

Easter Sunday – Making All Things New
Matthew 4:17; Luke 4:43, 9:22, 13:32
March 31, 2024
Pastor TamiLuckhardt

A five-year-old was in the car with her father as they drove past a cemetery. Noticing a large pile of dirt beside a grave, the child pointed and said, "Look, Dad, one got out!" I laugh, but now, every time I pass a graveyard, I'm reminded of the One who got out. Today we have come to celebrate the one who got out! The one who gets us out too.

John tells us that early that morning, of the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away. This was the Mary whom Jesus had set free from seven demons that had taken hold of her life. As a result, she became a follower of Jesus. And on that Sunday morning, when she arrived at the tomb, she discovered that the stone had been removed. Grave robbers were common in those days. So, she ran to where the disciples were hiding: "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him." Peter and John ran back to the tomb, and the only thing they found in the tomb were the cloths used to wrap Jesus' body after he had been taken from the cross. This was odd. Why take a body and leave behind the cloth used to wrap the body? Such cloths were considered valuable, which was generally what grave robbers were seeking. So, if the body was stolen, why would they leave the clothes and then place them exactly as they would be if the body had been there?

John writes in great detail throughout his gospel. Here, in verse 7, he writes that the cloth, which was placed over Jesus' face, (some translations call it a napkin, others a handkerchief, others, a face cloth or burial cloth) was not just thrown aside like the other grave clothes. But John takes an entire verse to tell us that the cloth was neatly folded and was placed where Jesus' head had been. What was the significance of that? In the Hebrew tradition, when a servant was waiting for their master to finish eating a meal, they would know, if when the master left the table, and having used his napkin to wipe his fingers and his mouth, to clean his beard, and then tossed the napkin aside, it meant he was done eating. But if the napkin was folded, it meant "I'm coming back." So, the folded face cloth might have been John's way of saying to the readers, Jesus is coming back.

I find it interesting that at his birth, Jesus was wrapped in bands of cloth, leftover bits of fabric, for his swaddling clothes. Leftover fabric used to cradle the baby King, left behind as God in the flesh grew and grew. At the end of his life, his body is once again wrapped in bands of cloth. At his burial they covered the Prince of Peace, who had died to conquer sin and death. But now the cloth is empty. Those grave clothes had been left behind, no longer necessary.

If you have been in our building lately, perhaps you have noticed a large loom in our atrium. Since last October, we have been taking old plastic bags, cutting them into strips and weaving sleeping mats for those folks who have no home. This is a project on which that many hands have worked, from our eQuality associates who are here during the week, to our kids and youth, adult faith groups and even some of you after worship each week. Through the help of many hands, to date you have woven four mats. The fifth mat is on the loom, and you are invited to pop by to take a look, maybe even weave a line or two. Everything old, made new again.

Growing up, we always had a rag bucket in the garage. Anyone else have a rag bucket in their home? Any shirt or towel that had seen better days went into this bucket and we used them for everything from washing the car, to dusting furniture, cleaning screens, and cleaning up spills.

Everything old, made new again. My mother grew up during the depression, one of ten children, the daughter of a coal miner in the hills of West Virginia. I asked my her how she used rags. She told me they used rags for so many things; for cleaning, of course, but also to block the drafts in the windows and doors of their house, to tie up the tomato plants in the garden, for rag curls (anyone remember rag curls?) She also told me about these men, called Ragmen, who would come through town with their wagons and people would bring out their bundled paper, rags, old pots and pans, bottles, and anything else he might buy. He would pay them a few pennies for these remnants, then take them to some junkyard where he probably made a few pennies profit himself. Times were hard and everybody benefited a little from transactions with the rag man. Everything old, made new again.

On, this Easter, I share with you the story of another Ragman, as told by author, Walter Wangerin.

I saw a strange sight the other day. I could hardly believe it except that I saw it with my own two eyes. It was before dawn on that Friday morning, and I noticed a man, handsome and strong, walking the streets and alleys of the city. He was pulling a cart that was filled with clothes that were bright and new and clean. And he was calling out in a loud, clear voice, "Rags. Rags. New rags for old. Give me your old rags and I'll give you new."

I thought this was strange. Here was a man, probably 6'4", arms big and strong as tree limbs. His eyes flashed with intelligence. What was he doing? Couldn't he find a better job? Where was he going? And so, I followed him. My curiosity drove me, and I was not disappointed. "Rags. Rags. New rags for old. Give me your old rags and I'll give you new."

