

“You Are Resurrected Every Day”
Rev. Bill Freeman
Sunday, April 16, 2017 (Easter)
Menifee United Church of Christ

Little Johnny went to Grandma's house for Easter. Little Johnny's family went to Grandma's house for Easter Dinner every Easter. As soon as the plate of food was placed in front of Little Johnny, he began to eat. Little Johnny's mother said, "Little Johnny, you're not supposed to eat until we say a prayer." Little Johnny, who is five years old, says, "No, I don't have to wait for a prayer." Little Johnny's mother says, "Yes, you do. You have to wait until we pray, like we do at home." Little Johnny says, "That's just it, we're not home, we're at Grandma's, and she knows how to cook." Happy Easter! I hope the Easter Bunny was good to you. I hope you got a lot of candy and chocolate in your Easter basket. I know I did. As some of you may know, I gave up sweets and snacks for Lent at the request of my daughter. So when I get home, I plan to eat a bunch of chocolate and candy. To the point where I go into a diabetic coma by the end of the day! No, just kidding! But I am thankful that this is over with. I have lost about 5-10 pounds since this happened. I think it's just a coincidence. But I'm going to try to keep the pounds off. After today. This is a big day for this church. If you were here earlier, you saw all the people that had the waffle breakfast and sausage. It was just wonderful and we thank our friends from New Birth church and CALM Church who joined us over here. We thank the volunteers and everybody who took part. This was a wonderful day.

"So, Pastor, why isn't Easter on the same date every year?" Good question. Well first, Easter has to be on Sunday. Second, as I understand it, Easter is a time when the Christians of the 4th century got together and decided what was orthodox and what was unorthodox for the Christian church. They decided that they didn't want to tie Easter Sunday to Passover, which to me would make sense, having it over Passover, like it is this week. But they didn't want to tie Easter Sunday to the Jewish festival of Passover. So, instead, Easter is based on the ecclesiastical full moon that happens about the third week of March. That's why that is. "Okay, Pastor, so why are there Easter eggs and the Easter Bunny?" Oy, I'd rather answer a theological question. But as I understand it, hundreds of years ago, Christians painted eggs red to signify Jesus' crucifixion. They did it with eggs because when chicks are born and hatched it's like Jesus being resurrected. Okay, so what about the Easter Bunny? Well, as far as I can tell, people want to have a lovable character at Easter, like we do at Christmas with Santa Claus. You know, a lovable character besides just Jesus. But I'm burying the lead. I learned not to do this in Journalism class. I'm burying the lead.

Jesus was resurrected 2000 years ago! Happy Resurrection Sunday! According to the gospel of Matthew, on the third day after the crucifixion, if you count Friday, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb. As they approached the tomb, all of a sudden (or as some people say, all of the sudden) there was an earthquake! (He shakes a table.) The earth shook! And the angel descended from heaven like lightning! (He leaps lightly down from the stage.) Probably more gracefully than that. The angel rolled back the stone covering the tomb, sat on the stone, and saw that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were frightened and he said, "Fear not, you've come looking for Jesus. He is not here. He has been raised. Go ahead and see for yourself. Then go to the disciples and tell them that Jesus has been raised and he will meet them in Galilee." So, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary fled with fear and great joy. Along the way, Jesus appeared to them and they worshiped Jesus. That's where we get Jesus' resurrection. This has been a story that's been told by Christians for 2000 years. Many Christians believe it. Some Christians do not. Some Christians would believe it, if only (he pulls his cell phone from his pocket) there was cell phone video of the event. That's why we celebrate Easter, because of the resurrection of Jesus. And I believe, just like Jesus, we are resurrected, every day. We are resurrected to be the spirit of Jesus.

"Well, Pastor, if Jesus' body was resurrected, where is it?" Oy! I'd rather answer questions about the Easter Bunny and Easter Eggs. This was a question we talked about in my seminary class. The professor said, "If Jesus' body was resurrected, where is it?" The discussion went round and round for a while. And I raised my hand and said, "Professor, maybe we are the body of Christ. Maybe the church is the body of Christ." She kind of rolled her eyes and said, "Yes, Bill, but we Christians believe that Jesus was physically resurrected, so his body must be out there someplace." Okay. But it seems to me that, if God is spirit, and Jesus tells us that God is spirit, and spirit doesn't have a body – God is not a white-bearded man sitting on a cloud someplace in the sky – and if God and Jesus are the same, why wouldn't Jesus just be a spirit? I don't know. But let's just say that Jesus' body is up in heaven, someplace. Then I believe that Jesus' spirit is within us. So that whenever we do good, whenever we do what Jesus taught us to do, whenever we love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind; whenever we love our neighbor, love our enemies, love ourselves; whenever we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, comfort the sick, visit the prisoner, we are the spirit of Jesus, working through us. That's who we are supposed to be, I think. That's how we're resurrected every day. We are the spirit of Christ within us, doing the work of Jesus. So we are resurrected every day.

