

The Need for Creed, Pt. 6
Living Third Day Lives

I Corinthians 15: 14-22; I Peter 1: 3-5

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We're down to the heart of the matter. This is the episode in the Jesus-story on which everything depends. "The third day he rose again from the dead." We rise or fall on the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Either he got up or he didn't. Either we have the greatest hope the world has known or we have a bunch of sentimental clap-trap that's not fit for a Hallmark card.

Let's go back to our diagram from last week. We have been saying the Apostles' Creed is a story more than it's a list of ideas. It's a condensed narrative more than a set of precepts. The second chapter is the story of Jesus told in a dozen episodes. Before there was time, before there was anything, the eternal God dwelt in a harmony of love as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Out of his love, the Triune God created heaven and earth. He brought it all into being out of nothing. Human beings above all creatures were made expressly in his image. We have the ability to choose, to love, to speak, to worship. But we went wrong. We chose against our Creator. Death and chaos entered the world. But God determined that he would not be without us. So in the fullness of time he sent his only Son into our world. The eternal Son of God was born of the Virgin Mary. He took up DNA and skin and nerves and bone and walked among us. But a rebellious humanity would not accept the love he brought. We preferred our darkness to his light. So Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He died and was buried. Last week, we saw that though his body was in the tomb, the story of Jesus did not end. He went down to the realm of the dead. Having experienced the hell of separation from his Father on the cross, he took the punishment for sin that we deserve and made it his own. His death became his triumph, and so he went to the realm of the dead as a victor, not a victim. He went to set free the prisoners, to proclaim the liberty of life and forgiveness that he has won for the human race.

But, thankfully, he didn't stay "below." He came back up. In fact, if Jesus hadn't returned from the dead, we would never have been able to see his Cross as a triumph. It would only have been defeat. If he had gone to the realm of the dead and never come back to the land of the living on earth, we would know nothing of his victory or his Lordship. He would be just another failed Messiah, another great

man who fell to the power of evil. As Paul said in our lesson, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins...If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (I Corinthians 15: 17,19). For the story to work, he’s got to come back into our world. He has to be the hero who goes to the far realm, conquers the evil, and returns to his people with the spoils of victory. Indeed, every hero story is just a shadow of this one Great Story. The history of Jesus is the central story of the human race. It’s the story that makes sense of everything. It’s the story we can enter and so be transformed. Now the center of this central story is Jesus’ resurrection. The dead Jesus lives again. His broken body was transformed to a resurrection body, rippling with life and outfitted for eternity.

Jesus rose on a Sunday. If you count the Friday of his crucifixion as the first day, then Sunday, the day of resurrection was the Third day. Sunday was also the first day of the Jewish week. Now think of this in terms of the days mentioned in the creation week of Genesis 1 and 2. God begins creating and that is the first day. So, if you keep time in tune with Scripture, every Sunday reminds us of the beginning of creation. It is no coincidence that Jesus rose not on Friday or Saturday, but on Sunday, the first day of the week. The resurrection is a new creation. It’s man coming back to life from death. It’s eternal life transforming a human body. It’s the beginning of a new humanity in Jesus. Sunday is a creation day. So the Third Day is a day of new life and new creation. The Third Day is the day of fulfillment, when the victory within his horrifying death on the cross came to be seen in the this world. The Third Day reminds us that the resurrection is about a new order, a new age, that Jesus has begun.

And that’s where I want us to spend our time this morning. What does it mean to live Third Day lives? If we really believed that the crucified Jesus rose from the dead and broke the power of death, how would we live? What does a life lived in resurrection joy look like? I worry that there’s a disconnect between what we confess in the Apostles’ Creed and the way we feel and function in the world. I’m not sure the truth of Jesus’ resurrection regularly reaches my heart and then flows out in my words and actions. In our lesson this morning, Peter said that we “have been born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (I Peter 1: 3). Jesus’ resurrection is the grounds for no longer living in futility and despair, but for a hope that is lively and life giving. How do we do that?

This week I asked the elders this question, “If the resurrection is true, then it means I don’t have to.....” What would you say? If the resurrection is really true, then I don’t have to:

- Worry so much.
- Try to fix everything.
- Fear death.
- Stay stuck in myself.
- Look at the world and feel only despair and defeat.

Jesus is alive. So God’s got this thing under control. We did our worst and God turned it into the best news ever. That means we are free from the pressure that’s it all about us and what we do and how we get it all done.

On the positive side, what would Third Day lives look like?

- We’d be full of *hope*. Even in the worst situations, we’d know that Jesus overcame the powers of death, sin and evil and the redeemer of the world will bring everything to rights by the end. As Peter said, we have been born again, out of futility, into a life of hope, precisely because of the resurrection
- We’d be people of deep, calm *peace* even in the midst of chaos, for we’d know what the final outcome of the world will be.
- We’d be *free* people, unafraid of what man can do to me, knowing that the worst someone can do is to take our earthly lives, but they cannot touch our eternal lives.
- We’d be *giving* people, no longer scrabbling and scrambling in a fight for survival of the fittest. Knowing the eternal life we have in Jesus, Third Day people are free to give their lives away to others.
- We’d be *real* people. There would be no need to live in the delusions of our culture. We can face down the reality of aging, mortality, failures, breakings and rendings because we have joined to the one who took our sadness and sin as his own, and took it down to the depths of hell only to return in new life. He took our betrayal that led to his broken body and outpoured blood and made it the sign of the life he gives to us every time we take communion. He took the denials of Peter and restored him in love and forgiveness so that Peter never needed to pretend to be anything but who he was, a forgiven, restored sinner bearing witness to the Lord of life.
- Above all, Third Day lives overflow with *joy*. This is no shallow chipperness. This is a joy that accounts for the sorrow in the deep wells of the earth. We see that God is turning our scars into beauty marks. He took

his thorns and wore them as a crown. He still turns ashes into beauty. He still turns deep darkness into morning.

Hope, peace, freedom, giving, reality, joy—that's the kind of life I'd like to have. That's a life that would be compelling to others, that would spread the gospel across the world.

But I don't live this way most of the time, and I don't know many Christians who do. We seem to be as distracted and stressed as the pagan down the street. We certainly winge and whine like everyone else. Our foreheads are wrinkled with worry. Our attempts at love are hesitant and tentative. We stay carefully guarded. We seldom break into song or dance with joy. Are there people who would say of us, "They are a mirthful people"? What's happened to us? Third Day lives should be overflowing with the mirth of the Triune God who has accounted for the sorrow and suffering in the world and secured its redemption.

What steals our joy? Well, there's the obvious—our bodies are decaying, we have to work for our living and the ground is full of thistles, we're still prone to sin and so is everybody around us. So of course, the world, the flesh and the devil are always working against our joy. But let's look at a few specifics that actually may fall within our control. Here are a few symbols of joy-stealers I've encountered: Smart phones, Fox News, Commercials, Cozy Living Rooms, and Football. Shall I explain? My Blackberry represents a nexus of joy stealers. I have information addiction. I want the squirt of a new piece of news, a new communication, a little buzz to fill in all unfilled silences. Plus, it represents the bane of multi-tasking. I have so many little tasks buzzing around my head like flies that I can't gear down into the big story, the true story of the risen Jesus. Add to that a steady diet of any TV news network, and you're killing your joy. News networks are designed to keep us in a state of agitation and fear. We are meant to watch and say, "Ain't it awful, and ain't it just getting awfuller?" And of course they export the addictive fear that if you don't watch you'll miss something. Here's Breaking News: turn it off and you won't miss anything! Commercials go without saying. The lustifying of everything turns women into objects, appetites into gods and unnecessary things into joy-draining quests. A Cozy Living Room represents the cocoon of my home and the brightness, loudness, muffling effect of all my comforts. I miss the stars. I miss walking. I miss speaking to neighbors. I miss being connected to the land in a way that connects me to God. Finally, football represents the constant presentation of a story of struggle and quest that invites me to join it emotionally. I love it. But I actually attach myself to the fate of a team and let my joy, my time, my love, my life be more informed by the story

on the gridiron than the story at the heart of the cosmos. Is there anything more embarrassing than the middle aged man at the game yelling, not cheering, with such a desperate passion that you suspect he believes the outcome of the game actually matters in the real world?

