

Living on the Easter Side of Life  
Colossians 3:1-4

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What does Easter mean to you? I posed that question to a preschooler and he said, "Easter Bunny with lots of candy." I asked a teenager what Easter meant to her, "Fun in the sun; it's Spring Break!" I asked my hairdresser this week what Easter meant to her and she replied, "I'm going to church Sunday for the first time in five years." I asked a person facing death what Easter meant to him; with a tear in his eye he said, "I can live forever." What does Easter mean to you? Does it mean a new bonnet with a blue ribbon on it, a burst of spring, or a brand new life in Christ?

Let me take you past the empty tomb and the confused disciples on that first Easter morning to the power of the Resurrection in the life of the early Church. It was a power that changed the world. We know that from history. It is also a power that can transform your life. Or as Paul put it to the Church at Colossae, "*So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.*" Are you living on the Easter side of life?

**EASTER PEOPLE HAVE A NEW WAY OF THINKING.** They set their minds on things above.

A couple of weeks ago, Brian Nichols, on trial for rape in an Atlanta courthouse, confiscated a gun from a deputy and went on a shooting rampage that left four people dead, including the judge presiding over his trial. Nichols managed to escape the courthouse and about 2:00 A.M. put a gun in the face of Ashley Smith as she returned to her apartment in North Atlanta. He forced his way into her apartment and proceeded to tie her up, but Ashley Smith kept her cool. Eventually she convinced Nichols to let her read to him from the Bible and from Rick Warren's book The Purpose Driven Life.

Let Ashley tell you the rest in her own words: "I told him I was a child of God and that I wanted to do God's will. I guess he began to want that too. I believe God brought him to my door so he wouldn't hurt anyone else. I told him 'Your purpose might be to surrender, go to prison, and teach others about God.'" The rest, as they say, is history. He let her go and she turned him in.

I suppose no one here is running from the strong arm of the law, but there may be plenty of us here running from ourselves, confused about our purpose for living, wondering what we should do with the rest of our lives.

Of course, there are plenty of people who will tell you what to do with the rest of your life. Marketing experts would have us believe we are consumers. Their job

is to translate our slightest wish into a desperate need. If you don't think such marketing is effective, listen to your kids describe McDonalds.

Politicians would have us believe we are voters, likely to follow the crowd when it comes to casting our votes for leaders. Maybe most of us are. Parents, teachers and employers help us understand who we are, or sometimes put thoughts in our minds that take a long time to get rid of.

My parents never thought I would amount to much. I was the only kid around a crowd of adults so I was always in the way, unable to keep up, never very good with my hands, not likely to be first in the field of farming. But one night in a little country church when I was no more than twelve years old, I caught a glimpse of what it meant to be a child of God and I have been living into that reality ever since. Have you discovered your purpose of living?

Whatcha got on your mind today? Are your thoughts full of lust, greed, anger, rage, malice, slander, or do you concentrate on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience? Do you forgive as the Lord has forgiven you? Does the peace of Christ rule in your heart? These are the thoughts of those whose minds are set on things above, says Paul. These are the kinds of things that control us and guide us.

Today, this Easter Sunday, I want you to know that you are a child of God, no less than the moon and the stars. You have a purpose for being here! You were made to glorify God and serve others. Maybe it's time to enlarge your vision, change your way of thinking. That is what true repentance is all about.

**EASTER PEOPLE HAVE A NEW PASSION FOR LIVING.** Look in the middle of this text, *"For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."*

Our country is in an uproar this week over the definition of life. It had to happen sooner or later and now it is here. The tragic story of Terry Schiavo played out in the media, the courts, the Congress and the religious pundits of this land is troubling to say the least. Everyone seems to have an opinion except the person whose life is being debated and no one knows for sure what her wishes might be.

Our president says that if we err, we should err on the side of life. His critics immediately ask, "Does that include the death penalty and health care for the poor?" Of this I am convinced, I do not want the courts or the Congress setting the agenda for my living or my dying.

