



Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

EASTER MESSAGE
MATTHEW 28:1-10
APRIL 9, 2023

"WORK YOUR WORLD"

*"Now after the sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week" – those or very similar words form the beginning of each of accounts of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Well why not – if you're going to rise from the dead, you may as well get an early start – right? You might say Jesus was the original "early riser"! All four accounts of the resurrection take pains to say the visit by women to the tomb was on *"the first day of the week in the first blush of daylight."**

Why? The Jewish Sabbath – their day of worship and rest - is Saturday, but that 'day' begins at sundown on Friday and ends at sundown on Saturday. The Sabbath plays a significant role in the story of our Lord's passion. The few followers Jesus had left when he died were anxious to remove his body from the cross and bury it before the Sabbath began – at sunset on Friday. Otherwise, since burial was considered "work" they would have had to leave Jesus' body on the cross until sunrise on Sunday.

While these details may seem trivial, they're quite meaningful. All the gospel writers, particularly John – whose resurrection account says, *"very early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark..."* - want to tell us that Easter is the first day of God's new creation. If you want to press the analogy – Easter is the birthday of God's new world.

Genesis 2 says that for six days God worked in creation, but on the seventh he rested. Jesus, according to the Jewish reckoning of time, died on the sixth day of the week – Friday – his "work" completed three hours before sundown. God then observed a "sabbath" by letting his son rest in his tomb till *"after the sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week."*

Then, the gospel writers all propose, God started creation over. Why not – if you're going to save and remake the world you may as well get an early start! Mind you Easter was not some radical altering of the created order – nobody's arguing anything about creation's physical characteristics changed. The "laws of nature" that were in place remain in place. The moon still orbits the earth, the earth the sun and certain constellations, if you use your imagination still look like warriors shooting a bow and arrow, or a kitchen kettle, or a kite with tail. The flora and fauna of the world continued pretty much as they had from time immemorial, although in these parts deer getting pretty scarce by the end of November!

Nations continued to exist, languages and cultures proliferated as in the past, rising and falling as they always will. Women continued to have babies in travail and men worked by the sweat of their brow. So, what made Easter 'God's New Creation' - what was or is earth shattering about it besides the earthquake Matthew says arrived along with an angel of the Lord who rolled the stone of an empty tomb away?

Well for starters – and its a pretty good starter, your personal circumstances vis a vis God were altered forever. There is nothing so important in your life as believing Jesus, the Son of God, died for your sins. As from the cross where his first words were *"Father forgive them, they know not what they do..."*, Jesus forgives you. Your death will not be your end, but only the beginning of what you were created for – eternal life. The God who made your body loves it and has truly wonderful plans for it. By believing, John 20:31 says, you have life in his name – you are, II Corinthians 5:17 says, a "new creation".

Moreover, the subtle but intentional allusions to creation in the stories of the resurrection – ‘*toward the dawn of the first day of the week*’ that is, tell us quite plainly that because of Easter you’re a sinless man or a sinless woman again – as man and woman were in Genesis before a serpent plucked at their pride and awakened self-serving human nature. I also believe the intent of the gospel writers is remind us of something God once said to that sinless man and woman.

In creation God gave all sorts of commands. Two are of particular importance for us today. Genesis 2:15 says man was placed in the garden to “*to work and keep it.*” Genesis 1:28 says man and woman were to, “*be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth*” - have a big family I suppose, but more than that – it was a command to bring the goodness of the garden to the world. On the day of resurrection, from the garden where his tomb was, Jesus commanded to his followers – “*go to Galilee, there you will see me*” and followed that up by telling them “*go, make disciples of all nations.*” Take the goodness of the garden to the world – work the world ... multiply.

The first followers of Jesus were called to go and do something with their lives – a unique call to be sure, but how these men and women were to “*work the world*”, to “*be fruitful and multiply.*” I could go on – I rather enjoy this sort of stuff, but I know some of you (have dinner plans) put a ham in the oven before you came to church today, so I better wrap this up!

I’ll do so by challenging you for Jesus’ sake to find a way to “work your world” – the personal pocket of existence you call “*your life.*” What does your life mean? Well, evidently a lot if Jesus gave his for yours. If you were to shape your world by following Christ – if that is a call you have or would accept, that means you are asked to consider, prayerfully of course, where in “your life” you can exhibit the resurrection of Jesus – where you can inject small but powerful symbols that you take your cues from the *new creation* Jesus initiated on the first Easter.

We do well to remember the old Bible camp song “*He’s got the whole world in his hands.*” Indeed, He does! But you have a hand in “your world”. When you go home today and offer up a prayer of thanks to God over your Easter dinner – ask also how you and the others with you might hold, with equal fervor, with hands uplifted in prayer, the pain struggles, and opportunities in your world and the love God displayed in Jesus Christ for it.

To the Risen Lord Jesus be the glory. AMEN