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In Christ we are made new, however, that is not an easy road. We must first learn how to die, since every resurrection is preceded by a death. Then we must learn how to rise, then finally how to fly. Join us in exploring what the Cross means to us once again on this Easter Sunday!			

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

In 2 Corinthians 5:17 there's an oft quoted & memorized verse which says, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"* Reminiscent of Easter...in Christ lives are made new.

When we lived overseas, we met a man who raised butterflies. At first his passion drove him so hard that he literally bought a house across the street from his own home in order to raise them. Inside, where couches & chairs should be, there were branches & leaves - the furniture of nascent butterflies - caterpillars.

But the one house wasn't enough, it proved too small & limiting for his passions, especially one in the middle of the city. Therefore, he bought many acres outside the city in the jungle, and had a traditional Lampungese stilted home built on the land, along with a fountain, and a huge outdoor cage for the butterflies to roam free.

A beautiful respite from crowded city life, and a reminder of our subject on this Easter Sunday morning, *Life Made New*.

On the branches he made available, colorful chrysalises formed, filled with plump caterpillars. We might say caterpillars build a womb of new life for themselves. However, they could equally be building a tomb of death, since many don't make it through the pupal stage.

Either way, they build a chrysalis, meaning *gold*; or *a house of gold* – due to the metallic color of many chrysalis shells. It's like a tiny house, the new hide of the caterpillar itself, constructed for a metamorphosis which will involve an inside-out renewal of the creature the caterpillar once knew itself to be. He will no longer be the same after he emerges from his chrysalis.

Enrobed in the chrysalis, the wings begin to fully expand as it goes through an excruciating process of change. When the caterpillar emerges, it will have brightly colored wings hardened to a point of delicate beauty. Once a small, chubby, worm-like thing, she will emerge from her chrysalis a majestic fully-formed butterfly – graceful & ready to soar high & free.

In light of that metaphor, let's look at 3 stages of the resurrection life as Jesus does His transformative work in us. [1] Learning How To Die [2] Learning How To Rise [3] Learning How To Fly

As I speak today, reflect on the season you find yourself in now, connecting it with one of these three phases. Welcome the Holy Spirit to teach you what He intends today. Let's pray to that end before we start...

Singer/Songwriter, Jon Foreman, wrote, *"...I've been learning how to die."* Aren't we all... James said to us last week that Jesus wasn't concerned about capitalizing on the moment, about wooing the crowds, about pumping his brand. Jesus was counterintuitive, which is part of what makes me believe in the Gospel - it's real stuff. Not sensationalism. No salesmanship. Why would anyone want to follow any message which tells us we have to learn how to die? That we have to die to self. Why would you want to follow a savior to a cross? As James pointed out last week, that isn't the Tony Robbins message. New life begins with death. The Resurrected emerge from graves.

I had a pastor friend whose wife had lost 3 pregnancies over a very short time, I remember the day they lost the third on a retreat in Java - he stormed out of the hotel, upset & questioning God. He climbed a very high mountain alone that day.

There will come a day when we will lose our loved ones, or be lost to them ourselves as we pass through the veil of death. Death is before us & sometimes it hits without warning. We're all learning how to die; it's absolutely frightening.

The tradition of Lent preceding Easter is the time people consider how God, in the person of Jesus Christ, emptied Himself (Phil 2:7). The cross marks this season of suffering - Jesus models, that suffering is the path to freedom. Our God loves in cruciform self-giving ways. Christ gives his life that we might receive full everlasting life in Him. Jesus didn't allow his fear to stop his cruciform love - he sweat blood in the Garden of Gethsemane. *"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will,"* (Matthew 26). He asked that knowing all along the answer was no. God the father was leading God the Son to death in order that we could not only learn how to die well, but enable us to rise from the dead.

Christ had to die in order to satisfy the requirement of the Law. Humanity is plagued with sin, and that takes a sacrifice. Resurrection is like new birth, it's a bloody business. Christ's physical body was made a bloody sacrifice as payment for that sin. **Colossians 1:22** states, *"Now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."* In Christ we learn how to die. Jesus goes before us as the model, and makes way for us as the only perfect sacrifice. As we follow our King through the door of suffering, we find it's not as frightening as we thought; there is life on the other side; life abundant.

Everything dies. Everything has it's winter. Jesus reverses the order! Where death was the end, it is now our great beginning! Death is now a prerequisite to life as Jesus said, *"Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."* (John 12:24) Christ died, reproducing His resurrection life in innumerable people over the years, and we're called to do the same. To mimic him in dying well, our cruciform goal in life is to reflect His self-sacrificial love. But, you can choose not to fall to the ground, to remain a single seed, never letting go of the branch. Not to reproduce life, but only exist... But I want to follow my King to the cross! Because I know that not everything which dies stays dead.

