

Rich Lusk
Sermon notes
5/1/11

“The Pattern of the Kingdom: Living in the Shadow of the Cross and the Light of the Resurrection” (Mark 8:22-38)

After a horrific week of suffering our state, I found the only thing I felt comfortable preaching on was the death and resurrection of Christ, and our participation in those realities. The cross is the sign of all that’s wrong with the world: our sin, creation’s curse, and the inevitability of death. But the cross is also the sign of God’s love: our God is a God who shares in the brokenness of the creation and is determined to do something about it, even if it kills him...quite literally. The resurrection is what makes the cross make sense; it turns the horror of the cross into a great triumph. If the cross is the shape and path of Christian living, the resurrection provides the power and goal of Christian living.

The death and resurrection pattern is strewn throughout Scripture. Ultimately, we must come to see the transitions and progressions of our lives as a series of miniature deaths and resurrections. God “kills” us, then makes us alive in a more mature glorious way...so that we can die again. Sometimes these deaths mean transition into a new phase of life, like getting married or having a child. Sometimes, they are more overtly ethical, such as dying to a sinful or selfish desire in order to better serve others. But life as a whole in the kingdom of Christ takes on a death and resurrection rhythm.

The resurrection does not mean we have vague sense of optimism or that we look at the world through rose tinted lenses. The resurrection means a whole new world has begun, a world of life, joy, hope, and power. This new world has broken into the midst of the old fallen world, full of death and decay. Until the last day, when our bodies are raised to be like Jesus’ glorified body and the whole creation is transfigured, the new world and the old world will continue to overlap and wage war against one another. The cross is the mark of the old creation, broken, cursed, and judged. The cross is the death of that old world. The cross means that when God entered our world,

we murdered him. We are evil. But the cross not only reveals the magnitude of human wickedness, it also demonstrates the magnitude of divine love, which has submitted to and overcome our wickedness. The call to carry our crosses is not a call to live in the old world, but rather a call to show the love that made Jesus willingly submit to cross rather than the evil that nailed him there.

If the cross is the mark of history, the resurrection is the mark of God's new creation breaking into the old to transform it. The resurrection comes from beyond history, beyond nature. But the resurrection doesn't come all at once; rather, it comes in two stages. First, Jesus is raised in the middle of history, secretly unleashing resurrection power and life into the world. Second, at the end of history, the resurrection will be fully manifest when all of us are raised bodily and made fully like Christ. Then resurrection will visibly and powerfully explode into every corner of the cosmos, filling the whole creation with the life and glory of God in the fullest possible way.

The death and resurrection pattern is the clue to our experience, as the two ages and two worlds overlap. All the ups and downs, sorrows and joys, sacrifices and rewards of life fall into the death and resurrection paradigm. Paul constantly pointed to this pattern (e.g., Acts 14:22, Romans 5:2-4, 8:17-18, 2 Corinthians 4:17, etc.) and calls on us to embrace it (Rom. 12:1-2).

One of the major inspirations for the sermon was Tim Chester's new book *The Ordinary Hero*, which is quite good as an exposition of what it means to "live the cross and resurrection." Here are some things in the book I noticed and liked, aside from its overarching themes:

- Why did Jesus die? The cross is what happens when we take God's account of reality more seriously than Caesar's. (p. 51-2)
- We used to talk about character, now we talk about personality. Self-denial is no longer a virtue but a sin against the self. Chester explores what we used to say and what now say to the man contemplating an affair, the woman looking for self-esteem, the person seeking employment. Our answers used to focus on service to others, now on service to self. (p. 83)
- Following Gorman, Chester points to the frequent Pauline pattern of "although status"- "not selfishness"- "but self-

