

Rising With Christ

1. Warm-up Question: What are you looking forward to this spring?
2. On Easter Sunday we began a new sermon series called “Living With Resurrection Power.” Let’s begin by re-reading Sunday’s scripture, John 20:1-18, as printed on p. 3.
3. As we read, listen for a word, phrase, or verse that speaks to you.
 - a. What word, phrase, or verse most caught your attention and why?
 - b. Imagine being among the disciples when Mary Magdalene reported that she had seen Jesus outside the tomb. What do you think you would have been thinking or feeling? How do you think these events would have affected you?
3. The first Easter took place 2,023 years ago in a faraway land, which raises the question: Why should we care? What’s the relevance of what happened then to our lives today? Jeff shared two verses that address those questions.
 - a. Romans 8:11 says, “If the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the same [Spirit] who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that [now] dwells in you.” What do you think that verse means? Put it in your own words.
 - b. Romans 6:4 says, “Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too can walk in newness of life.” What do you think that verse means? Put it in your own words.
4. The New Testament promises that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is now available to dwell in, animate, and empower each of us. On Sunday, we focused on the first critical step Jesus said we must take to begin to access that power in our lives. Read John 3:1-8 and 16, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. The phrase “born again” has come to carry a lot of cultural baggage. When you hear someone describe themselves as a “born again Christian,” what thoughts or feelings arise within you?
 - b. Jeff urged us not to let the narrowness of many who claim to be “born again” to keep us from thoughtfully exploring what Jesus meant when he originally coined that phrase. In John 3:5, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.” What do you think it means to be born of water? What do you think it means to be born of Spirit?
5. Sometimes people say, “We’re all children of God.” Jeff suggested that statement needs to more nuance. He suggested it would be more precise to use the wording of Acts 17:29, “We are all God’s offspring.” In other words, we are all created in God’s

image. That means, like God, we have freewill. God doesn't force us into a life we don't want. It's up to us to choose whether we want to be part of the family of God. Jeff said, "When God created you, God gave you spirit – an innate spiritual capacity – but that spiritual capacity lies dormant within until you decide that you want to live a spiritual life. You get to decide; you get to make a conscious choice."

- a. What do you think of that statement? What do you like or dislike about it?
 - b. Jeff relayed how J.J. Abrams inherited from his grandfather a passion for the technical aspect of taking things apart and putting them back together. But J.J. didn't awaken to that passion until his grandfather took him on a tour of Universal Studios and J.J. heard about the technical aspects of movie making. J.J. says, "It was an *aha* moment for me. . . . It just felt like an answer to a question I didn't even know I was asking. Suddenly I realized: *This is the thing I want to do!*" Spiritual awakening often happens in the same way. We encounter a deeply spiritual person or place or read the stories of Jesus and experience *aha* moments that cause us to say, "This is who I am and was meant to be." Tell us about a key *aha* spiritual moment in your life.
6. In John 3:8, Jesus tells us, "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." In other words, the process of being born again is mysteriously mystical. Different churches have different ways of trying to help midwife the spiritual birthing process, but there's no one-size-fits-all way that people experience spiritual awakening. There is, however, a common denominator for Christians. Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, so that whosoever **believes** in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. This raises the critical question, "What does it mean to **believe** in Jesus?"
- a. Jeff said it's possible for a white nationalist to believe in Dr. Martin Luther King without truly **believing** in him. Explain the difference between believing in Dr. King and truly **believing** in Dr. King.
 - b. Explain the difference between believing in Jesus and truly **believing** in Jesus.
 - c. Do you feel you've reached the point of truly **believing** in Jesus? If so, when did you reach that point, what happened, and how is **believing** in Jesus challenging and changing you?
 - d. Baptism is the traditional way people who come to **believe** in Jesus announce that decision. Read Romans 6:3-5. Why is baptism important and what does it symbolize?
 - e. Jeff ended Sunday's sermon with a description of what we might experience when we die. Has **believing** in Jesus changed the way you think about death? What do you envision death might be like for you? How do you feel about death?

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' ¹⁶Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." ' ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

John 3:1-8, 16

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' ³Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' ⁴Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' ⁵Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.'

¹⁶ 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Romans 6:3-5

his death? ⁴Therefore we have been ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.