Deepak Chopra knows that we are resurrected every day. Deepak Chopra, as you know, is an author, a medical doctor, a meditation advocate. Deepak Chopra says, "Resurrection is a leap into a whole new way of thinking." It is, resurrection is a leap into a whole new way of thinking. It's thinking that, not only is Jesus resurrected, but we are resurrected every day, whenever we do the will of God, whenever we're filled with the love of God, whenever we're filled with the spirit of Jesus, whenever we're filled with the Holy Spirit, we're doing the work of Jesus, we are resurrected. So then Christians ask

themselves, "What would Jesus do?" and then do that. Christians can ask themselves, would Jesus bring food to our food pantry, and clothing to our clothing closet? If so, then do that. Would Jesus help the homeless? If so, do that. So that we can be resurrected every day by having the spirit of the resurrected Christ within us. So that we're not like the guards at the tomb, who, when they saw the earthquake and the angel fall from heaven like lightning, were like dead men walking. They were frightened. We're not supposed to be dead men and dead women walking. We're supposed to be filled with the spirit of God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

"But, Pastor, what if I don't feel resurrected every day? What if I feel crucified every day? What if I feel like a dead man, or a dead woman, walking? What do I do then?" The correct response for me is not to act like Cher in the movie, "Moonstruck," when she slapped Nicholas Cage across the face and said, "Snap out of it!" The correct response for me is, "Come talk to me. Come tell me why you don't feel resurrected every day. Come tell me why you feel like a dead man or a dead woman walking. Tell me why you feel crucified every day. Maybe talking about it will make the situation better. Then maybe we can work on some kind of solution, so that you will feel resurrected every day, so you don't feel crucified every day, so you don't feel like a dead man or a dead woman walking every day. Because God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit and I want you to feel resurrected every day."

The United Church of Christ is resurrected every day. The United Church of Christ is our denomination. The United Church of Christ has been resurrected in one form or another for hundreds of years. A couple hundred years ago, the United Church of Christ was resurrected when it opposed slavery. A few decades ago, the United Church of Christ was resurrected when, for the most part, it opposed the Vietnam War. The United Church of Christ was resurrected a few decades ago when, for the most part, it supported the Civil Rights laws. So you can see why the United Church of Christ, which is our denomination, has a reputation for being a liberal denomination, the most liberal, mainline, Christian denomination in the country. I think that when UCC churches close down, die, oftentimes because they're not liberal, the UCC resurrects those churches – brings in a minister who believes in being Open and Affirming, brings in a minister who believes in welcoming everyone; brings in a minister who believes in justice, like helping the homeless; brings in a minister who has a liberal theology, like taking the Bible lovingly, but not always literally. I think, I have a hunch, that a few years ago, the UCC expected this church to die. But then something happened a couple years ago that gave the UCC and, I think, the California Conference of the UCC, some hope.

"What was that, Pastor?" Well, two and half years ago, this church called a liberal pastor to be the minister of this church. A minister who believes in being Open and Affirming, welcoming everyone; a minister who believes in justice, like helping the homeless; and a minister with a liberal theology, like taking the Bible lovingly, but not always literally. "Hey, wait a minute, Pastor, are you talking about yourself?" Well, kind of, but I didn't resurrect this church by myself. I'm not Jesus. I needed the help of this congregation to approve being Open and Affirming, which happened a year ago. To approve putting a rainbow flag on the side of our building, which they did. To go to the city council, as we did two years ago, asking them to care about the homeless, and now, two years later, the city of Menifee is starting to care about the homeless and not just wanting to shuffle them off to Hemet or someplace. So I think this church also supports the liberal theology that I've put forth, as far as coming to Bible Study and coming to my sermons, where I talk about taking the Bible lovingly, but not always literally. I believe this church can continue to be resurrected every day. As long as we continue to help people who are homeless. As long as we continue to do what we are going to do this coming Saturday, and have a town hall meeting in this church, where we've invited a congressman, our congressman, Ken Calvert, to come, but "unfortunately" his office says he can't make it. But we'll have the town hall meeting anyway and ask questions. And we'll have different groups here who will talk about social justice issues. I hope as many people that are here today will come to that, because I think people here care about the future of this community and this country. I think as long as we care, we will continue to be resurrected every day in this church. Maybe we can even help the city of Menifee be resurrected every day. Because I think that's what Jesus would want us to do. To be resurrected every day.

I think music helps us to be resurrected every day, at least it does me. "So, Pastor, is that why you had us sing a Christmas carol on Easter Sunday, what's up with that?" Well, kind of. I thought it was appropriate for Easter Sunday. "Joy to the World, the Lord is come, let earth receive her King. Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and heaven and nature sing." Doesn't that sound like an Easter song? I could have had us sing the other song, "Joy to the World" by Three Dog Night. "Joy to the world, all the boys and girls now, joy to the fishes in the deep blue sea, joy to you and me." That would have been a perfect Easter song, at least that part of the song. We're not supposed to be like Mary Magdalene and the other Mary on Easter morning, filled with fear and great joy. We're just supposed to be filled with great joy. And I hope we are, because Jesus was resurrected over 2000 years ago and because we are resurrected today and every day.

What about you? Do you feel resurrected every day? Do you feel filled with the spirit of God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit? I hope so, because I believe that's what we're supposed to do. I believe we're supposed to, as I said, have the spirit of Jesus within us. To do what Jesus taught us to do, like in the Beatitudes. We are supposed to bless those who are poor in spirit. We're supposed to bless those who mourn. We're supposed to bless the meek. We're supposed to help people to feel resurrected every day. I think, when we do that, we ourselves are resurrected every day. When we do that, this church is

resurrected every day. I believe that's what God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit want us to do. They want us to be resurrected every day.

Let us pray.
God of love,
*Help us to be resurrected every day.
Help us to help others to be resurrected every day.
And help us to help this church to be resurrected every day,
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.*

(This sermon was delivered without manuscript or notes
and was transcribed from a recording of it.)