Soon the Ragman saw a woman sitting on the steps of her back porch. She was crying a thousand tears into a handkerchief. Her knees and elbows made a sad X. Her shoulders shook. Her heart was breaking. The Ragman stopped his cart and pulled a brand new, clean handkerchief from his cart. Quietly, he walked to the woman, stepping around tin cans, dead toys, and an old broken-down bicycle. He leaned down and spoke with such gentleness. He said, "You give me that rag and I'll give you this new one." She looked up at him and just nodded 'yes'. And he slipped from her hands that handkerchief and place on her open palms this brand new, bright, clean handkerchief.

Then, as he began to pull his cart again, he did a strange thing. He put her tear-stained handkerchief to his face, and he began to weep and sob uncontrollably. His shoulders were shaking, and his heart was breaking. Yet, she was left without a tear. "Rags. Rags. New rags for old," cried the sobbing, intelligent, wise man. I continued to follow him.

Soon he came across a little girl whose head was wrapped in a bandage with a stain of blood on her forehead and a trickle of blood that had dripped down her cheek and dried there. The Ragman looked at her with such pity. He pulled out of his cart a brand new, beautiful, bright yellow bonnet. And he walked over to the little girl and with such gentleness said, "You give me that rag on your head and I'll give you a new one." She just looked up at him. She trusted those eyes and that voice. So, she nodded, and he took the bandage off her head and put it around his own head. And he took that bright yellow bonnet and set it on her head.

And I gasped at what I saw next because with the bandage went the wound. On his head there was now dark, more substantial blood, his own blood and a trickle of blood began to drip down his cheek. But she was left without a mark. "Rags. Rags. New rags for old," cried the sobbing, bleeding, intelligent, wise man.

The day was beginning to show its first light even before the sun could be seen. And the Ragman came across a man who was leaning against a pole. "Are you going to work?" He shook his head. "Do you have a job?" And the man sneered at the Ragman and said, "Are you crazy?" As he pulled away from the pole, the sleeve of his jacket was limp, the cuff stuffed into a pocket. He had no right arm. So, the Ragman said, "You give me your jacket and I'll give you mine." With so much quiet authority in his voice, the one-armed man took off his jacket and the Ragman did the same. And I trembled at what I saw, for with the Ragman's jacket went his arm. And when the one-armed man put on the Ragman's jacket, he had two arms, thick and strong as tree limbs. But the Ragman was left with just one arm. "Rags. Rags. New rags for old," cried the sobbing, bleeding, intelligent, wise man," as he pulled his cart on with one arm.

Soon he came upon a drunk who was passed out on the sidewalk and covered with an old army blanket. With his one arm, the Ragman took that old blanket and slung it over his shoulder and out of his cart, he pulled a brand new, beautiful blanket and gently laid it over that old, sick, tired, drunken man. And beside the man, he left a whole new set of clothes. Though he was weeping uncontrollably, bleeding freely from his forehead, pulling his cart with one arm, stumbling for drunkenness, and falling again and again, that old, sick, tired Ragman went on.

I kept following him. Where was he going? One street after the next. One mile after the next, through the streets and alleys of the city until he came to the city's limits. Yet, he went on. Where was he going? He came to the city dump, the landfill. I wanted to follow him, but I didn't know what he was doing. I was scared so I held back and hid. He was so old, so tired, so weak now.

With labor, he pulled his cart up that pile of garbage, stumbling, falling, bleeding. He got to the top and cleared a little place. He took the handkerchief, and the jacket, and the bandage and folded them up and laid them down, like a pillow for his head. And in torment, he laid down and slung that old army blanket over him, sighed, and the Ragman died.

I wept to see the change in this man. I didn't even know his name, but I had grown to love that Ragman. Every wound and heartache had disappeared at his touch, and he just took it all. Now he was dead. I was exhausted. So, I slumped into an old, abandoned, junk car. I don't know how I did it. I'd never done it before and I've never done it since, but I slept all day Friday and Friday night, then on through Saturday and Saturday night. But on Sunday morning, the bright sun slammed through the windshield of that old car, and it woke me up. I blinked and looked up to the top of that hill and I saw the first wonder of all. The Ragman was standing up, alive! He was folding that army blanket. He had two arms as thick and strong as tree limbs. There wasn't a sign of sorrow or old age, or pain or torment. There was that scar on his head, but he was alive. And every rag that he had taken now shined through cleanliness.

