

## What If?

It is Easter. God is good. God is with us. And welcome to all. I want to try something. I was wondering if this morning if we could flood the Facebook chat. When I say Christ is Risen. You write, "He is Risen Indeed." And so welcome. A special welcome if you're new to this feed or just joining us. Maybe you're new to Christianity or have been away. Welcome to the church family we love you, and so glad you could join us.

And this is a different Easter isn't it. COVID-19 brought some unexpected circumstances with kids at home, work at home, and worship at home. And because we don't know exactly when things will return to normal there is a lot of what ifting going on. For Kids what if all this e-learning doesn't work and we need to repeat the grade we're in? Or maybe more likely what if there is no graduation ceremony or celebration, my daughter is in 8th grade. For baseball fans what if the whole season is cancelled? I was reading a possible scenario where all teams would play in Arizona - but a whole season without going to Wrigley or Guaranteed Rate Field? What if no summer parties like Taste of Chicago, Ribfest or Lollapalooza. For our economy, What if COVID-19 leads us into a recession similar to the Great Depression? Will the stock market rebound or not? What if the medical community keeps getting overwhelmed and I can't see a doctor when I need to? Or what if the in shelter orders never cease and we are stuck in our houses for the rest of our lives. Hope you like your neighborhood because that is all the people you are seeing, and virtual contact is the all there is going forward. Ok that's a little dramatic.

You know even before COVID-19 many of us perhaps were good at what ifting. Go to work before the big presentation. What if they hate it and I lose my job. Go to school. What if I can't handle it and I fail. Go on a date. What if they don't like me and I never find love. Unfortunately, I'm really good at negative what ifting. What if I don't represent God well, what if I forget what to say, what if there is a zombie apocalypse and I'm unprepared. But can I pause? Can we be real. I have found it incredibly unhelpful to go down the road of negative what ifs. I agree with this quote, "You'll never get anywhere if you go about what-iffing like that." (Roald Dahl)

You know this is a time period that reminds me of the life of Job. Does anyone remember his story? We live in a time where so much has been taken away, and Job can relate to this. In a day he lost his wealth, and his children, and then later his health not to COVID-19, but boils. And much of the book of Job is his struggle with suffering. He has friends that are super unhelpful because they just bring what ifs. What if you did something wrong to bring this on yourself. What if God is getting his justice. And the most helpful consideration during distress, isn't the what if's his friends bring. But the reality of what Job knows. In the very middle of the book placed there for emphasis. Job and his friends stop what ifting, and focus on the reality of is and Job says, "I KNOW that my redeemer lives" (19:25) Not what I think, or hope. I know he will stand on the earth. And I will see him. The most helpful insight through a time of suffering was not what if, and it was not why. It was what is. *The greatest answer to what if is what is*

Because today is Easter Sunday. Christ is Risen he is risen indeed. And COVID-19 might have canceled a few things. Our gathering, our easter egg hunt, our quiche and coffee. But it did not cancel the empty tomb, and it did not cancel the peace of forgiveness, it did not cancel our enemies defeat, and it did not cancel joy overwhelming joy, and it did not cancel the beautiful realities of WHAT IS for us this Easter.

Let's consider more of what is as we get into the Word. Our consideration this Easter is the Great Resurrection chapter of 1 Corinthians 15. We do believe the words of the NT are of reliable witnesses who saw the risen Jesus. Today we meet Paul writing to Christians in Corinth who are wondering a what if. What if there is no resurrection. So Paul plays the game - and shows them just how unhelpful all the what ifs are. And then he answers what if with what is. 1 Corinthians 15 can't wait to share with you. There it is. Say out loud or to someone at home. "Because he lives all fear is gone." Let's have some fun on Easter.

So back in the day I was a wrestler in high school. And I was bad. So bad that my Sophomore year never won a match. Every match, every weekend tournament - not a single victory. But I'll never forget one shining moment. My Sr year a tournament at WISCO in Milwaukee. It was the end of the year regionals, and I was against a guy clearly winning and about to pin me. Familiar territory for me. But I remember this moment where I gave it all I had in one moment, and I reversed the position. And went straight into the cradle with all the force I could muster and pinned him - boom. Slap the mat, lift the arm. I had won. And it was such a great moment reversing that situation. My coach said it was the greatest match I've had. Probably as stunned as I was. What seemed like a clear loss, became a victory in a moment.