1 Corinthians 15:20-22, *“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.”*

We are surrounded by death. Physical death, yes, but also the death of our dreams, desires, wants, freedoms, passions & hopes. The death of our heroes, those we've looked up to who've fallen off the pedestals we've built for them. The death of our own self-righteousness & self-sufficiency. The death of our comforts & pleasures we hold onto so tightly. The death of our ideals & false identities - many of you are in a situation now that you didn't expect to be in. Life has not panned out as you thought it would.

And when we choose to follow Christ, we learn how to carry our cross of death in all matters well. We die peacefully. We don't go to it kicking & screaming. In Christ we know there's life on the other side of all death in Jesus. It's part of the holy burden we bear. *“Then he said to them all: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me’” (Luke 9:23)*. And we take up our cross in these things with a sense of daily intrepid joy, even in the midst of our pain, given that we know there's emergent life on the other side of the tomb. We can trust Jesus with our fragile hearts, even when it means death in one area, since we know he has mastery over all of death - he's in the business of resurrecting the dead.

He calls Lazarus to come out! Even when those there that day said, and I quote in the King James, *‘by this time he stinketh!’* because he'd been dead 4 days! That story shows Jesus great compassion in the shortest verse in the Bible when it says, *‘He wept’*. He weeps along with us in our pain of loss, but he also resurrects the dead!

Climbing the tree like the caterpillar, weaving our own coffin, we can be assured that suffering death changes us for the good. As it says in Ecclesiastes 7, *The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning*. Christ himself was made perfect through suffering; he learned obedience through it (Hebrews 5:8). Suffering teaches us that our will must conform to the Fathers. God gets to reign. That's what the kingdom of God means; God's reign & rule in life.

We can't rise to life victorious until we've fallen to our death first. We can't let our pride hamstring our efforts, instead we embrace the emptying of ourselves, of pride, self-reliance, and self-will, since we know from Jesus, that this is the path to freedom & victory. If you're facing a cross today, I invite you to follow your King into it, not trying to conquer it like an enemy, or bat it away, but allowing the Spirit of God to slay in you whatever keeps you from wanting to die. Embrace your cross as a friend. Knowing suffering's a part of our journey & that God loves us enough to allow us to suffer. Let the Holy Spirit build your Chrysalis, so that new life may emerge later. Since before we can be people of the *resurrection*, we must be people of the *cross* - learning to die well with the hope of being transformed into His image on the other side.

We can be assured of life made new since the Word tells us so, Romans 6:8, *“Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”* Dying in Christ isn't easy.

I remember giving my life to him. The fear of losing myself very evident. I didn't know what was on the other side of that death. But I'm living proof, to die is gain in Christ!

Death comes in many forms. A man recently moved his family across country for a new job. It was a depressed economy & he was blessed to have this position. But within a month, the bosses called him in & sheepishly said they had to let him go due to budget cuts. The death of his dreams, security & what it means to be a man. As he wept in his car on the way home, a voice told him, "There's always a Good Friday before a Resurrection Sunday with the bewildering Easter Saturday in between." Dying hurts. Dying isn't easy. Dying's painful. But dying's sometimes necessary to make new life!

Friends of mine recently had to die to a dream. They'd built their dream home. But due to life, they had to move & leave it behind. It's been painful. It's hurt, and they're in that bewildering Easter Saturday stage right now. But Resurrection Sunday's coming, although it may be hard to see - and most of us, like doubting Thomas, have to see it to believe it.

Remember a few weeks back we quoted Tim Keller when he said, *"If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs isn't whether or not you like his teaching, but whether or not he rose from the dead."* We cannot treat him as any other person in history, patronizingly calling him just a 'good teacher' - if he rose, then he's Savior & Lord of life; everything he says is trustworthy & true.

But, learning to rise with Him means learning to die with him first. Colossians 2:11b-12, *"Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead."* This speaks of a cutting away, an incising of your old self which stands in the way. Baptism images death leading to resurrection - going down into the grave & coming up washed clean by the Living Water of Christ. Clean. Life made new.

These are truths we believe *because* Jesus rose from the dead. Truths which can be trusted no matter how bad we feel or depressed we get. It's in these suffering moments when we grab hold of Jesus like never before. He went to the cross first, he endured the worst of fears & conquered them first, leading the way. He's opened the door for our transformation, although for a time it may feel like we're entombed in a dark chrysalis awaiting our freedom. We're changing from the inside out.

