

"Now Rise and Do Life Differently"  
First Christian Church  
Topeka, Kansas  
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## Title slide

You have heard that story before. The Easter story. It's a tradition. We read that story here ... every year ... on Easter Sunday morning.

Most people who know me, know that I love good stories. Here's a story that some of you have heard me tell before ... but for me, it's a classic. Like that hymn, Christ the Lord is Risen today. It bears repeating.

Little five year old David was riding the back seat of the car, on his way home from Sunday School one Sunday morning, and his mother turned around from the front seat and she asked him .... "David. What did you learn this morning in Sunday School?" "About Moses, and how God saved his people from the mean ole Egyptian army." David replied. "Oh really" .... his mother said. "Well tell me David, how did God save Moses and his people from the mean ole Egyptians?" And the little boy began to reflect on his mother's question. "Well ..." he said "Moses and his men were trying to get away from Pharaoh's army. And when they got to the Red Sea, they looked back and there came Pharaoh's jeeps and tanks after them. So Moses called for his engineers .... and in no time at all he threw a pontoon bridge across the sea. And Moses and his men got on the bridge and ran to the other side. And the Pharaoh's army got on the bridge and started to come after the Hebrews ..... and Moses called in his demolition crew and blew up the bridge. Pharaoh and all of his men, and their jeeps and tanks were buried in the sea."

"David.... are you sure that is how your teacher told you that story?" his mother asked. And then there was this pause ... and then David said ... "Well ..... no, that's not how she told it ..... but Mom ..... if I told it to you like she told it to us ..... you wouldn't believe it!"

Consider this Easter story. On that day .. the first day of the week after the Sabbath was over ... Mary Magdelene and the other Mary went to the tomb ... and they were confronted with an angel ... who said to them ... I know why you have come here. You have come to see Jesus. He is not here. He has risen as he told you he would. Go quickly and tell his disciples ... He has been raised from the dead.”

I can just hear the conversation between those women as they made their way back to the disciples. “If we tell them ... the way he told us ... they’ll never believe it!”

There is this sensible, realistic, rationalistic side to we human creatures, and the way we contemplate truth, isn’t there? Now there might be a way to explain this, folks. Maybe he wasn’t really dead when they put him in the tomb. Or maybe those crazed disciples of Jesus worked themselves up into such a frenzy they just fantasized that he had risen. There just might be a way to explain this. The Chief Priests ... according to Matthew ... paid Roman soldiers to start a rumor that Jesus’ disciples had taken his body from the tomb in the middle of the night ... for the purpose of promulgating the fantasy that Jesus had risen from the dead. There just might be ... if we put our heads together ...a very logical explanation for exactly what happened in the course of those days between the crucifixion of Jesus ... and the day those women went to the tomb and found that he was not there.

There could be an explanation.

But that is not what Easter is about. Easter is not about explaining resurrection. **2** Resurrection explains us! Resurrection explains ... why we are here. It explains why we have been ... First Christian Church of Topeka Kansas ... since 1880 ... when this congregation was chartered. Resurrection explains us! It explains this vast movement of faith that has encircled the globe ... having made contact in even the most remote parts of the world. No ... we are not here to explain resurrection .. Resurrection is here ... to explain us. This festival of joy that millions of Christians will come to celebrate this day ... is an acknowledgement that RESURRECTION EXPLAINS US! This affirmation ... that Jesus rose from the dead ... and that because we are created in his image, so too we will inherit eternity ... this is the

message that has come out of the empty tomb. And this is our defining mark. FOR CHRISTIANS, EASTER REPUDIATES THE INEVITABILITY AND FINALITY OF ESTRANGEMENT. That which was dead ... dead hope ... dead dreams ... dead relationships ... can live again. That is the message of Easter.

**3**Last Thursday morning's cartoon on the editorial page of the Topeka Capital Journal ... featured a revised standard version of the 2010 United States Census form that most of us have filled out and put in the return mail during the past few weeks. In the revised standard version of the form ... the questions are a little different ... Like, "What kind of an American are you? Hopeful, worried, Pensive? Frustrated? Disgruntled? Discouraged? Fearful? Bitter? Angry? And Where do you live? In a foreclosed home? A foreclosed mobile home? House that you owe more on than it's worth? Cardboard box? And who lives with you? Unemployed children? Out of work friends? The cartoon did what it was supposed to do. It called to our attention many of the problems with which we are faced at this particular point in our nation's history. We cannot ... especially as people of faith ... we cannot ignore the issues that bring division and pain and downright hostility and division in this great nation of ours. As people of resurrection **4**... through Christ, we are called to be the hope that the world is searching for so desperately these days.

Resurrection ... raising up out of death in to new life and new hope ... when we are really faced with it ... is almost more than we know what to deal with! It was for the disciples of Jesus ... and when we experience it even today .. it continues to be.

Resurrection. The stone rolled away from the ultimacy of death and hopelessness. That is the story ... that defines us! We are not here to explain resurrection ... any more than any of us would try to explain the modern events in our lives that overcome death and hopeless with new life and possibility.

Christianity was BORN **5** ... in a cemetery! .