- abasement.” Again and again we see that we have been blessed, but we are not use those blessings just for ourselves; rather, we use them for the sake of others. Philippians 2:1-11 shows that this was the pattern of the incarnate Christ and should be our pattern as well. In 1 Cor. 9:19, Paul uses himself as an example of this pattern. (p. 159ff; note the examples on p. 161-2)
- The miracles of Jesus were not just physical pictures of spiritual realities. Nor do they mean Jesus will heal us from every illness in this age. Rather, they give us a foretaste of the physical renewal of the creation to come at the last day. (p. 181-3)
 - Chapter 19 deals with treasure in heaven and can be used to shed light on what it means to “save your life by losing it.” As American consumerists, we tend to sacrifice for all kinds of things that aren’t really worth it. What do they profit us in the long run? Chester calls us to lay up treasure in heaven by being generous with earthly treasure.
 - Chapter 20 deals with the adventure of following Christ, closing with an illustration from *Lord of the Rings*. Chester’s point is that the resurrection proves this is a good world, and that goodness is worth fighting for and dying for. The kingdom gives us a cause worth laying down our lives for.

Tom Wright’s *For Everyone* commentary on these passages in Mark is very helpful. On p. 107, Wright points out numerous parallels between the healing of the blind man and the “healing of the disciples” as their eyes are opened to the truth about Jesus.

On p. 110ff, Wright does a nice job demonstrating how Jesus’ conception of messiahship clashed with that of the disciples. Jesus doesn’t just predict danger ahead; he vows to walk straight into it. He’s not just talking about taking risks; he’s talking about certain death. This is more than Peter can bear, so he rebukes Jesus. Messiahs, after all, are not supposed to get killed by the authorities, but overthrow them.

It is all the more striking that Jesus says the SON OF MAN must suffer. The Son of Man title traces back to Daniel 7, where the Son of Man acts as second Adam/man, taking dominion over the “beasts” of the nations. But now Jesus is talking about the Son of Man suffering at the hands of the nations. The whole paradox of the

gospel is right there...but the disciples are blinded by their own messianic ambitions, so they are not yet able to grasp it. Jesus, of course, will defeat sin and evil.....but he will do so precisely through his suffering and death, when he takes sin and evil onto himself to exhaust their power.

Wright concludes by pointing out that following this Jesus cannot mean making a few small adjustments to out otherwise ordinary lives. The kingdom will entail danger and risk, suffering and sacrifice, for those would be followers of Jesus (p. 112).

On the idolatry of the self, see Trevin Wax's fine book, *Holy Subversion*, chapter 2. The whole point of Jesus' teaching on the "cost of discipleship" is to show us that we must dethrone the self if we are to live in Jesus' kingdom.

Madonna gives the perfect example of desiring glory without the cross (much like the disciples). She once said, "I want to be like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, John Lennon, and Jesus? ... but I want to stay alive."

Peter Leithart's Table Talk article provides an excellent summation of life as a series of miniature deaths and resurrections (<http://www.leithart.com/2004/04/08/acquainted-with-death/print/>):

Many today boast of near-death experiences. I do not. I have never had a near-death experience. But I am not intimidated by those who have, because I can boast, too. I have never been near death, but I have died many times.

Before I was born, I was living in a warm and cozy, if somewhat damp, environment, minding my business and sucking my thumb. Birth was a death for me, a death to the womb, a death to protection and security, a death to a life of blissful and careless dependency. I cried when I was born, not because I was being born but because I was dying. And I had not yet heard that there was a Resurrection.

Just when home had become another womb, I was forced out into the wide world of kindergarten. I died, and cried, again. For some reason, eating at school was particularly traumatic, and I can remember my mother, kindest soul, visiting during lunch to comfort me.

Many years later, I sat on the front row of a small church in Birmingham, Ala., during my ordination service. The pastor who was assigned the task of exhorting me told me that my ordination was a call to die and that I was being set apart to pour myself out like a drink offering for the sake of the people of that church. My ordination was not just a call to death, it was itself a death. As hands were laid on me, what I had been – a lay church member – ceased to exist, and a new man was made, a pastor.