The tomb then becomes a womb when we allow it to become so. Our wings developing in the time we've bled & struggled. We've been changing - as our trials have allowed Christ to form courage & compassion within us. Time & time again, as we face a thousand deaths, he resurrects us stronger every time since we are being made into his image. Death can't conquer us in Christ. It can only steel us into greater people of God as we learn how to fly in Jesus. Because in him, the old has gone, the new has come.

We are Easter people. As we come out of our chrysalis, into the light of day. Our wings dry & we begin to learn now how to use them. Along with many other verses, James 1:4 describes this process, *"Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature*

and complete, not lacking anything.” We’re being transformed by the renewing of our minds, as Romans 12:1-2 teaches, in the submission of our whole selves to Jesus. We’re learning how to fly! God’s building into us. But we have a role to play in development.

Some might downplay Michael Phelps achievements as an Olympian given that he has natural ability & build which enable him to win. True, but his 28 medals have also been hard won. Michael has had to overcome many personal character flaws to get there. He practices 6 days a week, 5-6 hours a day, swimming more than 50 miles a week. Which has been his habit for years before he ever won his first medal.

Michael may have a perfect swimmers build & natural ability, but that in itself wouldn’t make an Olympian, he had to put the time in. Michael has equal potential to be a couch potato, but he’s engaged life not to be. The Spiritual Life is the same. We’ve been made new, but we have to get out & flap our wings, fly in the sun, and take on new adventures. In Christ we’re renewed & resurrected, we have the raw material, but we also need to allow God to conform us into the image of Christ by participating in our spiritual formation. We not only believe what he said, we act on it.

Remember Jesus said this in John 14:21 & 23, *“Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me....Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.”* So, in the spreading of our wings in Christ, practice makes power! We can’t remain as the butterfly newly emerged never using the wings he’s given us. What good are wings if you don’t fly? We must learn to fly into maturity.

Our wings grow strong as we practice being thankful in all circumstances (1 Thess. 5:18), showing the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25), honoring God with our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19-20), living & acting generously (2 Cor. 9:7), embracing contentment & resisting greed (Heb. 13:5), healing the sick & expecting God to work miracles (Matt. 10:8), loving our spouses deeply (Eph. 5:21-33), parenting with grace (Eph. 6:1-4), and training ourselves to be the servants of all, in life & leadership (Mark 9:35). And maybe most importantly, our devotion to seeing all people groups, all nations know Christ (Mt 24:14/28:18-20). Being people of the resurrection, expecting God’s Spirit to guide & lead us as train ourselves to do what Jesus did, so, when the moment arises, we’re ready to rise.

Remember the angels at the empty tomb said to the women, *“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!”* (Luke 24: 5b-6a)

According to Paul, the entirety of the Christian life hinges on the reality of the resurrection. *“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.*

More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes

also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the first-fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him” (1 Cor. 15:13-17;20-23).

Imagine for a moment, that this Easter will mark a new beginning for you – just like that newly formed butterfly. Imagine that what you see now, looming large & unshakeable in front of you, will one day be seen in the rearview mirror as small & unthreatening. It will look infinitely less foreboding than it does right now! Now turn your thoughts to your character. Ask yourself how closely yours resembles the character of Jesus. Be honest. Is there something you could change, right now, that would put you on a trajectory toward a better, more beautiful, and more Christlike future?

The resurrection of Jesus at Easter means a few, fundamental things about our lives. [1.] Every resurrection is preceded by a death, and a cross (or difficulty) can yield great gain in a heart matured by it. [2] Like a butterfly, resurrection transformation happens from the inside out; there is no shortcut, and the end result is worth the process. [3] Transformation only happens when we enter into the chrysalis of our situation with complete surrender. [4] Learning to fly takes practice, and practice means we do what Jesus did over & over again.

One Sunday morning, over 2000 years ago, Jesus got up, folded His grave clothes & walked out of his tomb. At that moment, your life & mine changed forever. Death was told, “No more,” and you & I were given the promise of an abundant resurrection life – both for the future & for the now.

This Easter, welcome the Holy Spirit to shine His light on your heart, revealing the places He needs to make new in you. Say yes to the chrysalis of transformation once again, kept on track by a compelling vision of the heights you will see on the other side of your metamorphosis.

We have a gift for you today as you leave. Please take one per couple or one per single. And for those of you who attend a Community Group bring this booklet with you to group this week if you are meeting. Otherwise read through it in the coming days and let the Holy Spirit minister to you in the message of the resurrection.

LET’S PRAY...

Questions for Community Group Leaders

1. Use the booklets as your discussion for this week. But you might also look at Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane in