

## “God’s Promises”

Romans 6:3-11

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • April 16, 2017

I don’t know about you but I love Easter. Which is kind of ironic. Reformed Presbyterians have always believed that EVERY Sunday is Easter. We’re not supposed to treat any Sunday as more important than the others. But Easter is still one of my favorite holidays. I think sometimes, though, we can get a little fuzzy about what we’re celebrating. Most people know it has something to do with Jesus coming out of the tomb...to hide eggs...and if he sees his shadow there’s six more weeks of winter. Or something like that. Walmart has been running commercials lately with the slogan “Easter like you mean it.” But the whole commercial is about kids chasing Easter eggs. What are we really celebrating? Is Easter merely a celebration of Spring? Living in Pennsylvania for several years I can tell you that in many places it’s NOT spring, so it must be something else.

This morning we had the joy of celebrating the sacrament of baptism. A couple of months ago the Swords began talking to me about baptizing Samuel and they asked if there was any way we could do it on Easter Sunday. Immediately I said, “of course!” Easter and baptism were made for each other. That’s because they are about the same thing! In fact, in the early Church, all baptisms took place at sunrise on Easter morning, which is where the tradition of Easter sunrise services came from.

This morning I want you to see that Easter is the promise of baptism. To help us understand, we’re going to look at the *problem*, the *promises*, and the *proof*.

First, the *problem*. When we call Jesus savior, the question we want to ask is, “who is he saving and from what?” The “who” is you and me. We have a big problem and it’s called sin. Basically, sin is anything that gets between you and God. In another place in Romans, Paul says, “the wages of sin is death.” Sin is not primarily about the bad things we do. Those are really the symptoms. The big issue, as R.C.

Sproul says, is that we have “no inclination whatsoever in our souls toward the things of God – no interest, no passion, no love. We are dead.” He goes on to say that “Because we are spiritually dead, we are slaves to the sinful impulses and lusts that drive our behavior.” Nobody is spared this problem. We are all born with it. And here’s the really good news: there’s nothing you can do to fix your problem!

Why is that good news? Because it leads us to the *promises*. In today’s reading from Romans 6 we begin to understand the promises that God makes to each one of us, the promises of baptism. The Apostle Paul says, “do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” We understand that baptism is the visible, outward sign or symbol of something that God does in us. It’s the sign of God’s covenant with each of us.

In baptism, God promises three things to us. First of all, He promises that we are cleansed from sin. Verse 6 says, “our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with and that we should no longer be slaves to sin.” The reason that I think this is important for us today is that if we’re serious about baptism, we come to understand baptism as our real funeral. “We were therefore buried with Christ through baptism into death.” Each one of us, because of our baptism, has already died. We died with Christ. We had to die with Jesus because only then can we be raised with Him.

The second promise God makes to us in baptism is that we are united with Christ. The word united used here literally translates as “to grow together” or “to graft into.” When a plant is grafted, the shoot that is grafted in is cut from its native stock and now derives life from

the new stock. In the same way, you and I are cut off from our sinful nature and grafted into Jesus who is the source of our life from that point on. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "I am the vine and you are the branches."

Verse 5 says, "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection." The third promise from God in baptism is resurrection to new life. Death can never claim Jesus again nor those who are united to him through faith. I think it's important to note that in this passage, our participation in Christ's death is described in the past tense but our participation in the resurrection is described only in the future tense. This is part of the promise of God.

In the waters of baptism we are given a new identity. We are no longer who we were. We are "in Christ." As Paul says in 1 Corinthians, "You are not your own, you were bought with a price." One day each one of us will finish the race. But until our time comes to participate in the resurrection we realize that we have no life of our own, only the life of Christ. So live every day in a way that glorifies Him.

That brings us to the *proof*, which is where Easter comes in. If the promise of God is that we will have eternal life with Him, how can we know that we can trust that promise? The proof that the promise is true is that Jesus rose from the dead. He was really dead. There's no way that he could have survived the crucifixion. He was really buried in a tomb that was sealed. And he really walked out of that tomb days later, proving that He had conquered the power of sin and death.

There's a new movie that recently started showing in the theaters called *The Case for Christ*. The movie, which is based on the book, is the story of Lee Strobel, a *Chicago Tribune* investigative reporter who essentially set out to disprove Christianity, which meant he had to prove that the resurrection of Jesus didn't happen. In the process, Strobel learned what so many others who have tried to do the same thing learned. He learned that the evidence

strongly points to the fact that the Resurrection really did happen. As theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg has said, "The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live."

If you are united with Christ, symbolized by baptism and confirmed by publicly professing your faith in Jesus, then you *certainly* will live with him forever. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we are also resurrected people. You have the Holy Spirit within you, which the Bible calls God's down payment on eternal life. And the proof is that Jesus has already done it.

So what does Jesus' resurrection mean for us today? Everything! First of all, it's not just some dusty story from ancient history. Jesus *IS* alive. He is alive today. Now that Jesus is out of the tomb you never know where he'll show up. He promised that wherever two or more of his followers are gathered in his name that he would be there. We can experience His presence and His power all the time. No matter what you're going through, Jesus is available to walk with you through it. Second, because Jesus conquered death, we no longer have to be afraid of death if we are united with Him. Verse 9: "We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him." We will all one day face our earthly death. But we don't have to be afraid of it because we know something far better is waiting for us.

Third, because we don't have to fear death, we can begin really living right now. Dallas Willard used to say, "If you want to go to heaven, don't wait. Now is the time to do it." What he was saying is that we can live as "resurrection people." We have already been spiritually raised with Christ. You have God the Holy Spirit within you. You can now live boldly for Christ. You can choose to live a holy life. You are now able to consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. You are able to bring the light of Jesus with you

everywhere you go, and to every person you meet. That's the Easter promise.

Finally, if you have not experienced the forgiveness and the assurance of eternal life that comes from committing yourself to Christ,

please don't wait. Make that decision today to trust Jesus as your savior. I would love to help you.

*Amen.*