

I love how many people just were lined up to make sure you got seats, and that the front rows are still empty. Glad you guys are here. I want us to remember today, what today is all about. I wake up every Easter Sunday morning and this one was special to me because it's the first time we get to celebrate Easter Sunday as a church family in this spot, in this location. But it's always special to me to wake up on Easter thinking about the fact that because of time zones, it's already begun on other parts of the world. That on Easter Sunday, millions and millions of people, time zone after time zone, will gather together in houses of worship like this one, and they look completely different, and they will celebrate together millions and millions of people celebrating together that Jesus is alive.

That's so powerful to me, especially when I think about the history of Easter. I want to tell the history for just a minute before we move into the real heart of the message in a moment, but I want to just remind us of what this is all about, what's all this fuss about? Why do we make a big deal out of this Sunday? God created the world, and he gave it to us, and he said, "Here's paradise enjoy it." We sinned and blew it, and messed it up. We marred creation. We brought it down to something it wasn't supposed to be.

And so God immediately went about the work of redeeming it all, fixing it all, repairing it all, recreating. His plan of redemption as it unfolded, worked its way through prophets and priests and kings in the Old Testament, all the way down through captivity and then a reassembling back in the Holy Land again. And out of that situation, out of that soil of this Jewish Holy Land, this family, this humble little family, a young virgin named Mary has a baby named Jesus. Her soon-to-be husband Joseph adopts him as his own, and they raise him together there in Galilee. They don't have much, but they live life.

When he is about 30 years old, Jesus is baptized, and it kind of commences his public ministry. At his baptism the disciples begin to follow him, and he takes them everywhere he goes. He asks them to lay down their fishing nets and become fishers of men. He spends three years teaching them, pouring his life into them, developing them, helping them to grow spiritually, helping them to understand, helping them to know that some day he would die and rise again.

The funny thing is when Jesus died and rose again, they didn't understand at all. They spent those three years soaking up and learning and trying to figure it out, but when it happened, they were still somewhat without a clue. So you come to the place where Jesus is living his last few weeks of his life, and it's almost like when you read the gospels things get very intense. Half of the book of John is just the last week of Jesus's life. A lot happened in those last few days as he squeezed out of those final hours with the disciples all of the relational teaching time that he could. Then he has supper with them one last time. Then they go to the Garden of Gethsemane together. And there in Gethsemane people come and arrest him. The disciples don't quite understand what's going on.

They arrest him, they put him on trial, six different trials, and then they crucify Jesus. They nail him to a cross and he hangs there. From 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on that crucifixion day, Jesus dies a very slow and very painful and difficult death. He suffers for us and the disciples are distraught. They don't understand it. They're getting together. They're sort of scattered but they're starting to get back together and talk about what's going on. They're all just down. Because what they hoped for was kind of a political deliverance from Rome. "Jesus will just come fix everything. He'll be on a throne and we'll reign with him and this will happen any time now."

Instead what they saw was they crucified him. He died. "Our savior, the redeemer, the one that we're following and we're hoping in is dead." They were so convinced he was dead that the ladies who were

close friends of his, the Marys and the friends of his arrive at the tomb of Jesus early on Sunday before the light had even broken for the purpose of anointing and wrapping his body for longterm burial. They didn't have time between his death on the cross and the beginning of sabbath and so they had to leave that and wait on that. So Sunday morning they arrive to the tomb to prepare his body for longterm burial. They didn't understand what was happening. And when they got there, the tomb was empty.

An angel filled them in on the good news. "He's not here. He has risen." And those ladies go back and they fill in the disciples on what's happened. They fill in Peter and John who run to the tomb and John gets there first. Peter runs in first. He finds this empty tomb and Jesus's grave clothes left behind. Then Jesus encounters two of those disciples on this road to Emmaus. They start to understand something powerful is going on. "We've been distraught. We've been down. We haven't understood but it seems like there's more to the story."

Then Jesus finds himself in the upper room with the disciples revealing himself to them. A week later on a separate Sunday night, Thomas is there and Jesus says, "It's really me. Touch my scars and know that it's me." And Thomas is like, "I got it. I get it." And the disciples are starting to get it, starting to understand. Jesus spent those remaining days with them as his resurrected self teaching them those final truths, and then he ascends back to heaven.

