



**CHRIST  
CITY**  
CHURCH

Because He Lives

Easter Sunday

April 4, 2021

SONG #1 | *The Way*

CALL TO WORSHIP #1 | Psalm 107:1-9

Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever!  
Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,  
whom he has redeemed from the hand of the enemy  
and gathered from the lands,  
from the east, and from the west,  
from the north and from the south.  
Some wandered in desert wastes,  
finding no way to a city to dwell in;  
hungry and thirsty,  
their soul fainted within them.  
Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble  
and he delivered them from their distress.  
He led them by a straight way  
till they reached a city to dwell in.  
Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
for his wondrous works to the children of humanity!  
For he satisfies the longing soul,  
and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

CALL TO WORSHIP #2 | Psalm 107:35-38, 43

He turns a desert into pools of water,  
a parched land into springs of water.  
And there he lets the hungry dwell,  
and they establish a city to live in;  
they sow fields and plant vineyards  
and get a fruitful yield.  
By his blessing, they multiply greatly,  
and he does not let their livestock diminish.  
  
Whoever is wise, let them attend to these things;  
let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD.

SONG #2 | [\*Praise the Lord Ye Heavens\*](#)

PRE-SERMON READING | Revelation 1:17b-18, 2:7, 11b, 17b, 3:12, 21:7

Fear not (says Jesus) I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys that open and lock Death's doors and Hell's gates.

Are your ears awake? Listen. Listen to the Spirit blowing through the churches. I'm about to call each conqueror, the ones who overcome, to dinner. I'm spreading a banquet of Tree-of-Life fruit; a supper plucked from God's orchard.

Here, Christ-conquerors are safe from Devil and death.

Here, I'll give the sacred manna to every overcomer; I'll also give a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.

Here, I'll make each conqueror a pillar in the sanctuary of my God, a permanent position of honor. Then I'll write names on you, the pillars: the Name of my God, the Name of God's City...and my new Name.

Conquerors, those who overcome by holding fast to Jesus, inherit all this. I'll be God to them; they'll be sons and daughters to me.

## NOTHING NEW | And yet, completely different

Easter Sunday arrives every twelve months, give-or-take a few weeks. Unlike our other “big day,” Christmas, which has a claim on a specific calendared day, Easter floats along, making anchor some Sunday between the end of March and April. And while the traditions, practices, and packaging of this holiday have shifted here and there over the years, the rhythmic ritual of gathering on Easter morning with other believers to commemorate Jesus’ death and resurrection—as so many are doing with us around the world at this very moment—is nothing new.

Couple the calendared inevitability of this day with the fact that what is said here this morning, and among faith families throughout the globe, will be no novel revelation, no fresh information, nothing new, and it's easy to wonder why all the fuss! And not so difficult to speculate why so many care so little beyond the family habits.

In a moment in history when the new thing is the only thing, the newest post the only post you see, the newest cause the only cause to consider, the newest solution the only solution; Easter is old news. 2,000-plus-year-old news! Easter Sunday, with all its fun and pastels, offers the world nothing new to talk about or use or sell. And yet, the reason that for over two thousand years, billions of Jesus followers have gathered to celebrate Jesus dead and alive is that **the first Easter morning changed everything, and the change is still underway**. What we will say and celebrate today may not be new to the world, but **it is a completely different world because of Jesus**.

## SACRED SPACE | A reunion

Our faith family has recently been immersing ourselves in the pastoral words of Jesus to his church in the book of Revelation. It’s one of the more fascinating and confusing books in our Bible. A book meant to encourage patient endurance in the completely different world Jesus’ death and resurrection brought into existence. A world in which Jesus’ followers are “conquerors,” that is, ones who overcome the assaults of evil and the evil one, not by force but by faith lived. Patiently enduring the realities of tribulation *and* kingdom experienced at the same time. Their motivation to hold fast to faith in Jesus, who is “the first and the last, and the living one,” who “died and is alive forevermore” (Rev. 1:17b-18a) is a reunion of sorts. God and humanity dwelling together again, but differently.