We Christians believe God's act of redemption in Jesus Christ ... his ministry ... death ... are all part of a vast eternal plan. But we believe Easter ... is God's ultimate affirmation. Easter is a call to us to rise up and do life with hope and determination. That which was dead ... dead hope ... dead dreams ... dead relationships ... can live again. Separation can be bridged ... People really can join hands across their differences and work and live together. Reunion, reunification, reconciliation ... really are possible! Perhaps we should all write letters to our lawmakers in this great land of ours ... and tell them what Easter is all about. Perhaps we should send a letter to the Hutaree (hu-TAR-ay) "Christian" group in Michigan who have been in the news this past week. They are best known by their neighbors for their active use of guns and their increasingly heated talk about fighting back violently against the government. Maybe someone needs to tell them the Easter story ... and God's mission in Jesus to bring reconciliation and peace to the broken world of which he was a part. Maybe someone needs to announce the profound message of the Cross ... and the victory of the Resurrection ... affirming the message of Jesus that violence begets violence ... peace begets peace.

We are not here this morning to explain resurrection. As David would say ... "Mom, if I told you ... the way my teacher told it to me ... you would never believe it." No, we are not here to tame this story down, and make it rational, and understandable ... reasonable! We are not here to explain the resurrection. We are here to affirm ... that resurrection ... explains us!

This is great good news! You see ... I believe with the Apostle Paul ... that the church ... is the living body of Christ in the world. Paul says it very clearly really, in his letter to the Christians at Corinth ... "Now you are the body of Christ". And what I hear in that affirmation is ... that the hope for the world ... lies ... in what the church has to give. That's kind of a big statement ... a huge affirmation. But that is what I believe to be true. We are the body of Christ ... the agents of reconciliation ... and as Wendell Berry put it ... we are to *practice resurrection*. A doctor ... practices medicine! A Christian ... practices resurrection.

I am reminded of the story that I read not too long ago that came out of a magazine. It was the story of conversation between a pastor and a business person who happened to be seated together on an airplane. The pastor was coming home from an intensive educational event, and he was dressed in faded blue jeans and sweat shirt...an obvious contrast to the much more formally dressed business man. The business man greeted the informally clad pastor...so, to be nice, the pastor began a conversation with the typical question that most men ask when they don't know much about the other person. "What kind of WORK do you do?" That's how we men get our identity, you know. Anyway...the businessman replied by saying..."I'm in the figure salon business. We can change a woman's self-concept by changing her body. It's really a very powerful, profound thing." His pride spoke between the lines of his conversation. "You look my age", the pastor said..."Have you been at this long?

"I just graduated from the University of Michigan's School of Business Administration. They've given me so much responsibility already, and I feel very honored. in fact, I hope to eventually manage the western part of the operation."

"So..you're in a national organization" the pastor said..."Oh yes", he replied. "We are the fastest growing company of our kind in the nation. It's really good to be a part of an organization like that, don't you think?"

The pastor nodded approvingly and thought...'Impressive. Proud of his work and his accomplishment...Why can't Christians be proud like that? Why are we so often so quiet about our faith and about our church?"

Looking askance at my clothing...he asked the inevitable question. "What kind of work to you do?"

"It's interesting"...the pastor answered. "We have some very similar business interests. I'm in the body changing business too. Actually...we apply **'basic theocratic principles to accomplish indigenous personality modification.'**"

The businessman looked impressed. And he said..somewhat hesitatingly..."You know, I've heard about that...but do you have an office here in the city?"

"Yes, we do...actually...dozens of them... We have offices in every city and town in the state....and for that matter in every state of the union....including Alaska and Hawaii.

By now...the business man was beginning to have a quizzical look on his face. How could any organization be that big....without him knowing about it...or having read about it in the *Wall Street Journal*. "Actually" ...the pastor went on..."we've gone International. And management has a plan to put at least one office in every country in the world by the end of this business era." "Oh...management?" "Yeah...the pastor said..."one of those father and son deals...."

"Hum" ...the business man said..."pretty good job, huh? Pretty good benefits?"

Let me tell you bout my benefits..." the pastor exclaimed. "Complete fire insurance...health insurance...I even have a mansion that is being built for me. Of course, I don't get access to it until I retire! Do you have a mansion that's being built for you?"

The business man was getting more and more edgy as the blue jeaned pastor went on. Finally he said...you know...one thing that bothers me about all you've been saying. I've read all the journals....and if your business is all that you say it is, why haven't I heard of it before now?"

"Actually..." the pastor went on... "a lot of folks on the inside don't say too much about it. I guess a lot of us just kind of take all the benefits for granted. Most of us are pretty quiet. But I am surprised you haven't heard about us...after all...we do have a 2000 year old tradition."

Suddenly...there was a look of revelation on the face of the businessman. "Wait a minute"..he said. "You're right" ...the pastor interrupted...."I'm talking about the church."<sup>1</sup>

We are the church. And the explanation for why are still here today ... longer than any other institution in Topeka ... I can't think of any business ... or school ... or any other institution that has a 2000 year history ... the reason we are here ... is Easter. We are here ... NOT to define resurrection. But to affirm ... that resurrection ... defines US!

SO let us arise ... and do life with hope and great joy!

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup>. Charles Swindoll, **Strengthening Your Grip**, (adapted), pp. 223-224.