



# Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
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FEBRUARY 25, 2018  
THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT  
MY HEART AS SANCTUARY, MY LIFE AS PRAYER

## Will You Wake Up Different on Easter Morning? Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Mark 8:31-38

Have you ever had someone ask you a question that completely stumped you? As a child, I was quite skilled at asking questions to the point that one of our neighbors had to appeal to my mother to call me back home so that he could get some yard work done in peace. Apparently, some folks don't like to explain why they do every little thing that they do. Go figure!

I think that often as parents, as teachers, as office workers, as business owners, as store keepers, as community volunteers, as budding scholars, as whomever, we have the inclination to answer every question that is put to us whether or not we know the answer. I will confess that most ministers, myself included, tend to attempt an answer to every question that comes our way.

Obviously there are many questions to which we don't know the answer but we can go and look them up. We used to pull the *World Book* or *Encyclopedia Britannica* off the shelf. Now we just ask Siri or Alexa all of those questions! Every once in a while, however, someone throws a question at you that you may not be able to answer and no one else can answer either. That happened to me.

A year or so ago, I ran into a question that has dogged me ever since. It is a question asked by author Rachel Held Evans in her blog which offers suggestions for how we can best experience Lent. Her question is a good question. Maybe it is too good. I'll let you judge.

Rachel Held Evans asked, "When I wake up on Resurrection Sunday morning, how will I be different?"<sup>1</sup>

That is a good question. It is an obvious question to ask people who are on their way to Easter. It can also be a disconcerting question for some of us who have never considered that question before.

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<sup>1</sup>Rachel Held Evans, "40 Ideas for Lent 2015," *Blog* (February 17, 2015); available online at: <https://rachelheldevans.com/blog/40-ideas-for-lent-2015>.

If she had asked the question, "When I wake up on Resurrection Sunday morning, how will Jesus be different?" I have a ready answer for her: "He is alive—raised to new life!" If she had asked, "When I wake up on Resurrection Sunday morning, how will the world be different?" I would say with the Apostle Paul,

'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, 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 15:54b-57

But that is not the question she asked. She put a question in my mouth and yours, in my heart and yours: "When I wake up on Resurrection Sunday morning, how will I be different?"

I must admit that I don't know the answer to that question.

It's not that the previous answers don't apply to this very personal question. They do. On Easter morning we celebrate that Jesus is alive and raised to new life, a life that he offers to us all. We do proclaim that the power of death and sin are defeated. Those answers, however, are true outside of ourselves and always will be. The question I don't have an answer for is: "When I wake up on Easter morning, how will I be different?"

I don't know all of the reasons that the Spirit of God impressed the spiritual "Here's One" upon the heart of the person who first sang it. I do know that when I hear it sung, it echoes somewhere in my own soul.

Talk about a child that does love Jesus, here's one.  
Talk about a child that's been converted, here's one.  
Ever since I heard the gospel story,  
I've been walkin' up the path to glory.  
Talk about a child that does love Jesus, here's one.

The spirituals have staying power because they tell our faith story. Like you, I love Jesus and have for as long as I remember. Like many of you, I have been converted, or have claimed Jesus as my Lord and Savior for a long time. Ever since then we have been walking up that path to glory. Granted, I have taken a few foot paths that have meandered off to the side. Sometimes I have chosen what I thought was a shortcut or a more attractive

route or what appeared to be an easier trail, but basically I have been walking the same path you have. For us, the question of “When I wake up on Easter morning, how will I be different?” isn’t a matter of will I be “saved” or not. The question is whether or not I will be different. Will the journey of Lent have changed me somehow? Does my faith make a difference in who I am?

Too often, I fear, we sell the Gospel short in terms of the power it offers to change life. Granted, we talk a lot about the personal change it brings about in lifestyle and attitude, but do we really consider the life-altering effect that the Good News of the Gospel offers to us? Abram and Sarai took a risk in following God to an unknown land in hopes of a better life for them and their descendants which they imagined to be great in number. Certainly God promised to give them descendants that would outnumber the stars in the sky or the grains of sand in the sea (perhaps even God has a tendency toward hyperbole now and then).

Abram and Sarai were ready for their family to begin and grow. God, however, intended for Abram and Sarai to change and grow for themselves. To symbolize this transformation, God told Abram that he would no longer be known as Abram, which means “ancestor”; instead, he would be called Abraham, which means “ancestor of a multitude.” In that day and time, names spoke your character, they identified who you were. Such a name would distinguish Abraham in many ways. Likewise, Sarai became Sarah. Both names mean “princess,” but the change in the name indicates a potential change in the person. Because of their encounter with God, Abraham and Sarah were changed. Though the way was not always easy and they did not always make the best choices, Abraham and Sarah were different because of their relationship with God.

Likewise, Simon Peter, the brash and outspoken fisherman—become—apostle changed because of his relationship with Christ. This morning we heard Peter’s rebuke of Jesus when it was suggested that Jesus would suffer and be put to death like a common thief. Later on he would even deny that he knew Jesus, not once, but three times. Eventually, however, Peter changed because of God’s engagement with his life. He became the first person to publically preach the Gospel and led the gathered church in Jerusalem. The fisherman named Simon (which means “one who hears”) eventually learned to actually listen to Jesus and became known as Peter (“the rock”) who was steadfast and foundational in establishing the fellowship of believers known as the Church. Our encounter with God changes us.

