

SOARING WITH CHRIST  
Matthew 28:1-8

March 31, 2002  
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What an absolute joy to worship here, to be your pastor, to celebrate this Easter Sunday. Thank you for giving me the privilege to do that.

What does Easter mean to you? I posed that with a preschooler yesterday and he said, "The Easter bunny is coming to bring me some candy." I asked a teenager, "What does Easter mean to you?" With a twinkle in her eye she said, "Fun in the sun. I'm on my way to spring break." If you happen to be employed with the church, Easter week is the busiest week of the entire Christian year.

What does Easter mean to you? Is it a family reunion? Is it an Easter bonnet with all the ribbons on it? Is it a day to affirm your faith? For me, Easter has come to mean A GLORIOUS CELEBRATION OF LIFE.

Christ is risen, He is risen indeed! In Him we have new life. Through Him we have abundant life. With Him we have eternal life. Come sisters and brothers, let us celebrate life this Easter Sunday.

Life is a gift we receive. The gospel of John 1:4 says, *In Christ was life, and that life was the light of all people.* Easter is a celebration of life.

Technically speaking, none of us asked to be born. Parents do not go grocery shopping to select their children. Children do not pick out their parents from the Easter parade. Why I was born in America, to Christian parents, who raised me in the Church, and taught me to honor God, is providence beyond my comprehension. While I have not always appreciated it, in these later years I have come to understand that life is a gift, a precious, simple gift that we receive from others.

Of course, parents are far from perfect. If you wonder about that, ask my children. They will tell you the truth. Parents come from the old school. Parents do not always get it right. Bill was unusually excited and nervous about the birth of his first child. When the day arrived, he drove his wife, Betty, quickly to the hospital. He was so anxious that he sped right past the Admitting Entrance. Betty, through her labor pains, said, "Bill, that's where we're supposed to go." Bill insisted, "No, I read the sign. It said, Make Deliveries in the Rear."

If our earthly parents gave us life, our heavenly parent gives us faith. Our spiritual lives are absolute gifts from God. You remember that old story about a four-year old who kept insisting on a little time alone with her newborn brother. Her parents were anxious about it because you never know what a four-year old is going to do about a new infant in the house. Reluctantly they agreed to give

her time alone. As they stood at the door eavesdropping, the four-year old went into the nursery and edged up to the crib. Leaning close to her newborn brother she said, “Baby, will you tell me what God feels like? I’m starting to forget.” We do forget. Do you remember when it was easy to pray?

Now I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
If I should die before I wake,  
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

There was a time when God could do anything. There was a time, when you knew God could take care of the monsters under the bed. There was a time when your God was big enough to supply all your needs. On this Easter Sunday, I wonder if you can get back in touch with that kind of God? Is it any wonder that Jesus said, *“Unless you become as little children, you cannot get into the kingdom of God.”* The nature of faith is to re-appropriate the child that is within us and to come again to life. Because we do forget, because life gets cluttered with problems, and because we often make life complicated, there are times and places in our lives when we need to be born again. We need to be born again.

Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus one night and asked, “Could you explain it to me one more time? I’m not sure I get it.” Jesus, with tenderness toward a very wise man, said, “You must be born again.” Nicodemus said, “Wait a minute. This doesn’t make sense. How can I crawl back into my momma’s belly and start all over? It might be enticing for a fresh new start, but how can I do it?” Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, flesh gives birth to flesh but the Spirit gives birth to spirit and the wind of the Spirit blows where it wills bringing new life.”

If you could use a fresh new start, I can think of no better day than Easter Sunday to embrace new life in Christ. If you could use your sins washed away, I can think of no better day to accept God’s grace and forgiveness than Easter Sunday morning. If you could use a new attitude, a new way of thinking, I can think of no better day than Easter Sunday morning to put on the mind of Christ. If you could use a new way of living, a new set of ethics by which you do your business and live your life, I can think of no better day than Easter Sunday morning to embrace the way of Christ. New life is available for you.

In your bulletins are six stories of families in this church whose hearts are being touched and lives are being transformed by the miraculous power and grace of God. They are not super Christians. They are just simple people. We could have selected hundreds and thousands of people in this community of faith whose stories could be here. These people just happened to be available and we present their stories to you today, simply trying to say that God is still in the life transformation business. He can take your life where it is and transform it into what it ought to be.

As John Feldhacker said in the first story, “It was only in humbling myself to God

and talking to God about my struggles that my heart found peace and my family came home.” Life is here, here for you today. Life is a gift, a pure and simple gift. Jesus the risen Christ wants to give you a brand new life!

Life is an adventure that we take. In John 10:10, Jesus said, *I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly.* Life is not a problem to be solved, but an adventure to be lived. Are you living a life of mediocrity or a life of meaning? Are you getting by or are you soaring high? Are you just keeping up with the routine or are you embracing God’s possibilities? An adventure is possible for you today.

One of my favorite stories is about a Texas billionaire who decided to throw the biggest party in the history of the world. He decorated his mansion in magnificent ways. He stocked his gigantic swimming pool with a few sharks just for entertainment. He invited friends from near and far to come to his party. After offering a toast he said, “I have an unusual challenge for someone tonight. Anybody who has the nerve to jump in my swimming pool for entertainment, fight the sharks through it and come out on the other side, I will offer him one of three gifts. He can have my daughter’s hand in marriage, he can have one of my Texas ranches, or he can have a million dollars.” The words were hardly out of his mouth when there was a splash in the other end of the pool. Sure enough, somebody was swimming and miraculously got through the sharks and climbed out on the other side standing in front of the Texas billionaire. The surprised and shocked giver of the party said, “I never thought anybody on earth would do this, but since I’m a man of my word, it’s your call. You can have my daughter’s hand in marriage, you can have a Texas ranch or you can have a million dollars. Which would you like?” The young man, wiping the water from his face, said, “I don’t want any one of the three. I just want to get my hands on the guy who shoved me in the pool on the other end.”