He goes back to heaven and sometimes we miss out or overlook the significance of his ascension back to heaven. But he said, "If I do that, if I go back home, I'm going to send the one who will come along side you, the Holy Spirit. And he's going to comfort you, he's going to teach you, he's going to protect you, he's going to guard you from the spiritual forces of evil and so forth and he's going to come. And I'm going to prepare a place for you and someday I'm going to come back and gather you again to myself."

Jesus ascended back to the Father, and the Holy Spirit comes upon the church and empowers the church in a way it had never experienced before and suddenly they were getting it. They were getting it. The New Testament records everything was different after that. When they encountered Jesus and had those eye witness, hands-on experiences, face-to-face with the resurrected Jesus and they knew they had seen him dead. He didn't faint, swoon, fake it, pass out, just go to sleep for a bit on the cross. He died there. He was dead. And now they've seen him and they've walked with him for weeks on end.

And now Pentecost is coming. The Holy Spirit has filled them and these guys became bold. And all of the sudden they're telling everyone. "That Jesus that we followed, he died on the cross and we told you guys that he died for our sins, but then we weren't sure what was going on and now he's back and he's resurrected and we want to tell everybody about him."

They kept getting thrown in jail. Which I think is very significant that these guys had left a bunch of jobs and they'd left positions of influence perhaps or any hope or dream of having a reputation and building some kind of fortune or earthly empire. And instead lost everything and were arrested repeatedly, beaten, killed with swords, beheaded, burned at stakes. That's the history of Christianity. They went to their deaths one after another. Of the original 12 disciples, one was Judas who betrayed him and took his own life. Ten of the rest died martyrs' deaths and John was exiled into his 90s and died of natural causes in exile. They went to their deaths for Jesus.

And that's not all. The reality is if you know much about history, for about 300 years the church shouldn't have made it, shouldn't have worked. You have people that are rejected by the religious

leaders of their day. Over in Rome, they are rejected by the civic leaders of their day. They are misunderstood. I remember taking a church history class learning that the early people in Roman era, they believed this rumor that those Christian people, they didn't call them that but they called them the Followers of the Way. They called Followers of the Way. That the Followers of the Way they'd get together and when they're behind closed doors they eat people and they drink blood.

I mean we know the contest. Jesus was giving us a symbolism. But in the early era the church was talked very poorly about and they were not people of position or influence or power. And yet somehow they make it. In fact within 325 years somehow they've covered all of ancient Europe and northern Africa. Their influence has just spread and blown up and dominated. Why? Why did the church make it? Organizationally it's a little weird. It doesn't seem to work. As far as positions of political influence or power, Christianity doesn't hold it and Jesus who was crucified... Well lots of people were crucified and there were lot of different stories of people who might be religious leaders. But something was different about Jesus. He was alive to the point that those early disciples said, "We will lay everything on the line and give up our very lives to defend our eyewitness accounts of seeing and interacting with the resurrected Jesus."

So I've made this decision in my life, that if Jesus could predict his own death and resurrection and that history would support that this movement that shouldn't have made it is still here, and that all of these people died. If that's true of him, if he could predict his own death and resurrection, I'll just follow him anywhere. And that's where I am today. I follow Jesus.

Now you might be here today and it's Easter Sunday, you came with family. Maybe you're not sure where you stand on all that. You're not sure what you believe. That's okay. We want this church to be a very safe place. You can come and check it out. We're not going to hand you a knife and a chicken and ask you to do anything weird. We don't pass around snakes. It's not that kind of thing. I understand. Everybody is at different places spiritually and that's okay. But I want you to know my heart and my heart is I stand here as one who says, "If Jesus Christ, the Son of God, could predict his own death and resurrection and the world could be so radically changed by that event, I will follow him anywhere and I'll go all in believing him." So that's where I am today. That's where I am.

That's why we gather today. It's not for many of the other reasons. I think Easter is fun for lots of reasons. We wake up on Easter Sunday and we celebrate it with candy and eggs. I'm not sure where the egg thing came from but we celebrate all those things. I celebrate those things. I enjoy Easter Sunday. I like Cadbury eggs. Anybody else? This is confession time. They're like Christian crack. I get all of that and I celebrate all that. But then we come together sometimes and we understand what this is really all about.

So here at Grace Hills we've been walking through a message series called Healing. It's been very defining for who we are as a church. From day one we started Grace Hills to be a place, a family, for people who are broken. Now if you've got it all together and you don't need church and you don't need anything fixed in your life, there's lots of places to go on Sunday, but we're going to be unapologetically a place for people who have brokenness. So we've talked in this series about how all of us have to face our brokenness. We're all broken to one degree or another in different ways. It doesn't mean we're all the same. It doesn't mean we have the same experiences but all of us have brokenness in our lives, the brokenness of sin, the brokenness of the sins of others toward us, the brokenness of experiences that we've walked through.