The culture we live in is not going to help us. Joy is not spontaneous. Living Third Day lives requires discipline. We've got to be intentional about eliminating joy-stealers. We've got to be ferocious in our dedication to joy-creators. What if I told myself, "You can watch News for the same number of minutes as you read Scripture and pray everyday." In other words, you want a half-hour segment of news? Get out your Bible and earn your news. Any more than that and you're draining your soul. You want to watch football? Be sure you take a walk during which time you go over the history of the story of our salvation in Christ—work through the 12 episodes in the Jesus-Story of the Creed. Find your place in the contest of God's love for a wayward world before you attach yourself to a contest that is, after all, only a game.

Of course uncovering joy is deeper than all this. Third Day people worship with zeal. We sing out. We prepare for worship. It is not optional and we don't fall into sleepily demanding that the worship leader get us out of our haze. No, we come to lift our hearts robustly to the Lord of life.

This next point is a bit wild: Third Day lives find the joy in suffering. This is a hard truth. But I find that joy and suffering are linked. It is in the moments when I most desperately need God that I experience his joy. What a mystery—joy, deep, real joy arrives more often when circumstances are hard, not easy.

Jesus told his disciples just before his arrest and death, "So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (John 16: 22). The joy Jesus gives his disciples cannot be taken away. It is anchored in his resurrection. Crucifying Jesus is the worst thing humanity ever did. God-murder is in our hearts and if he left this world to us, we'd take it straight to hell. But the Jesus-story undercuts human evil. Jesus rose. Life wins. God wins. Joy prevails. Our joy is as sure as the resurrection of Jesus.

So Jesus could go on to say to them, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16: 33). I love the King James version here, "But be of good cheer." Be of good cheer, Jesus has overcome the world. He is risen from the dead.

This is the news that sends us out into a dark world with the light of the gospel. This is the story of life we speak into a world of violence and death. Nine days ago, murder struck down our street. We were shocked and enraged. But murder is striking in our community every other day, just not where we live. Third Day Christians sorrow at the violence in the world, but we are not surprised. We do not despair and we do not rage. Jesus has the victory. He sends us into the world with his gospel. Third Day Christians realize that the deeper struggle is figuring out, “Why does our city manufacture 20 year olds who can murder so easily? Why is violence a growth industry for us?” And then we get on with loving little ones whose families are failing to. We start schools in Gardere and we partner with kids at Buchanan or Abounding Love. We hammer Habitat Houses and share food at the Outreach Center.

But all that is just a start. Third Day Christians stop the joy-stealers in their lives not just so they can be personally happier. We need the deep joy of the Jesus Story so it will ignite our imaginations. The world needs us to live out of the deep joy of resurrection. Third Day Christians will find solutions to heal our broken world. They will find ways bring hope to lost and wandering neighbors. Third Day Christians will be lit up with a passion to fill the emptiness of others with the fullness of Christ’s joy.

Study Questions

- From a narrative point of view, what happens to the Jesus-story if he does not reappear in our world?
- What is the significance of Jesus’ rising on a Sunday?
- According to I Peter 1, “we have been born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” What forms of “dead despair” does this living hope free us?
- Review and add to the list of characteristics of Third Day Christians?
- Did you relate to the joy stealers listed? Which others would you add?
- How does joy require discipline?
- Third Day Christians cultivate joy not just to be personally happier but in order to ignite our imaginations. Where in your context do you need the living hope of Third Day minds to be at work?
- What does the resurrection have to do with our mission?