of mourning  
than to go to the house of feasting,  
for this is the end of all mankind,  
and the living will lay it to heart.

Ecclesiastes 7:1-2

Strange words. I preach them at every funeral service I do. The thought of death is very sobering because it is the destiny of us all. Wisdom demands that we do think about it.

We have three people in our fellowship right now who are in hospice care. That's a sobering thought. But every one of them is facing the circumstances of their life with courage. More importantly, they have hope. And that hope is an anchor for their soul. You see, they have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. They know that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and that they, too, will rise with him. Death has no power over them because they are partakers of the life of Christ. That's why they can say, with the Scriptures:

Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

I Corinthians 15:54-58

### **Song of Response – I Will Rise**