I couldn't stop myself; I walked up that garbage hill and I told the Ragman my name. I was a sorry sight standing next to him. But the Ragman just smiled and said, "give me your old, dirty rags and I'll give you new." So, I did. I gave my old tired, dirty rags to the Ragman, Jesus Christ, and he gave me new.

So, I am wondering, do you know the Ragman? The one who takes our rags and exchanges them for something beautiful? Through his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ takes our failures, our mistakes, our shame, our addictions, our pride, our woundedness. He takes those old rags and gives us something new, something better in their place. He gives us hope,

forgiveness, peace, grace, purpose, joy, and unconditional love as we stand beside him and say, "Take my old rags and make me new."

What is your rag? What have you been holding onto? You know, your rags no longer need to define you. This Easter, you can give them to the Ragman; Jesus Christ, who has conquered sin and death, who longs to take your dirty rags and mine. This is the Easter you can say to Jesus, "Lord, take my rags and make me a new creation." And you too will be a wonder beside him. *Everything* old, made new again.

Today we celebrate Christ's resurrection. Today we celebrate our resurrection too - Our freedom from sin and death, because of the One who first loved us. Today we celebrate our new life in Christ.

Let's pray: Alleluia! Everlasting God, we give you our thanks and praise! Christ is risen! We are now an Easter people, blessed by your miracle of life after death. All our hope and trust is in your grace, O God. Out of darkness comes light; out of despair comes new promises. Fill our lives with a joy that is beyond understanding, remove our doubts with a faith that is deep and whole. Heal our spirits with your song of hope. The promise of the Resurrection changes us forever, that is a blessing beyond imagination! Thanks to you, our God, and our Savior! Amen!

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of April 7, 2024

Weekly Prayer

Creating God, you envisioned and brought into being all of creation and humanity. Humanity is just one part of your incredible Word. As I read your Word today, open my mind and heart to the delicacy and interconnectedness of all that you have made. May my insight into Your wonder-filled creation grow. Amen.

Monday, April 8

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-3, 24-31

When God began to create the heavens and the earth the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God's wind swept over the waters. God said, "Let there be light." And so light appeared.

God said, "Let the earth produce every kind of living thing: livestock, crawling things, and wildlife." And that's what happened. God made every kind of wildlife, every kind of livestock, and every kind of creature that crawls on the ground. God saw how good it was. Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth."

God created humanity in God's own image,
in the divine image God created them,
male and female God created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground." Then God said, "I now give to you all the plants on the earth that yield seeds and all the trees whose fruit produces its seeds within it. These will be your food. To all wildlife, to all the birds in the sky, and to everything crawling on the ground—to everything that breathes—I give all the green grasses for food." And that's what happened. God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good. There was evening and there was morning: the sixth day.

Observation

This is a portion of the first of two creation stories found in Genesis. The writer(s) wrote poetically, and Hebrew priests may well have used the story in worship. Many of Israel's neighbors in the ancient Near Eastern world had their own creation stories, but the Bible's account was the only one that saw creation as fundamentally good. The world came spotless and "supremely good" from God's hand.

Application

Professor John Goldingay, in his book, *Genesis for Everyone*, expressed the thought of Genesis 1:31 in terms we may find it easier to relate to: "At the end of the week of creation, God is in a position to stand back, survey the six days' work as a whole, and smile in satisfaction. The project has come out very well. It looks great." Make a list of 3-5 ways in which you still see the original goodness of the creator's intention in our world.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for the miraculous gift of our beautiful, abundant earth, and for entrusting it to my care. Help me be a faithful steward of your gifts, always mindful of my choices and their impact on your world. Amen.

Did You Know?

Did you know that spending time in nature—even as little as 20 – 30 minutes a few days a week—may reduce stress, anxiety, and depression? Scientific studies show that almost any form of immersion in the natural world may improve your overall well-being and engagement with the larger human community. So, get outside and enjoy God's good world!

Tuesday, April 9

Scripture: Genesis 2:4-9, 15-17

On the day the LORD God made earth and sky— before any wild plants appeared on the earth, and before any field crops grew, because the LORD God hadn't yet sent rain on the earth and there was still no human being to farm the fertile land, though a stream rose from the earth and watered all of the fertile land—the LORD God formed the human from the topsoil of the fertile land and blew life's breath into his nostrils. The human came to life. The LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east and put there the human he had formed. In the fertile land, the LORD God grew every beautiful tree with edible fruit, and also he grew the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The LORD God took the human and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it. The LORD God commanded the human, "Eat your fill from all of the garden's trees; but don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because on the day you eat from it, you will die!"

