



# Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
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APRIL 1, 2018  
RESURRECTION SUNDAY  
MY HEART AS SANCTUARY, MY LIFE AS PRAYER

## My Heart as Sanctuary, My Life as Prayer I Corinthians 15:1-11; John 20:1-18

Another Lenten journey has been completed, another Easter Sunday has arrived! We have reflected, examined, confessed, and traveled our way to this day when we can finally proclaim again: Jesus Christ is raised from the dead! He is alive! Hallelujah!

The more somber and introspective hymns can be put aside and we can finally sing our alleluias again. For me, one of the blessings of Easter Sunday is that we put the beloved but somewhat reserved tune “Old Hundredth” back in the drawer and sing the Doxology to that triumphant tune “Lasst Uns Erfreuen” which itself means, “Let us rejoice!” And we do!

Now that we have arrived, we realize what a wonderful and unique journey it has been. This lenten season began on Ash Wednesday, as it always does, but this year that day was also Valentines Day. That coincidence seemed appropriate since Valentine’s Day is all about the heart, and Ash Wednesday is about the heart of the eternal opening to us. During Lent, I think there is a definite sense of God’s wooing us, loving us into the life God created for us. The theme that has guided us over these past seven weeks is “My Heart as Sanctuary, My Life as Prayer.” We have affirmed that the place where God truly meets us, where we honestly commune with God, is in our hearts. That is the true altar on which we offer our lives, one way or the other.

Now it is Easter Sunday, and we celebrate Christ’s resurrection and our own rebirth. I’m certain it has not slipped by you that today is also April Fool’s Day, the first time since 1956 that the two days have coincided. For hundreds of years, however, Christians have declared that the forces of evil thought they had defeated the power of love until Jesus broke out of the tomb. In fact, centuries ago, churches in southern Germany practiced *risus paschalis*—“Easter laughter”—by telling jokes in church and enjoying holy

laughter. Such celebrations were among the roots of our current April Fool's Day shenanigans.<sup>1</sup>

However, I tend to agree with Professor Wesley Hill that the big surprise on Easter may not be that Jesus rose from death. We kind of expected that didn't we? After all, there were all of those hints in the Gospels: Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus talking about destroying the temple and rebuilding it in three days, Jesus telling his disciples that he would be put to death and in three days rise from the dead. If we are paying attention, if we are truly watching closely and listening carefully, the Resurrection, wonderful and astounding as it is, may not be the biggest surprise in the story.

The big surprise is that God died on a cross—for us—to demonstrate that God really does know what it is like to be me and you. God knows that we carry our own crosses daily. Some of those crosses are of our own creation while others come to us out of pure circumstance or happenstance. Life happens and we bear the cross. The resurrection we celebrate today is because of where we were on Friday. We stand in the garden of new life today because we came from the cross of Golgotha where we were on Friday.

Throughout this season of Lent, many of us wrote and shared poems about where we are from, what influenced and shaped us into the people we are today. We learned that we are from some of the same places: farms and small towns, loving families and nurturing communities, music and sports and traditions that still bring smiles to our hearts. Some of the places we are from are very specific like “the Wildcat Road,” some are general like the mountains, the hills, the country, and the low country. Others of us come from places difficult to pin down as one of you described, “I am from the middle of nowhere, yet the center of my everywhere.” Another of you summed it up well when you said, “Where I'm from is where you're from.”

Obviously, the Bible tells us where Jesus is from: the Word spoken at the creation of the world, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, King David, Joseph and Mary, a carpenter and a young woman who pondered all that happened with her firstborn son. Like many of us, Jesus was known by his parents and other relatives.

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<sup>1</sup>Mike Ellis, “Easter Fools' Day: Did Ya Hear? Jesus Pranked the Devil,” *Anderson Independent Mail*, March 30, 2018; available online at: <https://www.independentmail.com/story/news/2018/03/30/easter-and-april-fools-day/439341002/>.

Scripture tells us that Jesus was born in the little city of Bethlehem and grew up in the somewhat obscure village of Nazareth. Yet, the full story of his life is that he has taken up residence in the hearts of people the world over. One of you noted that you are from “He’s got the whole world in his hands.” Jesus is from there, too.