I left that pastorate after six years. We had and still have many dear friends in that church, and leaving there was like toppling a tree whose roots have burrowed deeper than anyone can know. Weeks later, my wife and I, along with our seven children, found ourselves standing at the bus station in Cambridge, England, far from friends and relatives, and having absolutely no idea how to get where we wanted to go. I did not cry, but I wondered that night as I stared, sleepless and jet-lagged, at the shadows on the ceiling of our room in St. Peter's Terrace, whether the death of leaving my pastorate would be followed by a resurrection. Was this the end of my life or its beginning?

I have died many times. So have you, for life is a series of such deaths. To speak of resurrection is to say that death never has the last word, that a rising is promised for every dying, a new beginning for every ending. To trust in Jesus the Risen One is to trust that God will call us to new life after each death. This is the Gospel that we need to hear in the midst of a world of death and deaths.

And it is the Gospel that has always been preached and heard. True faith has always been resurrection faith. What has Abraham, our forefather, found? "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac ... concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense" (Heb. 11:17-19). Abraham was confident that Isaac would be resurrected because Isaac's very conception was a kind of resurrection. He "did not consider his

own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb" (Rom. 4:19b). Death did not discourage him, but instead he hoped against hope, "strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform" (Rom. 4:20b). Abraham believed the God "who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did" (Rom. 4:17b). Trudging up to the peak of Moriah alongside his son, Abraham did not waver in faith, for he walked beside his son, who had risen from the dead once before.

And what have the apostles, our fathers, found? They were traitors all, cowards in the face of the Jews' attack on Jesus, sheep who fled when the shepherd was struck, leaving Him to die alone. The cross was for them the end of hope (Luke 24:21), the end of their dreams for Jesus and for themselves. Judas betrayed Jesus to the Jews, but the other apostles were likewise complicit in His death.

Still, these men were among the first to see the risen Jesus. As Rowan Williams has put it, the apostles were preached to before they began to preach, and the message they heard and believed was the message of resurrection. Easter after Calvary means, for us as for the apostles, "that our betrayal is not the ultimate fact in the world. We may betray, but the world characterized by betrayal is now interwoven with a reality incapable of betrayal.... The incarnate truth, 'risen from the dead,' establishes that faithfulness as the ground of inexhaustible hope in the world, even in the midst of our self-deceits." The cross was the foundation for reconciliation, and the Resurrection brought that reconciliation to reality, as the Betrayed re-established table fellowship with His betrayers (John 21).

Resurrection is not just a moment in the life story of the apostles or of those who have believed through their witness. If we stopped with that, we would be liberals. Resurrection is also, and more fundamentally, a moment in the life story of Jesus. He died as a convicted criminal, condemned to a form of execution reserved for rebels against the Roman state. But that verdict was not endorsed by heaven. In the Resurrection, God passed His verdict in the cases of Jesus vs. Rome and Jesus vs. Judaism, reversing the decisions of the human courts and judges, and declaring Him to be "the Son of God with power"

(Rom. 1:4). The Resurrection was the vindication of Jesus and the vindication of all He claimed. As Richard Gaffin has pointed out, this is what Paul meant when he spoke of the one who had been “manifested in the flesh [and] justified in the Spirit” (1 Tim. 3:16); he was saying Jesus was vindicated by the Resurrection. If Jesus did not rise, then the sentences passed by the Pilates, Herods, and Caiaphases of this world stand unchallenged, and we can only conclude that God the Father has conceded the victory to them.

This is why the Resurrection is as essential to our justification as the death of Jesus. If Jesus had died and remained dead, the public verdict on Him would have remained “Guilty as charged.” But the Father did not let that verdict stand. He passed His own verdict on Jesus, and when He did so, He passed His verdict on us as well, we who were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. Because we are in Jesus, and because Jesus has been declared the Righteous One in His resurrection, we also are declared righteous. He was “delivered up because of our offenses,” Paul writes, “and was raised because of our justification” (Rom. 4:25).