Tell me if this isn't like Easter, with Easter being so much better. It looked like death had won. Jesus left to hang on a cross and die. Placed in the tomb. The burial place shut and sealed by the stone. The women going that first Easter to commemorate that body as if were over. Like my coach hanging his head about a good season. Until something unexpected - in a moment a different reality. They see an angel who says to them, "He is not here; he has risen, just as he said." (Mt 28:6) And that's the premise of Paul in our lesson to. Consider Paul's dialogue with us, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead." That's the reality. That's the facts. Why do the what ifs need to stop. Because of what is, that *Jesus IS alive*.

And what this means for you. The glorious reality is that you have a God is with you and working for you during COVID-19. Surely I am with you always he says. We love those working for us. Have you heard in New York the people clapping, and singing, and encouraging the medical field. That's good to do. Thank you doctors and nurses! But as humans they take shifts off. But you have one who has not slept and will not slumber as he watches over you and works things out. The God making a way right now - when it seems there is no way. If you're at home can we give a hand for our God who is alive with us and working!

But there is more to this. And I wanted to ask when is the last time you had someone say to you or you said yourself, "Unfair!" I was reading an article about fishermen in San Diego saying it is unfair they can't go out on the ocean to provide a living, but people can line up to go to Costco. I saw in the news Dairy Farmers in Wisconsin dumping gallons and gallons of fresh milk because things have changed during this time, and the demand for milk is lower. I think of the dialogue over what is essential. Those who are essential saying it's unfair why do I have to put at risk going to work. Those who can't go to work saying it's unfair, why can't I work and

why isn't my job essential when others are. We could say this about the beginning of the virus - unfair we didn't start it but now we have to deal. Why is my life wrecked 'cause of someone else

Our Easter message contains parts about it that we look at it and say unfair. I don't know your theological mainframe or background. But if you go back to the beginning everything was fair and in working order. Perfect - everything was good. Until Adam and Eve rebelled. They ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and it opened up a Pandora's box of evil. This world became like Humpty Dumpty, fallen, broken, without any ability to put it back together. And so we from their sin deal with all sorts of things. COVID-19. Bad relationships. Death. And Paul reminds us of this v.21, "For since death came through a man" v.22, "For as in Adam all die." And we could say unfair! I didn't start it. And I wish we could claim immunity from sin, but it is something we also have been carrying since the time of the fall. So though we didn't start it, we've continued it and still deal with the consequences of sin.

And our sins wouldn't just mean death in this life, and pain and turmoil, but separation from God forever. That is what they deserve. As Paul reminds us the wages of sin is death.

Except for Jesus. Except for Easter. Except for the gospel's greater unfairness. How did those verses go on? "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." Where Adam brought rebellion, Jesus brought obedience. Where Adam brought guilt and shame, Jesus brought peace and joy. Where Adam brought death, Jesus brings life to the full and everlasting. And so the good news of Jesus is totally unfair. It's like being credited a victory you did fight for. Given an A on the test that you didn't take. Like winning the lottery and you didn't even buy a ticket. If we are every hung upon on unfairness, consider the glorious reality of what Christ has won for us on Easter. Because the reality is this. *The curse of sin IS reversed*. If you are in Christ you need not be in guilt and shame, need not be locked in fear of death. If you're new to Christ, this good news is for you. Jesus lived, Jesus died, and he rose for you. So you could experience the wonder of his incredible love. Look to him and find your hope in Him.

Let me ask where right now is God treating you better than you deserve, where is he graciously unfair? Is it that the kids are home, but they are healthy. Is it that you do have money coming in. Is that you have enough for the day? Last week was pretty incredible for me. It was my birthday, and I had so many great things going on. Had a donut, shared devotion. But at 5:30 I had something I will never forget and that was an impromptu parade. A banner was outside and cars from our congregation rode past waving and honking, throwing cards out the window. It was fantastic. How much of that did I deserve? It wasn't fair it was grace. This is our God through Jesus Christ. Psalm 103 v10 says, "He does not treat us as our sins deserve." Content to give us so far better than what we deserve because the curse is reversed.

But COVID-19 has tested us because it brings up all the things we are not in control of. Can we be real. If you're at home feel free to say out loud I'm not in control. Ready. We are not in control of our plans - they have been disrupted in a major way. We are not in control of money - whether stock market or income. We are not in control of other people - what they do or say during this time. Many have said the hoarding of TP was about trying to gain control over one small area of our lives. I consider this quote by Kay Hooper, "I think control is an illusion we build to protect ourselves, and the larger we try to make that circle, the weaker it gets. We

can't control our own destinies, much less someone else's. And even the illusion is so fragile, any change can destroy it." So who is in control?

