

# “Easter Living”

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John 20:19-23; Acts 4:32-35

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Lots of people are taking on renovations right now. Talk to Jason Holmes, one of our Celebrate Life leaders and a General Contractor. He can tell you he's booked for well over a year to do renovation jobs. It is really hard to get contractors, and things like the price of lumber have skyrocketed.

Often with a renovation people take “before and after” pictures. In the Bible there is a before and after picture of the renovation of the disciples. A snapshot of the after picture is seen in our reading from the book of Acts.

It is a picture of a group of people who get along together — it is a picture of unity and purpose. They are working together toward one common aim.

If you were to try to measure the energy of this group of disciples in the ‘after’ shot, (the way you can look at your phone and see how much battery is left,) you would see that they are at 100% -- fully charged & full of grace. They are filled with the Holy Spirit and powerfully share the testimony about the resurrection of Jesus.

They have no sense of scarcity. Do you remember a year ago in the early pandemic times how everyone was afraid that there might not be enough food or toilet paper? Fears of scarcity were not entirely irrational when borders were closing and supply chains were under threat... though the toilet paper one was pretty funny. I remember some of our recent refugees laughing at us because a lot of the world functions just fine without toilet paper. I won't go into details. But for the disciples in this ‘after shot’ there is no fear of scarcity or anything else.

They are not worrying about their own needs — they are looking beyond themselves and meeting the needs of others. These disciples are filled with mission, purpose and love. We have a picture in these 4 verses of a beautifully, incredibly transformed renovated church.

Now let's take a look at the before picture. John 20:19-23; Acts 4:32-35

It's still Easter day in our scripture reading. It's evening, it's getting dark. The disciples are hiding in a room behind locked doors — they're in a self-imposed lockdown.

They are very afraid and probably exhausted and on edge. I'm guessing they are more than a little short with each other. Grief, fear, lack of sleep can do that to you.

Grief has 5 stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. During the few short days after the death of Jesus the disciples are likely bouncing around the stages of denial, anger and bargaining.

I wonder if Peter was running through his list of 'if only's'? I bet the negative thoughts were coming even when he tried to think of something else. Something more positive. "If only I had not let them take Jesus that night. I tried to fight but as usual no one else jumped in. Same as always! When I jumped out of the boat, they all stayed in the boat. I cut that guard's ear off in the garden but everyone else just stood back and did nothing. Nothing. Why didn't they fight? Why didn't I fight harder? Why didn't I stand up for him in the courtyard?"

Fear, hiding, and locked inside are not words you associate with Easter and the resurrection, but that's where the disciples were on that first Easter Sunday. That is the before picture. What does your 'before' picture look like?

I know from hearing people share their testimonies at Celebrate Life that some of you have incredible 'before-and-after' stories of transformation in your lives. Many don't have dramatic stories but still know they have changed.

But even if you've come a long way, I bet there are still some renos that could be done on your life. Where are you afraid? What hurts? At what or at whom are you angry? What would you love to be doing or who would you love to be but limitations keep you from doing and being?

Friends, we are in a lockdown, our 3<sup>rd</sup> serious lockdown in a year. But if we are honest with ourselves, we might see that in some ways the lockdown is not just out there with stay-at-home orders but also in here—in our hearts.

In fact, in many cases the pandemic has highlighted issues that were pre-existing conditions. It highlights relationships that were strained before; it highlights precarious financial situations; it shines a spotlight on our health or lack thereof.

It has certainly shone a spotlight on societal issues. The pandemic has helped us to see more clearly the issues of homelessness and addictions in our community. It has helped us to see the systemic racism in so many different institutions. It has highlighted the lack of adequate care in nursing homes, difficult and sometimes deplorable conditions for migrant workers and workers in meat packing plants or warehouses.

What do you wish your and our after picture might look like?