We have that brokenness, and all of us as a result of that brokenness have hurts, habits, and hangups. Just universal, all of us have that. So in this series we've walked through that. And throughout the series, we have given a lot of steps, a lot of principles, a lot of practices to follow like declaring myself bankrupt. Jesus said, if you want to be blessed you have to declare yourself poor in spirit. "I have nothing God. I'm powerless. I can't fix this on my own. I don't have what it takes inside of me. I'm not good enough or powerful enough to fix my own life. I need you." And so that's a step that I take.

Another step is confession. I tell God about my sins. I tell other people about my sins and God gives me forgiveness and other people help me with healing. And so I walk through confession and that's a big hard step that we've talked about.

We've talked about the step of forgiveness and repairing relationships. We've talked about all kinds of steps, but what I want to do today is to understand the connection, the direct connection between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and my healing, your healing. Because I believe that while this is a global event, while it's universal and everybody kind of wrestles with it, even people who don't believe have to grapple with it and it definitely affects the way that our culture is, that the resurrection of Jesus seems larger than life. It's timeless. It's this historical event. It also matters directly and personally to me and to you individually. That the resurrection of Jesus didn't just shape history, it shapes our lives somehow. I want to explain how.

The Apostle Paul, who encountered Jesus after the other disciples, but had this personal relationship with Jesus, he wrote some things in the book of Philippians in chapter three. He kind of gets into the aim of his life, the purpose of his life and he says, "I've accomplished a lot, I've done lots of great things, I've earned lots of money, I've done really well, I've had positions." And then he also says, "I've also blown it. I've also sinned. I persecuted the church. I've been zealous for all the wrong reasons." He goes through all of his faults, and failures and hangups. And he looks at both his accomplishments and his failures.

Chapter three of Philippians is where he goes, "I count all of that like garbage compared to one single purpose for which I now live my life. I want to know Jesus. I want to know Jesus." So in Philippians chapter three in one verse he says this, "I want to know Christ. I want to experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him sharing in his death so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead."

In that verse, and those two verses are so much depth for us to kind of mine this morning about the connection between the resurrection of Jesus and my personal experience of living life under his care. I want to just connect the two this morning. I'm sort of summing up a lot of things that we've taught in the last few weeks and I'm also sharing a big, big powerful truth with you this morning about life. But I want to just draw out of this passage two very simple connections between the resurrection and you. Between Jesus's resurrection and your life, two big, big ideas, big truths.

And the first one is this. There is purpose in your pain. There's purpose in your pain. What Paul said in that verse is a little mind boggling, because we get one part of it right. He said, "If Jesus rose again from the dead, I want to know that kind of power." And we get that. Yes. Send me the tape on that. I need that. I need the power of the resurrection in my life. I want to experience power. What we don't understand is where he says, "I want to know Jesus. I want to suffer with him." And we go, "Okay, whatever. I don't know if I'm signing up for that okay."

"I want to suffer with him." What does that mean? "I want to suffer with him." Just like in Jesus's beatitudes, Paul's presented something to us that's kind of hard to sort out. How do I reconcile that? I'm just going to be really honest here. I don't want to suffer. I'm just owning it. I don't want to hurt. I woke up this morning and it's a happy Easter kind of morning. There's balloons outside. We're going to take photos. I bought a shirt four weeks ago for today. Saved it. Didn't wear it Sunday after Sunday. Last night tried it on. Angie goes, "You can't wear that. It doesn't match the family."

So nonetheless, we get up and we're like we're going to do family photos. So it's a happy Easter kind of Sunday. I like happiness. I didn't wake up this morning and go, "God bring the pain. I want to hurt today." I don't know that Paul was saying in general, "I want to hurt." There's something in what he said. He said, "I want to suffer," and he uses a phrase that really means, "I want to suffer with Jesus, with Jesus." And the phrase we get our word fellowship from it. It's this Greek word *koinonia*. He says, "I want to fellowship with Jesus in pain."

There's pain that I've walked through in my life that nobody's been able to explain to me. And I'm sure you've felt the very same thing. Why did I have to lose that loved one? Why did I suffer that abuse? Why did I go through that loss or that trauma or that moment? And as a pastor, a lot of times people will ask me, "What sense does that make? What could possibly be the purpose or the good that would come from that kind of suffering?" And so often I feel like I'm at a loss because I have to ultimately say I don't know. I don't know the thing that God was trying to do there or was bringing about. You may not know this side of eternity. Sometimes we just don't know. I don't know.