I love what Paul writes, "For **he must reign** until he has put all his enemies under his feet." (15:26) Which means he is reigning. What did Jesus do after he ascended into heaven? He sat at the right hand of God, and that means no matter how your life has changed. *Jesus IS in control*. He is reigning right now. Above all things for your sake and my sake. And yes there will be storms in world broken like Humpty Dumpty, but we have a God to navigate the storms for us, and work out all things for our good. And what does this mean.

You know something that I look forward to getting back to is vacationing. Anyone there with me. To hop on an airplane to go on a cruise. And let's say you choose a cruise liner. There you are no coronavirus to worry about. You can lay by the pool, eat all that delicious food, and catch a Broadway equivalent show. But what's really interesting is that you do all of this on a moving ship, without ever meeting the captain. This person is navigating the wild and vast ocean and you're sleeping, comfortable putting your life in their hands. But you don't know their name. Reminds me of Blumer vacations - roadtripping in the conversion van. When Dad was driving I could sleep in the bed in the back - different era. Knowing Dad's got this. We don't have a ship captain, we don't have Dad Blumer, we have the God who conquered death - who is still in control. Who is reigning over all things right now! And because of this we can have peace. I love what it says in Isaiah chpt 43, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze." (1-2) And so you can be calm, you can sit back and rest knowing God is in control.

You know Easter means so much to so many. One of the differences during this time for me is using Facebook a bit more. And I was able to reconnect with a friend I grew up with and his father was my pastor. He was considering his Father and mother who are now in heaven with the Lord. He brought up this phrase his dad would use for the sick and terminally ill that "Either you get better, or you get perfect." What an incredible understanding. Wish we could share that with those in the hospital sick with COVID-19. Either I get better and live a while longer. Or I get perfect where my body never aches and never has pain. This is true for all who are facing death. On Facebook I got connected to another college buddy who I played baseball with. His child right now is dealing with cancer. It's a hard seasons as this child was released from the hospital and is now entering hospice and what looks to be the final stages of his earthly life. The song his father has going around is "I will rise." This is a man who knows either this child gets better or this child is made perfect.

When we consider the death toll which is projected to be 60,000 in the United States when this is all said and done. When you look at New York who is using public lands for temporary grave sites. When you consider the day when we have to, our loved ones have to face death. How great to know the reality of Easter and what is. *Death IS defeated*. Paul said, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." (26) God doesn't like death any more than we do it is called an enemy, but it is an enemy that has been defeated through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the enemy that will never touch us again in the new heavens and the new earth. In the place where my childhood pastor and his wife are. Along with all who died in the Lord.

As we close I wanted to bring up another great Easter song is by MercyMe called, "I can only imagine." Perhaps some of you saw the movie that came out a couple years ago. And it's a song filled with glorious possibilities. He is gloriously what if. What if I dance, what if I sing, what if in heaven I fall to my knees, or if I'm just still before the Lord.

Easter fills our minds with these thoughts don't they. Of what will be. And maybe this kind of what if is ok. Go with me. What if one day we wake up to a world without pain. What if one day we see those we love living their best life. What if one day the devil is no longer trying to trip me up. What if one day I no longer have to war with my sinful nature. What if one day I have absolutely nothing to worry about. What if one day I get to explore a world filled with unexplainable inexhaustible beauty. What if one day I see with my own eyes the one who loved me first and best. And what if in that day he simply says, "Well done good and faithful servant."

But I end where I began. Let's not what if. Let's focus on what is. And I tell you all of those are WHAT IS because of Jesus. They are WHAT IS because of of EASter. This Easter don't be afraid of what could be, don't be afraid because you're not in control. Focus on what is. That Christ is Risen. He is Risen indeed - and the reality of that overwhelms everything else. Amen.

Lord I thank you for the day you have in store for me. When like Jesus I will rise to be with you. We consider all those who are with you now. We need not fear during COVID-19, because you are reigning now for the sake of us your church. But we do pray you would lead us through this time stronger and more connected to you. Thank you for Jesus life, his death, and his resurrection. Help me to glory in just how unfair you are to me, to love me and give so much more than I deserve. Thank you Jesus. Amen.