And more, the Resurrection that is a moment in the life story of Jesus is the key moment in the life story of creation. Because of Adam’s sin, death spread to all men, until the world was one great boiling pot of death and deadly threats. Death reigned. Death, for example, was at the heart of the Old Testament system of uncleanness. If an Israelite made love to his wife at certain times, he became unclean, a form of death. If she had a child, she became unclean. If he attended his father’s funeral, he became defiled by the corpse, even if all he did was enter the room. If a blemish appeared on his arm, he had to go see a priest, who would determine whether it was skin disease; his skin might be dying. For Paul, the whole creation participated in death, subject to futility (Rom. 8:20-21).

Death reigned, but it reigns no longer. I can make love to my wife on Sunday morning, then get up and go to church. I can embrace the breathless body of my mother and not have her death spread to me. However pockmarked my skin becomes, it will not keep me from the presence of God. And all these reversals of the reign of death are promises that the creation-wide corruption that is not yet overcome will someday be reversed as well.

But Jesus' resurrection is not only a promise of future resurrection and of the future restoration of all creation. It is the actual beginning of that process. For old covenant Israel, the resurrection was an event hoped for at the end of days, an eschatological event, the event that would usher in a new world. In the midst of the history of death, God began to reverse death. Resurrection is not only something promised, but a present reality, and we enjoy the down payment of that promise. We who are in Christ not only have died with Him, we also are raised with Him to new life and know His resurrection power working in us (Eph. 1:15-23).

A Gospel without resurrection is, as Paul emphasized, no Gospel at all (1 Cor. 15:12-19). If there were no resurrection, Abraham would have been left without an heir, his future, and the future of God's promise, doomed by Sarah's barrenness. If there were no resurrection, the apostles would have been left without hope. Their last memories of Jesus would have been the mangled body on the cross and the solemn closing of the tomb. After three years of sharing Jesus' table, they would have been left to stew in self-reproach and memories of betrayal, without hope that they would ever drink the cup anew in the kingdom of heaven. If there were no resurrection, the crying newborn would be doomed forever to mourn the loss of his first home.

Some quotations on the cross, resurrection, and discipleship--

Dorothy Sayers:

It is curious that people who are filled with horrified indignation whenever a cat kills a sparrow can hear the story of the killing of God told Sunday after Sunday and not experience any shock at all.

Henri J. M. Nouwen:

Jesus went to Jerusalem to announce the Good News to the people of that city. And Jesus knew that he was going to put a

choice before them: *Will you be my disciple, or will you be my executioner?* There is no middle ground here. Jesus went to Jerusalem to put people in a situation where they had to say yes or no. That is the great drama of Jesus' passion: He had to wait upon how people were going to respond.

Thomas á Kempis:

In the cross is salvation, in the Cross is life, in the Cross is protection from our enemies, in the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness, in the Cross is strength of mind, in the Cross is joy of spirit, in the Cross is the height of virtue, in the Cross is perfection of sanctity. There is no salvation of the soul, nor hope of everlasting life, but in the Cross.

John Stott:

There is wonderful power in the Cross of Christ. It has power to wake the dullest conscience and melt the hardest heart, to cleanse the unclean, to reconcile him who is afar off and restore him to fellowship with God, to redeem the prisoner from his bondage and lift the pauper from the dunghill, to break down the barriers which divide [people] from one another, to transform our wayward characters into the image of Christ and finally make us fit to stand in white robes before the throne of God.

Augustine:

He died, but he vanquished death; in himself, he put an end to what we feared; he took it upon himself, and he vanquished it; as a mighty hunter, he captured and slew the lion. Where is death? Seek it in Christ, for it exists no longer; but it did exist, and now it is dead. O life, O death of death! Be of good heart; it will die in us also. What has taken place in our head will take place in his members; death will die in us also. But when? At the end of the world, at the resurrection of the dead in which we believe and concerning which we do not doubt.