“The imagery invoked,” in the passages which Tina read, “is unmistakable, as it is drawn from Old Testament descriptions of **sacred space**.”<sup>1</sup> Space where humanity and divinity dwell together in harmony.

*I’m about to call each conqueror, the ones who overcome, to dinner. I’m spreading a banquet of Tree-of-Life fruit; a supper plucked from God’s orchard. Here, Christ-conquerors are safe from Devil and death.*  
(Rev. 2:7, 11)

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, 380.

The “Tree-of-Life,” whose fruit provides the diversity of delights in a banquet within God’s orchard, is no other place than the Eden of Genesis, reimagined. The birthplace of life, a dwelling where all is “good” and “very good,” and we are safe from the Devil’s lies and actions, which treated our first parents, and even the judgment of our acceptance of them. A dwelling secure from all that bring about loss of life in its fullness.

*Here, I’ll give the sacred manna to every overcomer; I’ll also give a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.*

(Rev. 2:17)

Here in this reunion of God and his children through Jesus dead and alive, we are given “sacred manna,” the very bread that provides life truly and fully when nothing else is available or will satisfy. In this renewed sacred space, the manna is not portioned out and limited because of our propensity to hoard as our faith lineage did on the way out of bondage and into promised abundance. Now it is enjoyed without fear of its loss or limit.

In this sacred space of reunion of God and humanity in harmony, we know who we really are. Those sins and misfortunes, trespasses and evils, things done to us, things we do, things that people say we are, which most of us get a twisted sense of our identity, **naming us in ways our birth certificates never could**; these names are whited-out. The name rewritten and received cannot be known or given by another human, circumstances, or spirit, but only by the One who wrote us into life in the first place. Taking what has been marred by our minds and this world, he hands to us, gives us to grasp and know who we truly are without shame. The naming (judgment) stays with him.

*Here, I’ll make each conqueror a pillar in the sanctuary of my God, a permanent position of honor. Then I’ll write names on you, the pillars: the Name of my God, the Name of God’s City...and my new Name.*

(Rev. 3:12)

Here, the reunion is no temporary state but a permanent dwelling. Rather than God building a place for us to dwell in, we are built into his place of dwelling. Pillars of his temple, sanctuary, his holy ground. Pillars clearly marked as his workmanship and artistry, which no tyranny, greed, lust, or laziness can deny. And no idol or evil can claim as their own.

*Conquerors, those who overcome by holding fast to Jesus, **inherit all this**. I’ll be God to them; they’ll be sons and daughters to me.*

(Rev. 21:7)

Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb, slain on “Good Friday” and alive on Easter morning, says that this reunion is the inheritance of those who patiently endure with him the dual experience of tribulation *and* kingdom **until there is only kingdom**. This union with God as sons and daughters in sacred space, **a world completely different because Jesus lives**, is the final image of Revelation. A picture of the reversal of sin’s curse which came in that

first sacred space. The accursed darkness of death in little daily ways as well as forever. The final image, the city of Psalm 107, which Sam and Kate read for us to begin our time today, is a city to which we are “lead by a straight way until we reach” it—led by “the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” himself. A city where those things that dimmish life—which makes life a tribulation—are resurrected, transformed into things that make life abundant.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city [which we have been led to, gathered in to, written in to]; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month [perpetually]. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

No longer will there be anything accursed [deserts now springs of water, the hungry satisfied, fields ripe with fruit, safe from all that would kill-steal-and-destroy], **but** [something completely different] the throne of God and of 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. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun for the Lord God will be their light and they will reign forever and ever.

(Rev. 22:1-5)

## CURSES REVERSED | Healing through union

It is a beautiful image, a world completely different because Jesus lives among us. But here is the thing, the death and resurrection of Jesus do not merely prove for us an end, give us a conclusion to hope for, but also a promise to experience a whole life today in the middle of kingdom *and* tribulation.

*...on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.*  
(Rev. 22:2)

Notice, the tree-of-life, the first promise from Jesus to his churches, is on both sides of the river-of-life. Life now and life forever. Its fruit is substance and delight of harmony with God and others, fruit borne from the Spirit which indwells us now. A guarantee for what we will have forever and a producer of substance and delight today.