Observation

Genesis' second creation story was folksier and less structured than the one in Genesis 1:1-2:3. It said God created a human first, before any plants or animals. (If read as literal history or science, it would contradict Genesis 1.) It used "Yahweh" (translated "LORD") rather than the more generic "Elohim" as God's name. Here God gave the newly created humans a "garden," a perfect setting in which to thrive, and settled them "to take care of it."

Application

The Hebrew words for human (adam) and fertile land (adamah) sound alike and emphasize the connection between human beings and their land. This connection was intuitive for the largely

agricultural people of Israel. In what ways have many of us in more industrialized, office-centered, technological ways of life lost that sense of connection? For what reasons do we need to remember that the land still nourishes our life?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, make me ever more aware of the ways in which my choices affect the people, the other forms of life, and even the life-sustaining earth around me. Amen.

Did You Know?

Up to 100 million monarch butterflies migrate every year, up to 3,000 miles each way. Minnesota is one of their summer breeding grounds, with peak migration in mid-September. Planting native plants can help sustain this butterfly population, which has suffered substantial loss of habitat due to development. Ask your local garden center for help!

Wednesday, April 10

Scripture: Psalm 19:1-4, 33:6-9, 12-15

Heaven is declaring God's glory;
the sky is proclaiming his handiwork.
One day gushes the news to the next,
and one night informs another what needs to be known.
Of course, there's no speech, no words—
their voices can't be heard—
but their sound extends throughout the world;
their words reach the ends of the earth.
God has made a tent in heaven for the sun.
The skies were made by the LORD's word,
all their starry multitude by the breath of his mouth.
He gathered the ocean waters into a heap;
he put the deep seas into storerooms.
All the earth honors the LORD;
all the earth's inhabitants stand in awe of him.
Because when he spoke, it happened!
When he commanded, there it was!
The nation whose God is the LORD,
the people whom God has chosen as his possession,
is truly happy!
The LORD looks down from heaven;
he sees every human being.
From his dwelling place God observes
all who live on earth.
God is the one who made all their hearts,
the one who knows everything they do.

Observation

Owen Gingerich, Emeritus Professor of Astronomy at Harvard, in his book, *God's Universe*, wrote: "Rather than believe that the universe is simply meaningless, a macabre joke, I would prefer to accept a universe created with intention and purpose by a loving God, and perhaps created with just enough freedom that conscience and responsibility are part of the mix....the elements are just right, the environment is fit for life, and slowly life forms have populated the earth." His precise teacher's prose echoed the poetry of the ancient psalmists.

Application

Perhaps drawing on David's outdoor life as a shepherd, Psalm 19:1, 3-4 said "Heaven is declaring God's glory.... of course, there's no speech, no words—their voices can't be heard—but their sound extends throughout the world." When has nature spoken most powerfully to you of God's glory, goodness, and power? When have you seen nature's ability to "speak" spoiled by human carelessness or greed?

Prayer

O Lord, open my eyes to the signs of your creative power and beauty that can still be seen in our world. Fill my heart with wonder at the wisdom and grace reflected in so much I can see. Amen.

Did You Know?

The Milky Way galaxy—home to the Sun and the Earth—contains millions of stars and is just one of billions of galaxies in the universe. Even at the speed of light, it would take 100,000 years to travel across our galaxy. In the night sky, you can witness God's glory and power.

Thursday, April 11

Scripture: John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.

The Word was with God in the beginning.
Everything came into being through the Word,
and without the Word
nothing came into being.

What came into being
through the Word was life,
and the life was the light for all people.

The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

Observation

Many Greek philosophers identified "the Word" (Greek "logos") as the great idea behind the universe. The Hebrew Bible began (like John's gospel) with "in the beginning," and said God spoke all that is into being. John defined what he meant by "light" more specifically. The person Jesus he had seen, heard, and known, he said, was the light who broke into the world's darkness. In coming to earth, Jesus the creator was creating anew.

Application

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light" (verse 5). Both Genesis and John said God created "light," in both the physical and spiritual senses. Have there been times when it felt to you as though darkness was trying to put out God's light in your life? In what ways have you learned to nurture your connection with Jesus, so that God's light can keep shining in and through you?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, what came into being through you was life, was light. Thank you for creating new life in me as your light reaches to the dark corners of my being. Amen.