Henri Nouwen writes: "Our society is not a community radiant with the love of Christ, but a dangerous network of domination and manipulation in which we can easily get entangled and lose our soul."

In the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul presents a whole new concept of dying and living. Paul says go ahead and get your dying over with so

you are free to live. Die to yourself so you can be brought to life in Christ. Spiritual transformation begins with death.

There are some things we learn by facing death that is difficult to learn anywhere else. Tim McGraw called me the other day. One of our members told him I love his song, Live Like You're Dying, so he called me. I'm not used to talking to stars and I was stunned that he had just called me up to talk about it. When I finally figured out this was not a hoax, I said, "Tim, the lyrics of your song ring true, so true to me. When you are faced with death, you learn what is important in life. You are not really ready to live until you have come to grips with your death." Remember his lyrics?

*I was finally the husband, that most of the time I wasn't  
And I became a friend, a friend would like to have.  
And all the sudden goin' fishing, wasn't such an imposition  
And I went three times that year I lost my dad.  
Well, I finally read the Good Book,  
And I took a good long hard look,  
At what I'd do if I could do it all again  
And I loved deeper, and I spoke sweeter, and I gave forgiveness I've been  
denying, and someday I hope you get the chance to live like you are dying.*

Once we die to what we cannot control, we are set free to experience life in ways that we never imagined possible before. You are really free to live.

Maxie Dunnam in his book, Alive in Christ, tells about hearing from a small prayer group of twelve women who started meeting as a result of a prayer conference he led in their church. The letter went something like this, "Dear Maxie, I thought you might like to know what has transpired in our prayer group which meets every Thursday morning at 6:30 A.M.

- One alcoholic, given the simple medicine of love, has been sober for ten years.
- One whose husband left her with two boys is making it alone by the power of Christ.
- One who has just put her mother in a nursing home is finding support and the peace she longed for in this group.
- One who was on the verge of a nervous breakdown is now praising the Lord.
- All of us are finding an incredible new life in Christ."

Wouldn't you like to live, not merely survive? Living is a thing you do, now or never. Which do you do? Because Christ died and rose again, you and I can find life that is eternal and everlasting.

**EASTER PEOPLE HAVE A NEW REASON FOR HOPING.** In the last part of the Scripture lesson today we read, "*When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.*"

Reinhold Niebuhr once said, "Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime. Therefore, we must be saved by hope." We are full of hope today.

Twenty-five years ago, Trina Paulus wrote a touching parable of life called Hope for the Flowers. It's a story about Stripe, the caterpillar, who upon his birth immediately ate the leaf on which he was born. Soon Stripe climbed down the tree of his birth to explore new territory. That's when he encountered this huge pile of caterpillars, all climbing over each other in a frantic attempt to reach the top. Stripe joined the climb for a while only to discover that caterpillars who reach the top were immediately knocked back to the ground. So Stripe turned around and climbed down. He frolicked in the grass a while with a lady named Yellow, but it wasn't until Stripe stopped and became very still that Stripe, the caterpillar, became Stripe the butterfly.

The metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly becomes a mighty symbol of the new life offered us in Christ. We are saved by hope. Anyone in Christ is a new creation, the old is gone, the new is come. This transformation is not our doing, but the power of the risen Christ permeating our very being and extending into eternity.

Wouldn't you like to start living on the Easter side of life? A new life in Christ awaits you. A church community will welcome you. Hope for tomorrow surrounds you in the core of our believing.

*In the bulb there is a flower, in the seed an apple tree,  
In cocoons a hidden promise, butterflies will soon be free.  
In the strain and stress of living,  
There's new life for you and me.  
Now revealed this Easter season,  
A gift from God that we can see.*

Wouldn't you like to live on the Easter side of life?

Amen.





Place your message here. For maximum impact, use two or three sentences.