*The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*  
(Rev. 22:2)

Notice also that the leaves are “for the healing of the nations.” Not nations (people and places) already healed but in the process of being so. Healing experienced on the way (through the Way) to the city, not just at our arrival.

The reversal of the curses of separation and rebellion, those ills and evils which pull us and the world apart as we bite and devour one another, scrapping for everything we think we must claim as ours against theirs. This

reversal, healing, transformation is what the death and resurrection of Jesus bring even now. A union of God and humanity that bears fruit in our everyday roles and relationships heals the nations (even ours) and sees peace amid the chaos. A world completely different, all because he lives.

What one day will be all that we know is today something we can only taste. But we *can* taste it. And even a taste of this reunion changes everything. And so, let us say in union with the Spirit and the millions of Jesus followers around the world today:

*The Spirit and the Bride [i.e., the Church] say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.*

*Come, Lord Jesus!*

(Rev. 22:17, 20b)

## BECAUSE HE LIVES | Fear not

Let's pray.

Jesus, you have said to his churches, and to us today, Fear not, I am the first and the last and the living one. I died, and I am alive forevermore.

Heavenly Father, you sent Your son; we know Him as Jesus  
He came to love, heal and forgive  
He lived and died to buy our pardon  
An empty grave is there to prove our savior lives  
Because He lives, we can face tomorrow  
Because He lives, all fear is gone  
Because we know He holds the future  
And life is worth the living, just because He lives

And then one day, we'll cross the river  
We'll fight life's final war with pain  
And then, as death gives way to victory  
We'll see the lights of glory, and we'll know fully that He reigns

Because He lives, we can face tomorrow  
Because He lives, all fear is gone  
Because we know He holds the future  
And life is worth the living, *just because He lives*<sup>2</sup>.

*Amen*

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from the hymn, "Because He Lives" by Bill and Gloria Gaither.

## SONG #3 | [Death in His Grave](#)

### COMMENT BEFORE COMMUNION

Because the Lamb slain is also the Lamb living who enjoys the reunion that you and I long for, those who die with Jesus can live like Jesus. The apostle Paul describes a completely different world because of Jesus this way,

*This is what happened in baptism. When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came up out of the water, we entered into the new country of grace—a new life in a new land! [Sacred space!]*

*That's what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we were lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so that we can see where we're going in our new grace-sovereign country.*

*Could it be any clearer? Our old way of life was nailed to the cross with Christ, a decisive end to that sin-miserable life—no longer at sin's every beck and call! What we believe is this: **If we get included in Christ's sin-conquering death, we also get included in his life-saving resurrection.***

*We know that when Jesus was raised from the dead, it was a signal of the end of death-as-the-end. Never again will death have the last word. When Jesus died, he took sin down with him, but alive, he brings God down to us...*

*That's what Jesus did.*

(Romans 6:3-11)

And that's why we celebrate Easter. So through the symbols of broken body and shed blood, let us confess what Jesus did in love and receive what Jesus gives by grace through faith.

### CONGREGATIONAL CONFESSION w/ COMMUNION

Having been buried with Jesus in baptism, we were raised with him through faith, faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

We, who were dead in our trespasses, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us and its demand for our lives.

This Jesus set aside, nailing it to the cross.

He disarmed every spiritual tyrant and sham authority and put them to open shame by triumphing over them through death and resurrection.

Because he died, we live. Because he lives, we live like him.

SONG #4 | [Scandal of Grace](#)

SONG #5 | [In Christ Alone](#)

BENEDICTION | Colossians 3:1-3, 9-10, 12, 14, 15

So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Jesus, Christ City Church, *act* like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective.

Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your *real* life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. *He* is your life.

You're done with that old life. It's like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you've stripped off and put in the fire. Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe. Every item of your new way of life is custom-made by the Creator.

So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline.

And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

Letting the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other, as we follow Jesus together *because he lives*.