Did You Know?

You can find comprehensive recycling information for Hennepin County Recycling here: <https://www.hennepin.us/recycling>. This is one way we can help renew the Earth and care for God's creation. If you want to know if something can be recycled and where, visit their web site for more information.

Friday, April 12

Scripture: Colossians 1:15-20

The Son is the image of the invisible God,
the one who is first over all creation,
Because all things were created by him:
both in the heavens and on the earth,
the things that are visible and the things that are invisible.
Whether they are thrones or powers,
or rulers or authorities,
all things were created through him and for him.
He existed before all things,
and all things are held together in him.
He is the head of the body, the church,
who is the beginning,
the one who is firstborn from among the dead
so that he might occupy the first place in everything.
Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in him,
and he reconciled all things to himself through him—
whether things on earth or in the heavens.
He brought peace through the blood of his cross.

Observation

Scholar N. T. Wright noted that today's passage made a striking claim: "Jesus holds together the old world and the new, creation and new creation. The 'salvation' or 'redemption' on offer in Christianity is sometimes described as if it meant that the old world, the ordinary world of creation we all live in, was worthless.... Jesus Christ, says the poem boldly, is the one through whom and for whom the whole creation was made in the first place."

Application

Today's passage held an even bigger truth: The world is also full of ugliness and evil, summed up in death itself. That wasn't the original intention, and the living God has now acted to heal the world of the wickedness and corruption that have so radically infected it. The Jesus through whom the world was made in the first place is the same Jesus through whom the world has now been redeemed. Have you ever realized that Easter is not only about saving people, but about Jesus acting to redeem our entire planet?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I am ultimately your creation, and you love me. But you redeemed and love the whole creation. Keep teaching me how to love and value what you made. Amen.

Did You Know?

In the United States, the wind energy potential of just three states—Kansas, North Dakota, and Texas— would be sufficient to meet electricity demand from coast to coast.

Saturday, April 13

Scripture: Revelation 11:15-18, 22:1-5

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying,
“The kingdom of the world has become
the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ,
and he will rule forever and always.”

Then the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces
and worshipped God. They said,

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
who is and was,
for you have taken your great power and enforced your rule.
The nations were enraged, but your wrath came.

The time came for the dead to be judged.

The time came to reward your servants, the prophets and saints,
and those who fear your name, both small and great,
and to destroy those who destroy the earth.”

Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water,^[a] shining like crystal, flowing from the
throne of God and the Lamb through the middle of the city’s main street. On each side of the
river is the tree of life, which produces twelve crops of fruit, bearing its fruit each month. The
tree’s leaves are for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse. The throne of
God and the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his
name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more. They won’t need the light of a lamp or
the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shine on them, and they will rule forever and always.

Observation

Scholar N. T. Wright wrote that for too many Christians, “the aim of Christianity as a whole, and
of conversion, justification, sanctification, and salvation, is seen in terms of leaving earth behind
and going home to a place called heaven.” Instead, he said, “For the early Christians, the
resurrection of Jesus launched God’s new creation upon the world, beginning to fulfill the prayer
Jesus taught his followers, that God’s kingdom would come “on earth as in heaven” (Matt. 6:10),
and anticipating the “new heavens and a new earth” (Isa. 65:17, 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1)
promised by Isaiah and again in the New Testament.” That was why Revelation said judgment
awaits those who “destroy the earth”—the earth is not temporary and disposable. Rather, God’s
goal (in which we can join) is to recreate and restore the world to the beauty and harmony for
which it was always intended.

Application

Where is “heaven,” anyway? Had you ever before noticed how consistently the Biblical prophets
said our eternal hope is in a “new heaven and a new earth”? How does it shift the way(s) you
think about this planet if God’s plan is that God’s people spend eternity on this earth restored,
redeemed, and made new—if this may be “heaven”? In what ways have you, your community
and your country cared well for the earth? Can you identify areas in which you want to alter your
lifestyle to more actively join in God’s work of restoring and caring for creation (including, of
course, yourself and your well-being)?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I can observe ways in which your creative power works in this vast universe, yet

much remains mysterious. I not only believe, but count on, your promise that I can be with you for all eternity. Amen.

Did You Know?

When food goes to the landfill, the nutrients in the food never return to the soil and the rotting food produces the potent greenhouse gas methane. Preventing food waste or composting helps reduce methane emissions and creates healthy soil. Learn more at:

<https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/sustainable-management-food-basics#what>