When Jesus was twelve years old, he accompanied his parents to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. As we know, he stayed behind and conversed with the teachers in the temple. It was a pivotal point in his development and in the direction his life would take. As commentary on that event, Luke tells us that “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and other people” (Luke 2:52).

The influences in our lives shape who we are. Many of you pointed out that you are from learning and experiences of all kinds. You are from love and gratitude and places of abundant grace. You are from the acceptance of “Just as I am,” from learning how to forgive, and from getting back to where you ought to be. You are from listening for the still, small voice of God and learning how to find your own voice. In the temple, in the wilderness, and in every other place of his life, Jesus was learning and growing and becoming who God desired him to be. Jesus is from where we are from.

Another one of us wrote, “You don’t want to go where I come from.” Sometimes we end up in places where we should not be. It may be because of choice or by circumstance, but we find ourselves in a place that is neither healthy nor wholesome. It might even feel God forsaken. That is precisely where we find Jesus on the Friday before the joy of Easter. He is in a place no one wants to go. This is the scandal of the cross that the Apostle Paul writes about when he says, “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). The notion that Jesus could end up on a cross at all is absurd! What kind of God would allow mere humans to mock and humiliate him, beat him and gamble away his clothes, abuse him, assault him, and murder him in one of the most horrific ways possible? What kind of a God would allow that to happen? Certainly not the gods of the Romans or Greeks or any other gods we humans have devised.

But this God, the God who loved us into being and who loves us because we are his children, went to the place that none of us wants to go. This God chose to take on human form, became Jesus the Son, experienced our lives in every way, and allowed himself to be crucified. The God who

created the thorn bush, allowed it to be fashioned into a cruel crown. The God who caused the reed to grow by the river allowed it to be used as a rod to mock and abuse him. The God who made the oxen allowed its hide to provide the whip which lacerated his body. The God who caused the tree to grow tall and straight toward the sky allowed that tree to be built into the cross upon which he died. The God who imagined the multitude of useful tools that could be fashioned from the elements of the earth allowed them to be forged into nails which held his body on that cross. The God who caused vineyards to grow and grapes to be fermented into wine sipped the wine that had gone bad. The God of heaven and earth, the One who created humanity and provided all that is needed for a full and complete life, who generously gave us more than we could ever need, that same God allowed his creation to humiliate and kill him. As the Apostle Paul sings, God in Christ “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7-8). God did it all because God loves us! That’s the surprise in the Easter story.

Only love would go to a place like Golgotha. Only love would go to all of the places we are from. Only love will go to the places where we are now and wherever we might yet go. The primary place God yearns to go, however, is our heart for that is where we meet the crucified God who is the God of resurrection.

We have reached our destination. Our Lenten pilgrimage ends in the Garden of Resurrection where new life begins. Truly, we have cause to rejoice.

But wait! There is another surprise because the Garden on Easter morning is not the end of our journey, it is just the beginning! Artist Jan Richardson, whose writings have inspired us throughout Lent, painted a scene called “This Is Not the End.” In it she depicts a rock formation that is dark and formidable. Around it are shaded mists that create a sense of uncertainty and foreboding. In the rock, however, is an opening which is seen only because of the brilliant light emanating from it. We know it is Jesus’ tomb, but to my eye, it looks as if this hole in the rock is a doorway, not for Jesus to come out of, but for us to enter into. It looks as if the light is

beckoning us to enter the tomb and go through it, out the other side, to a place of light and possibilities.<sup>2</sup>

God's story—our story—does not end in the Garden. Karoline Lewis points out that in John's account of the resurrection, Jesus tells Mary to "go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 20:17) while in Mark's version of the story, a young man dressed in a white robe informs the women, "He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you" (Mark 16:7). Professor Lewis explains, "The resurrection was never the end of the story because we are called to see beyond it."<sup>3</sup> Jesus is going somewhere. The disciples are to go somewhere. There is no time to waste; the journey begins! Rather than a sense of completion and ending, there is great excitement about what lies ahead. Jesus has gone on ahead of us and we need to catch up with our Risen Lord!