Sometimes people ask that question about Christianity as a religion. They'll say, "How do you believe in a God when there's so much suffering in the world, when there's so much pain. How do you reconcile that with a God that you say is good." And as a pastor a lot of times in those discussions I go, "Very legitimate question." I don't always know why that suffering happens. I don't know why there are refugees. I don't know why there's war. I don't know why there's famine, why disease is spread. I don't have the answers to all those questions.

I do know one thing though. This is what I know about Christianity. While I don't know why the pain happens, and I don't know why the suffering occurs, and I don't always know why God allows what he allows, here is what I know about Christianity that seems to set it apart from every other kind of world view or belief system I've ever encountered in my entire life, and I was a religious studies major at a secular college. I've read all the books, searched through them all and here's something that makes this different. For Christianity God comes down here and joins us.

I don't know why there's suffering. I especially don't understand or can't fathom, but God chose to come down here and hurt with us. He came down here and He went through rejection. Why would God do that? God doesn't have to be rejected. He's God. He came down here and went through embarrassment and ridicule. Why? He's God. He doesn't have to do that. But he came down here and he suffered all that. He suffered being falsely accused. Have you ever have people talk about you behind your back and you go, "I don't understand why people do that. What sense does that make?" I think Jesus would say to you, "Well you've entered into some fellowship with me. I've been there." Walk through pain and loss and grief. Jesus walked through it as well. God came here and he suffered all of it.

I had a professor once who shared that he and his wife had walked through four miscarriages and he was pastoring a church at the time. He said that when church was over on Sunday, people would file out

the door and they would say things to him, meaning very well, but all of their words just were like daggers. All of the things they thought were helpful were really just hurtful and he said there was nothing anybody could say that seemed to make that pain better, especially after the second, third and fourth times. Then he said, "Then I came across this passage in Philippians where the bible says that Jesus suffered and when I suffer I fellowship with him. I fellowship with him."

I was in Starbucks one day and I was watching... This guy comes in and he had a hat on. It was a veteran's hat. He had fought in Vietnam. It said "Vietnam Veteran" on the hat. What intrigued me was that he walked in and he walks up to the counter and over in the corner was another guy with a veteran's hat on. They had both been in wars and they looked across at each other. They apparently didn't know each other but when they saw each other they both kind of nodded. It was like this instant connection that none of the rest of us were part of. It was like they get each other in a way I never will. They've suffered together.

I want to know Jesus and my suffering... I don't know what I produces in my life all the time. I don't know if it's making me more patient, I don't know if it's making me a better person. I don't always know. I don't know the payoff and we as Americans are big on wanting to know the payoff, right? Here's what I do know though. Every time I hurt, I hurt with the one who came to hurt for me. My pain has a purpose because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Here's a second big truth. There is power to change. There is power to change. There is purpose in your pain because of Jesus and his death on the cross and his resurrection, and there is power to change. This is where we get to the part of the passage that we understand a little bit more, at least we think we do. Yes, I want to experience the power of his resurrection. And sometimes if we're not careful we'll think that that's like a powerful moment. It's a worshipful experience. It's going to church and getting really into it and everybody claps randomly and spontaneously at the end of the song... That's the power of his resurrection right? I'm sure it is, but I think Paul has something even bigger in mind here.

Because when you look in the scriptures and you think about your healing and your brokenness and your sin and the lostness of humanity and what Jesus came to die to accomplish, to purchase back to himself, his people to redeem us from the power of sin. And then he sets us on a course of healing and growing, and we get frustrated because we're still seemingly have our feet stuck in the mud of sin. As a Christian I can't seem to overcome it and I can't seem to win. So the bible gives me lots of techniques, lots of advice, lots of wisdom. There are whole sections of scripture that are called wisdom literature. Just wisdom for living life. So he tells us if you're deep in debt, then he gives us wisdom. Borrower is servant to the lender. Here's how to get out of that. So he gives us wisdom about life, wisdom about money, wisdom about finances, wisdom about relationships, wisdom about my pain, my addictions, brokenness, all that stuff. He gives us wisdom.