Mother Teresa:

Confession [of sin] is nothing but humility in action .
... When there is a gap between me and Christ, when my love is divided, anything can come to fill the gap. Confession is a place where I allow Jesus to take away from me everything that divides, that destroys.

Henri Nouwen:

Once you choose to claim the joy hidden in the midst of all suffering, life becomes celebration. Joy never denies sadness, but transforms it to a fertile soil for more joy

Blaise Pascal:

Truth is so obscured nowadays and lies so well established that unless we love the truth we shall never recognize it.

Henri Nouwen:

Jesus is God's way of making the impossible possible.

Miroslav Volf on the Trinity's love for sinners (this is one of my all-time favorite quotations):

When the Trinity turns toward the world, the Son and the Spirit become, in Irenaeus's beautiful image, the two arms of God by which humanity was made and taken into God's embrace... That same love that sustains nonself-enclosed identities in the Trinity seeks to make space "in God" for humanity. Humanity is, however, not just the other of God, but the beloved other who has become an enemy. When God sets out to embrace the enemy, the result is the cross. On the cross the dancing circle of self-giving and mutually indwelling divine persons opens up for the enemy; in the agony of the passion the movement stops for a brief moment and a fissure appears so that sinful humanity can join in (see Jn 17:21). We, the others—we, the enemies—are embraced by the divine persons who love us with the same love with which they love each other and therefore make space for us within their own eternal embrace.

Karl Rahner:

Easter is not the celebration of a past event. The alleluia is not for what was; Easter proclaims a beginning which has already decided the remotest future. The Resurrection means that the beginning of glory has already started.

N. T. Wright:

Why did Christianity arise, and why did it take the shape it did? The early Christians themselves reply: We exist because of Jesus' resurrection. ... There is no evidence for a form of early Christianity in which the resurrection was not a central belief. Nor was this belief, as it were, bolted on to Christianity at the edge. It was the central driving force, informing the whole movement.

Frederick Buechner:

[T]here really is no story about the Resurrection in the New Testament. Except in the most fragmentary way, it is not described at all. There is no poetry about it. Instead, it is simply proclaimed as a fact. Christ is risen! In fact, the very existence of the New Testament itself proclaims it. Unless something very real indeed took place on that strange, confused morning, there would be no New Testament, no Church, no Christianity.

John Calvin:

However many blessings we expect from God, His infinite liberality will always exceed all our wishes and our thoughts

Charles Spurgeon:

The hearing of the gospel involves the hearer in responsibility. It is a great privilege to hear the gospel. You may smile and think there is nothing very great in it. The damned in hell know. Oh, what would they give if they could hear the gospel now? If they could come back and entertain but the shadow of a hope that they might escape from the wrath to come? The saved in heaven estimate this privilege at

a high rate, for, having obtained salvation through the preaching of this gospel, they can never cease to bless their God for calling them by his word of truth. O that you knew it! On your dying beds the listening to a gospel sermon will seem another thing than it seems now.

C. S. Lewis:

The Christian does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us.

Daniel Migliore, in a lecture to one of his classes at Princeton Theological Seminary:

Jesus did not die in bed.

John R. W. Stott:

We live and die. Christ died and lived!

Jurgen Moltman:

The symbol of the cross in the church points to the God who was crucified not between two candles on an altar, but between two thieves in the place of the skull, where the outcasts belong, outside the gates of the city. It does not invite thought but a change of mind. It is a symbol which therefore leads out of the church and out of religious longing into the fellowship of the oppressed and abandoned. On the other hand, it is a symbol which calls the oppressed and godless into the church and through the church into the fellowship of the crucified God.

G. A. Studdert Kennedy:

God, the God I love and worship, reigns in sorrow on the Tree, Broken, bleeding, but unconquered, very God of God to me.