You already know that, don't you? In sharing with us where you are from, many of you hinted at where you are going. You said things like:

"Now its up to me to pass on these lessons to my family, friends and neighbors."

"Knowing where I am from, trusting God with where I am going."

"I want to see what comes next."

"I am the person who loves people no matter who they are."

"I am . . . searching for a crevice to set free a flicker of light."

"I continue on my journey of faith."

"I am learning to live like Jesus."

"I am from becoming."

"I am from a new life."

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<sup>2</sup>Jan Richardson, Jan Richardson, "This Is Not the End," from *Easter Sunday: A Blessing for the Rising, The Painted Prayerbook*, March 2016; available online at: <http://paintedprayerbook.com/2018/03/29/easter-sunday-this-is-not-the-end/>.

<sup>3</sup>Karoline Lewis, "No End to the Story," *Dear Working Preacher*, (March 26, 2018); available online at: <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?m=4377&post=5121>.

The purpose of Jesus' resurrection was not to write the last chapter in the story of God's dealings with us; rather, Christ's resurrection is the beginning of a new story for each of us. Jesus came that we might have life, full and complete. That life is a gift handed to us; the new story is what we do with that life.

If we meet God in the sanctuary of our hearts, then we live the life of faith in prayer. That does not mean that we cloister ourselves off and spend the rest of life on our knees. To the contrary, we share our faith in word and in action. We do what Rabbi Abraham Heschel did when he participated in the March on Selma in 1956. After joining others in that historic effort to secure basic civil rights for all people in America, the rabbi summed up his experience by saying, "I felt my legs were praying."<sup>4</sup> We live our prayers. We walk our prayers. We speak our prayers. We become the answers to the prayers we make. We become living prayers which carry the Gospel throughout the world.

I think Erin McAuliffe summed it up best when she said,

"Where I am from, I'm not who I used to be,  
I am redeemed . . . I am a child of God.  
Oh , how I'd love for you to come to where I come from."

That is Easter! That is Gospel. May it be so for us all! Amen!

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<sup>4</sup>Rabbi Heschel's quote is from: *Jewish Women's Archive*, "Abraham Joshua Heschel."; available online at: <<https://jwa.org/teach/livingthelegacy/documentstudies/abraham-joshua-heschel>>.

April 1, 2018

## Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Glory to you, O God, on this greatest of festival days. We praise you for your wonder, for the power of your creativity at work in the world, for the patience you have toward us, and for the abundant love that is evident at every turn. We thank you, our Father, that you not only brought Christ to life again but that you also bring new life to us today.

We are truly grateful for the faithful witnesses who through the ages have continued to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Without their faith, we would not be in this place today. Without their sharing of the story, the world might not know the Gospel in all of its beauty and power. Help us, as well, to be faithful to sharing the Good News with the people around us. Use us, O God, to bear witness to your work in the world.

On this day and all days, we pray that anyone who does not know your love would experience it. We pray that those who are lonely will be befriended. We ask that all who mourn be comforted. Help any who are confused or distraught to find focus and direction. Give all who have lost hope a sense of meaning and purpose. Grant everyone who feels unloved an experience of your vast compassion. And bless each of us, we pray, with a keen awareness of your presence in our lives.

Because you are the Lord of all life, we pray for our world. Many are the nations whose people suffer from lack of food and housing and healthcare. Many are the nations whose people feel neglected and unheard, whose concerns are not considered, and whose future is dim at best. Many are the people whose voices are never heard and whose humanity is never honored. Bring health and wholeness to all people, we pray. Bring justice and righteousness into the lives of all people. And remind us that we have been given the charge to care for our sisters and brothers wherever they are.

We seek healing as well, O God, for our friends and family and for ourselves. Provide what we cannot otherwise obtain. Minister to us through the skill and compassion of the medical community and our family and friends. Heal us even if we cannot be cured so that we might live each day in the fulness of your grace.

It is Easter, O God, and we are grateful. We celebrate all of the goodness you bring to our lives. May we, in turn, be generous with one another and extend the Easter blessing to everyone whom we meet, by the grace of Jesus Christ, our risen Savior and Lord. Amen.