“When I wake up on Easter morning, how will I be different?” I cannot answer that question today, but I can decide to do some things that will ensure that I won’t be the same on Easter morning as I am today. I have to want to be different and I have to recognize the ways in which I need to be different. That is the calling of the Gospel.

There are many other questions that we can and should ask ourselves in order to get at, first, “Who am I now?” and, second, “Who does God want me to be?”. Most of us know the answers to those two questions, but we do not often want to answer them. As a way of getting to the heart of the matter and, after all, the heart is what truly matters in terms of our faith, I offer a few questions suggested by Rachel Held Evans for your consideration.<sup>2</sup>

First, let us ask ourselves if there is something in our life—a habit, a grudge, a fear, a prejudice, an addiction, an emotional barrier, a form of excess—that keeps me from loving God with my heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving my neighbor as myself? If so, how might I address that issue during this season of Lent?

Like Simon Peter, we need to spend time listening to God, but often God speaks in surprising ways. Sometimes God’s voice is heard in the voices of people who are poor or oppressed or marginalized or suffering in some way. Perhaps we should ask ourselves, “To whom should I be listening this season? How can I learn to listen to other people whose perspective and experiences might differ from my own?”

Most of us already seek out a particular spiritual discipline to help us during Lent. Choosing special times to pray, following a devotional guide or writing devotions of our own, reading scripture, walking the labyrinth, trying meditation, or some other spiritual exercise might be a needed change for our life of faith. What can I do each day that might help me grow spiritually?

Rachel Held Evans also reminds us that “the cycle of death and resurrection is central to the Christian faith” and asks, “In what ways is that cycle present in my life right now? Where might there be necessary change, suffering, death and decay, and how might new life emerge from those experiences?” Many of us deal daily with the effects of aging on our bodies, our minds, our relationships, and our ability to relate to the world as we once did. What new things might God do through us as we let go of some abilities and learn that we have new ones?

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<sup>2</sup>The following suggestions are gleaned from the above mentioned blog article.

These are a few of the questions we can ask ourselves as we think seriously about the main question, “When I wake up on Easter morning, how will I be different?” I don’t know for certain, but I hope I will be changed somehow. I know the possibility is there.

Earlier we sang a hymn written by Natalie Sleeth. It was written when her husband was ill and first sung at his funeral. It is a song about the promise of life that comes out of death. Singing this hymn during Lent reminds us of the promise of change that is always possible if we pay attention to our lives, honestly seek God’s guidance, and willingly give ourselves to the Good News that the kingdom of God is at hand, as near as the air we breathe, and then live into that Good News.

In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree;  
in cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free!  
In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be,  
unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.<sup>3</sup>

Within each of us—just as within a flower bulb or the seed of a fruit tree—is the potential to be beautiful and meaningful, creative and caring. The promise is not one of fame and fortune. The beauty of which we speak is not that sought by celebrities and news hounds. It is a beauty of the soul which shines out of everything good that we do. Our creativity is not the artistry that wins awards; rather, it is the compassionate wisdom that helps other people walk a little easier along the path to glory. The Christian life is one of dying to self and being raised to new life. It is one of putting off one kind of being human and happily putting on the gift of being created in the image of God.

“When I wake up on Easter morning, how will I be different?” I am not certain, but I cannot wait to find out! May Easter morning find us all different by the grace and transformation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord. And may we wake up with our minds “stayed on Jesus.”<sup>4</sup> Amen.

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<sup>3</sup>Natalie Sleeth, “In the Bulb There is a Flower,” © 1986 Hope Publishing Company.

<sup>4</sup>“I Woke Up This Morning,” African-American Spiritual.

February 25,2018

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We find ourselves at that point in the year when the weather changes quickly and what was winter one day feels like summer the next day and turns cold again the day after that. We are reminded that our own faithfulness, like the weather, sometimes vacillates from day to day. But you, O God, are constant in your faithfulness and steadfast in your love for us. For that we are grateful. For that we offer our praise.

Because we are not always constant in what we think or believe or how we act, we ask that you guide us, O God. During this season of Lent, lead us on a path of discovery that will help us to better understand what it means to follow you in faith. Walk with us when we choose a way that is not of your choosing and teach us why poor choices are detrimental to us and to the people around us. And during this time, cause us to stop every once in a while, to rest, to listen, and to ponder the wonder of being a child of God.

We know all too well that being human means being fragile at times. We seek your help during days when we are ill with a passing sickness or challenged by a long and dreadful disease. We thank you for all of the medical resources that are available to us and pray for the right people and best treatments to help us in our quest to be well. Above all we are grateful for the caregivers and friends who daily demonstrate their love and yours.

We admit that our world does not feel as safe and happy as it once did. We are anxious and worried for our children, for our community, for our nation, and for our world. We are puzzled that we never seem to learn lessons from our tendency toward violence. We don't understand why we cannot resolve our problems peacefully, why we cannot respect one another, and why we do not live well together. Help us, O God, for we do not seem to be able to help ourselves.

In these warm winter days, we feel the nudges of springtime rebirth. Although colder days will surely return, help us to remember that in life, what appears to be death, often surprises us with new growth. Surprise us, O God, as together we make our way to Easter and the resurrection you offer to us all through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.