There is an opportunity in this pandemic. The Chinese character for “Crisis”

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is made up of two symbols: one means *danger* and the other means *opportunity* or more accurately “*change point*”. If the pandemic had lasted just a couple of months like we thought it would in the early days — we all thought we’d be back to church and normal life by the summer at the latest—likely not a huge amount would have changed for us in the long run. We likely would have reset back to how we were before. However, it’s pretty clear that this pandemic is a significant change point in our country and our world.

And that has the potential to be a good thing. My hope is that government will use this change point to do things like bring in Universal Basic Income.

The same goes for our church. I have said before that this is an opportunity to step back and ask “*Who are we and who is Jesus calling us to be as a church?*” Our ‘before’ picture was not a bad picture. But it was a “very busy doing a lot of different things” picture. What one or two things are we now called to do?

I encourage you to dream of what the after picture might look like in your life; in the church and in our country. But for now, I want to focus on how we get there. How did the disciples move from the *before* to the *after* picture? How did they change?

Did they decide they needed to get over themselves, get over their grief, finally get their act together and become the disciples and the church they were called to be? Did they pick up a self-help book or decide a little more self-discipline was needed?

No, they didn’t get their act together. I don’t think they ever could have gotten their lives back together on their own. So what happened?

The first thing that happened was that Jesus broke through their locked doors and high walls. There is no place that is so far, so locked, so dark, so sinful that Jesus cannot meet you there. But when Jesus shows up, it is still up to us to decide if we want him there.

But friends, this is grace. The transformation in the disciples is not their hard work; it is the power of Jesus and their willingness to accept the gift of being set free. Where are you tired and weary of trying harder? From what do you need to be set free?

The next thing that makes the renovation is the Holy Spirit. Jesus breathes on them with the breath of God and they receive the life and power of the Holy Spirit.

Christians who function without the Holy Spirit often become burnt-out Christians. When you work with the Holy Spirit there is power and movement. Things that seemed impossible become possible.

How do you receive the Holy Spirit? Or even, how do you get Jesus to come in to your life? Ask.

The words don't have to be fancy. Just be still for a moment and ask Jesus to come into your life. Ask for Jesus to breathe on you and fill you with his Holy Spirit.

There is something powerful about asking. Why don't we take a moment right now to ask? The nice thing about being totally online is that you are likely alone watching this worship. So, if you would like Jesus in your life, and or the Holy Spirit to fill you, I invite you to raise your hand. I can't see you; only God can see you. *Let us pray...*

*Lord I want more of you. Forgive me for anything I have done to separate me from you and from the people you love....take a moment to offer a confession of these things... When we confess our sins, God is gracious and good and will forgive us for all our sins. Jesus come into my life. Come into these locked doors of my fear, my regret, my weary life. Fill me with your Holy Spirit. Grant me peace. Amen.*

I want to point out that having broken down the walls and breathed on the disciples, he then commissioned them to forgive sins. That is key here. The first mission of the church was to offer God's forgiveness. That means we need to be practicing forgiveness *all. the. time.* I know that you've been hurt, that you have felt offended or slighted or betrayed.

The first part of your renovation life is that it is marked by forgiveness. Those verses in the book of Acts say that the church was united. Do you know how unity happens? It's not that everyone became the same. It's not that everyone became super easy to get along with. *They learned the power of forgiveness and practiced it.* It was not perfect. The early church did have a lot of challenges and internal struggles, but it continued to grow and make a difference.

Finally, they are sent out. Set Free! They don't stay in that room. That is the sign that they are changed. That is the after-picture.

I want to remind you that being free has nothing to do with the conditions around you. Ask Nelson Mandela. You can be in a prison and be free, or you can have all the benefits of wealth and health and still be a prisoner to fear and hatred. So, I am not encouraging you to break out of the pandemic restrictions. In fact, how we love others now is by following the orders and staying home.

In the after picture, the disciples are no longer worried about their own problems. They now see the needs of others and they are working to make the world a better place.

Jesus wants to renovate your life and our world. That is my prayer for each of us this day — that we will be transformed and take part in transforming the world by the love of Jesus. Thanks be to God.