Push and pull. Shove and strive. Does that describe your life? Get by, get even, get there. Does that describe your life? Are you tired of it? Why scratch in the dirt with the chickens when you were meant to soar like an eagle? I like to say even if you win in a rat race you are still a rat. You are tired of it, aren’t you? You have had enough of it. You would like something better. I have got good news for you today. You came to the right place. God brought you here for a purpose.

Tim Sanders, the chief solutions officer for Yahoo, Inc., in his new book writes: The most powerful force in business today is not greed or fear or even raw energy of unbridled competition. The most powerful force in business today is love. It’s what will help your company grow stronger and give you a sense of meaning and satisfaction in the world. The three key ingredients to successful business, according to Sanders, are knowledge, networks, and get this one—compassion. If you are a lousy person, it’s getting harder and harder to make it in the business world because people are tired of lousy people.

When life becomes something to share more than something to hide, an adventure to take more than a buck to make, a heart to feel more than a hardened

deal, you are beginning to soar with the resurrected Christ. Isn't it time you moved from mediocrity to meaning?

Do you know the difference between success and significance? We have made it, you and I, and most of us got a better deal than we deserve. I say that every day. But, do you know the most important question in life? It is not, how high have you have climbed, it is have you made any difference since you have been here? Is life any fairer? Are there any people feeling loved just because you passed by? Is the world any better because you came here? Herein is the important. That is all that is important, my friends.

This week I found myself reading Jimmy Carter's book, Living Faith. I had read it before but I was back reading it this week for the sermon. Jimmy Carter says, "After leaving the White House, I read back through 6,000 pages chronicling my four years in office. Frankly, I could hardly remember some truly historic events. Then one day I took my ten-year old grandson fishing. We were out on a two-person fishing boat with an electric motor. With two buttons you could push with your foot, my grandson was the captain of the ship. In spite of our erratic course on the lake, we caught a bass or two. Then we stopped and sat in the sunshine and the beauty of nature. As the two of us fished Josh turned to me and said, "Poppa, THIS IS LIFE!" Jimmy Carter says, "I don't remember many of the acts of state but I'll never forget what my grandson said to me that day. It won't make any history book but it will make life."

You see God has given us a big job to do. He put us in this world and then dared to say to us, would you take care of my creation? He put us in this world with all kinds of people and then dared to say to us, will you love other people like I have loved you? Who could ever be bored with a mission like that?

I am pleading with you today not to set your beliefs to match your life. Set your life to match your beliefs. The risen Christ is here. Soar high. Life is an adventure to be lived. Understand what meaning and significance is all about. Be all you can be. Be a loving person. Don't settle for anything else. Life. I love it.

One more thing about it I want to share. Life is a hope we embrace. Jesus was standing at the tomb of his closest friend when he said, *I am the resurrection and the life*. One of my closest friends died at 58 years of age. He was a physician by profession. For the last two years of his life Lyman and I met every Wednesday morning to get a bite to eat and say a prayer to get us through the day. He brought the donuts and I made the coffee. After we chatted a few moments about family and friends, we offered a prayer together that the good Lord would help us to do no harm and maybe do a little good in the week ahead.

In the latter days of our meetings together, he was dying of colon cancer and I was trying to survive lymphoma. One day he looked me in the eye and said, "Howard, the rest of life is the best of life." He had more faith than I had. I

looked deep in his eyes. He was an intimate friend. I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “The rest of life is the best of life. I used to talk about praying; now I pray. I used to tell my patients that I cared, but now I care. I used to tell my family, I love you, but now I go home at night and we sit by the fireplace and I tell my boys the dreams I have for them even though I’ll never see them fulfilled. I used to honor God, I used to go to church, but now I know God and I go with him every step of the way.” In the face of death, Lyman had found a resurrection.

When Lyman left my office I sat there for a long time and I asked myself, why do we have to nearly die before we know how to live? Why do we fail to understand the nature of eternal life? Albert Schweitzer once said the tragedy of life is what dies in a man while he lives. You see, eternal life is for now.

When apartheid was finally lifted in South Africa there was a great party and Bishop Desmond Tutu was there. He had suffered a lot. A reporter asked the bishop for an interview. The bishop said, “You can interview me tomorrow, but today I need to dance.” Today is a dancing day, my friends. Today is about resurrection. Every word we have said today is alleluia. This about life. We are talking about God-given life. Don’t settle for anything else. Eternal life is for now.

Of course, eternal life is forever, too. The resurrection was meant for eternity. Winston Churchill planned his own funeral, so the story goes. It was held in St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, England. After the benediction a bugler intoned Taps, the universal sound that says, it’s over. But as the first bugler finished playing Taps, a second bugler on the other side of that great church began to play Reveille— It’s time to get up, it’s time to get up, it’s time to get up in the morning.

*When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and time shall be no more, and the morning breaks eternal bright and fair. When the saved on earth shall gather over on the other shore, when the roll is called up yonder, I plan to be there. Do you?*

Soar we now where Christ has led,  
Following our exalted head.  
Made like him, like him we rise  
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.

Alleluia. Amen.













