

## **GIVING UP DEATH** (Various Texts)

**Intro:** Seven Sundays ago we interrupted our series from the Book of Acts and embarked on a Lenten series entitled GIVING IT UP. On that Sunday, and for the next five Sundays following it, we looked at what we needed to give up, not just for Lent, but for good. We talked about Giving Up Control, and giving it to God. We talked about Giving Up Expectations, and looking with anticipation at what God has for us. We talked about Giving Up Superiority, and how we needed to get rid of the artificial lines that we humans draw to make us feel superior to others. We talked about Giving Up Enemies, and even Giving Up Our Lives. Each one of them sounds pretty serious. Like why would we want to give up our lives? But the truth was when we give up our lives, we experience real eternal life. Finally last week, on Palm Sunday, on the day when Jesus's popularity rose to its zenith, we talked about Giving Up Popularity. Today, on this day of Resurrection, with Lent having concluded several days ago, we're still talking about giving something up. But today we will talk about GIVING UP DEATH. You'll see what I mean as we continue.

A good way to start is to look at what is on your worship folder. I'm glad it's there for you too, because you can that read it and ponder it over the next week or longer – if you need it. We need the reminder found in its words. Listen, "*Jesus' resurrection is the destruction of all that destroys. It is the demise of that which seeks the demise of everything else. It is the end of ending, the ruin of all that ruins, and the annihilation of all that kills, robs, infects, corrupts and distorts. The resurrection is the final end of all that produces final endings.*

**Death is over.**" I don't know who wrote it, but it's powerful.

It's especially powerful in this day and age when there seems to be a lot of hopelessness, We need to share the hope that comes out of this very day.

Frederick Buechner wrote that the symbol of Christianity is not a star, a crescent, or a lotus, which are images of beauty and light. Instead it is the cross, an instrument of oppression and execution. This is because the cross represents hope. It's hopeful because of what occurred three days later.

Now, I believe that many of you here have the wonderful joy and anticipation that comes from the resurrection. But if you do not, then this message is for you. And for those of you who do know that joy, this message is for you too, because you need to share it with those around you who do not have the hope of the Resurrection.

A short while ago Emily read to you from the gospel of John. She read about Mary Magdalene arriving at the tomb and finding it empty. In fear and maybe a hint of anticipation she went and found the other disciples and told them about it. Peter and John (it doesn't say John but John is probably writing the account and he is pretty much presenting a first-hand account) race to the tomb and they find it empty. Indeed Jesus was not there. And as John looked at the folded grave clothes he realized that the scripture was true, and he finally believed what scripture said. Jesus must rise from the dead. And in that belief he and Peter, return to their homes, knowing that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Mary was still there – the excitement the disciples experienced escaped her and they left her there alone. She was weeping outside the tomb and it's obvious that she wasn't believing in the resurrection. She had now come to the conclusion that Jesus's body had been stolen for some crazy reason and she was in deep despair. She had come to lovingly prepare his body for burial since it had not been done properly on Friday as Sabbath was quickly approaching. And now the grave was empty and so was she. Her hope was gone.

She's a picture of the emptiness that comes from not knowing Jesus. She did not yet know what Paul describes in Philippians, as *the power of his resurrection* Philippians 3:10. Mary Magdalene's hope had been dashed. She had had such plans for a bright future, and now the one on whom she had hung her hopes was not only dead, but disappeared. Her world closed in around her.

That's what a world without Jesus is like.

Then, along comes someone she assumes is the caretaker for the garden. Our text tells us that she does not realize it was Jesus. Maybe it was a supernatural thing or maybe her vision was clouded with tears so that she couldn't even see the person who was speaking. She certainly didn't expect it to be Jesus. After all, she had seen him die and his body taken from the cross and perhaps she'd even been there when he was laid in the tomb. Of course, she would not have expected it to be Jesus, but she was desperate, so she asked this intruder (and her grief is palpable) "*Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.*" John 20:15 NLT

That's when he said her name, and her tears no longer blurred her vision, it was Jesus, himself, right in front of her. It's her RABBONI! Her beloved teacher and friend. Now it is her joy that is palpable. And, I think you can at least imagine why.

Little did Mary realize the full impact of what a living Jesus – back from the dead – truly meant. But this is the beauty of what Easter represents. Jesus rose from the dead. And his resurrection made our resurrection a reality. **THIS** is what we mean by giving up death.

But it meant other things as well. It was a reminder that the promise of the Resurrection is not just for some, it's for all who believe. We will resume our study of the book of The Acts of the Apostles next week and in the course of that study, likely sometime in late May or early June, we will be looking at Acts 10 where Peter is given an amazing object lesson in the full extent of the Gospel. We will see how he learns, once and for all that the good news of the Resurrection of Jesus and all of his saving power is available to even non-Jewish people – the Gentiles. As a preview, let me read a few verses from acts 10, because Peter references the resurrection there. Listen (Read Acts 10:34-43)

The good news is a message of hope for every race and every person. The song says, “The vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.” If you think you’ve bad – just try being worse than a vilest offender and then think again. The power of the resurrection is for you – you just have to ask.

Jesus rose from the dead so we could give up death. This is a wonderful hope for a hopeless world. Michael Kelly writes, “Jesus's rising on Easter morning was more than a showy miracle to shock and awe his attackers and followers. When Jesus rose, he turned the entire order of the universe on its head. The resurrection shows us that death does not have the last word. God has the last word, and that word is life. Suffering and death end, but God's kingdom lasts forever.”

Jesus wasn't thumbing his nose at the religious establishment and saying “Hey, how do you like me now?” Instead he was proclaiming God's lasting Kingdom which is available for everyone who believes. Angela read from 1st Corinthians 15 and Paul tells us there that *the last enemy to be destroyed is death*. 1 Corinthians 15:26. We celebrate that today. On this Resurrection Day, savor eternal life. It starts now. Amen.