We spent six weeks walking through wisdom. The wisdom of confession, the wisdom of declaring my bankruptcy, trusting him to be powerful in my life, all those things. I can go to Barnes and Noble and get lots of wisdom about stuff. If I'm wrestling with something, struggling with something, I can go to the bookstore and guaranteed to find a book on it. Thousands of self-help books are published every year. I can go find my subject, my exact weakness, introverts with an addiction to Cadbury eggs. Pull it off the shelf, crack it open, read through the 12 steps, walk through those 12 steps, write them in a note. I can do them every day and I can get better. But how many of you have gone to the bookstore, you've found that book about the problem you struggle with, you go home and you read it, or you watch a seminar,

or you YouTube it or ask the Google, or whatever, and you go through those things and you get the wisdom. Now you know what to do. And once you knew what to do, you then did it perfectly and never had a problem again.

No. You know why? Because it takes more than knowing what to do. It takes power. It takes ability. Where does that ability come from? Where does that power come from? Well, if I've confessed that I'm powerless and now I'm looking around. How do I fix this? How do I heal? And I look at the resurrection of Jesus, what Paul says is that I want to know the power that raised him from the dead. So let's dissect that a little bit.

He first says, "I want. I desire." It's a purpose. It drives me. I want to know and the word know is not just intellectual knowledge, not just collecting facts. It's to know by experience, to know first hand. First hand knowledge. He says, "I want first hand knowledge. I desire first hand knowledge of the power." And that word power in that verse is dunamis. We get the word dynamite from it, so it's like destructive, explosive, dynamic power that changes things, changes whole landscapes. So he says, "I desire to have firsthand knowledge of the changing power that raised Jesus from the dead." And he lives his life for that.

So here's the promise for you. You can know the suffering of Jesus when you suffer and you can know the power of God to change your life. My old pastor, Rick Warren, used to say he was addicted to changed lives. I didn't always fully understand that until I really started digging into this passage and understanding that the reason we gather together week after week and that we try to create small groups and relationships and do all... The reason we do all the stuff that we do is because at the end of the day, Jesus changes lives. And we're broken and we still struggle and we still wrestle, but he is alive. And he's alive because of the power of God and he invites us into a relationship with himself in which we know him.

I don't just know about Jesus. I don't just read about him in a history book. No, I know him. We have talked. We've spent time together. He has accepted me into his family and I know him. And I know his suffering. Now I don't know what it's like to go to the cross. I can't pay for people's sins. I'm not in any way, shape or form putting myself or my suffering on the level of Jesus's. It's just that my pain in a sense helps me to identify with and to have fellowship with Jesus. That Jesus and I can make eye contact and go, "I know." He says to us, "I know. I know, it's hard."

And I get to know today the power that changes people's lives. So when you get to that point, I've been there. When you get to that point where you are desperately wondering, "Why can't I stop doing this? When will it change? Will I ever get better? Will I ever overcome this? Will the pain ever go away?" The promise is yes, it will and it can and it begins the moment that you know the power and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is alive, and that doesn't just matter for history, it doesn't just matter for the world, it matters for you. It matters for me. Because now, we get to know him. We get to know him.

Would you bow your heads with me. Father, I ask you in this moment to unveil for each one of us where we stand with you. God it's possible we know church. We know religion. We know ritual. We know the rules. We think we know the expectations of other people. We know the story and yet we don't know Jesus. God I pray if anyone in this room doesn't know you, God may they come to know you now, here, today, in this moment. Father, lead us to know you.

If you're here this morning, and you're hearing me pray and you go, "I've been religious, I've gone to church, or I don't believe, I don't have any connection," but you're realizing in this moment, "I need to know Jesus. I need to know him." It's as simple as saying, "Jesus come into my life, I want to know you. Forgive me of my sins and save me. I want to know you."

You just there in the privacy of this moment and the personal touch of this moment, just echo from your heart to him, cry out, "God, I believe in you. Please forgive me. Please save me. Please wash me. Accept me into your family. I want to know you. I want to know that my pain matters. I want to know that I matter, I want to know that this life matters, that it means something, that there's a purpose. And that at the end of the day God, I know that this purpose partly at least, is I get to know the power of your resurrection. God change me, heal me, save me, work in me."

Father I pray that you just sweep across this room and remind us of where we're at, where we could be and help us to come to know you. Cry out, "God I want to know you. Jesus I receive you. Forgive my sins. Cleanse me. Wash me. Receive me. I receive you God. I trust you."

Lord we love you, we praise you. You brought your son Jesus back from the dead for our hope. Thank you. Thank you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.