George Herbert's "Easter Wings":

Lord, Who createdst man in wealth and store, Though
foolishly he lost the same Decaying more and more Till he
became Most poor: With Thee O let me rise As larks,
harmoniously, And sing this day Thy victories: Then shall the
fall further the flight in me.
My tender age in sorrow did begin; And still with sicknesses
and shame Thou didst so punish sin, That I became Most
thin. With Thee Let me combine And feel this day Thy
victory; For, if I imp my wing on Thine, Affliction shall
advance the flight in me.

Warren Buffet:

It is more blessed to give than to receive, but then it is also
more blessed to be able to do without than to have to have.

Dallas Willard:

I do not think I exaggerate when I say that some of us put our
offering in the plate with a kind of triumphant bounce as
much as to say: 'There—now God will feel better!' ... I am
obliged to tell you that God does not need anything you have.
He does not need a dime of your money. It is your own
spiritual welfare at stake in such matters as these. ... You
have the right to keep what you have all to yourself—but it
will rust and decay, and ultimately ruin you.

John Calvin:

It behooves us to accomplish what God requires of us, even
when we are in the greatest despair respecting the results.

Henri Nouwen:

For most of my life I have struggled to find God, to know
God, to love God. I have tried hard to follow the guidelines of
the spiritual life—pray always, work for others, read the
Scriptures—and to avoid the many temptations to dissipate
myself. I have failed many times but always tried again, even
when I was close to despair.
Now I wonder whether I have sufficiently realized that

during all this time God has been trying to find me, to know me, and to love me. The question is not "How am I to find God?" but "How am I to let myself be found by him?" The question is not "How am I to know God?" but "How am I to let myself be known by God?" And, finally, the question is not "How am I to love God?" but "How am I to let myself be loved by God?" God is looking into the distance for me, trying to find me, and longing to bring me home.

Peter Leithart:

Viewed as a whole . . . the Christian account of history is eschatological not only in the sense that it comes to a definitive and everlasting end, but in the sense that the end is a glorified beginning, not merely a return to origins. The Christian Bible moves not from garden lost to garden restored, but from garden to garden-city. God gives with interest.

Dallas Willard:

Exaggeration is a primary problem for churches, it is a primary problem, because churches want to present themselves in a good light and that's why there is so much performance in our Christian meetings. And very often right in the services of the church we find ourselves letting our yes not be a yes and our no be a no. We find ourselves exaggerating, emphasizing, and trying to put things in the best light and so on. Sometimes I think we believe God wants us to do that; but if Jesus is right in what he is saying, he wants us to learn the habit of very simply and clearly saying things the way they are - yes or no, and letting it stand.

Henri Nouwen:

How do we know about God's love, God's generosity, God's kindness, God's forgiveness? Through our parents, our friends, our teachers, our pastors, our spouses, our children . . . they all reveal God to us. But as we come to know them, we realise that each of them can reveal only a little bit of God. God's love is greater than theirs; God's goodness is greater than theirs; God's beauty is greater than theirs.

At first we may be disappointed in these people in our lives. For a while we thought that they would be able to give us all the love, goodness, and beauty we needed. But gradually we discover that they were all signposts on the way to God.

Dallas Willard:

The word “disciple” occurs 269 times in the New Testament. “Christian” is found three times and was first introduced to refer precisely to disciples of Jesus – in a situation where it was no longer possible to regard them as a sect of the Jews (Acts 11:26). The New Testament is a book about disciples, by disciples, and for disciples of Jesus Christ.... For at least several decades the churches of the Western world have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian. One is not required to be, or to intend to be, a disciple in order to become Christian, and one may remain a Christian without any signs of progress toward or in discipleship. Contemporary American churches in particular do not require following Christ in his example, spirit, and teachings as a condition of membership – either of entering into or continuing in fellowship of a denomination or local church. I would be glad to learn of any exception of this claim, but it would only serve to highlight its general validity and make the general rule more glaring. So far as the visible Christian institutions of our day are concerned, *discipleship clearly is optional.*