



April 1, 2018

Resurrection Sunday

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“We Are One Tribe” *Isaiah 25:6-9, John 20:1-18, Acts 10:34-43*

— When Jesus rose from the dead in accordance with the scriptures, Jesus broke down all barriers separating people. No more is there Jew or Gentile. What does this mean for us today? Well, there are no barriers for Christ but the ones that we put up. So let us break down the barriers that separate US and Them. Jesus has shown us the way.

The Lord be with you.

This year, our Easter scriptures deal with something very, very important that Jesus accomplished when he rose from the dead. Jesus removed the separations between all the peoples of the earth. In other words, Jesus re-formed all the Nations and Tribes of this earth into one universal tribe!

Jesus tore down the barriers between all tribes and nations. Those of us who follow the risen Lord, are told by God to live as one tribe! But usually, we choose not to. Instead, we prefer the safety and security of our own little tribes. We settle for the comfortable familiar nature of those that we consider to be “our people.” I’m going to call this sinful problem “Tribalism.” It includes all kinds of other isms like racism, sexism, classism, nepotism, nationalism, and so on. Any “ism” that puts one exclusive people group superior to another people group.

And we are all guilty of the sin of tribalism, because we all belong to different, exclusive tribes. We each come from a family. That is an exclusive group. You can’t get in unless you are born into it, or you marry into it. It is also possible to be adopted into a family. But everyone else is not in the tribe. Some of us belong to certain groups and organizations, like the rainbow girls, masons, or the cub scouts. Each group has different rules about who can be accepted into the group. Everyone else is not in the tribe. Most of us in this room are white European Americans. That is a tribe. If you are from Trinidad, Africa, South America, or

Asia, you are not in the tribe. And I think we are all American citizens, which puts us into the nation of America. We are all members of multiple exclusive tribes.

When Jesus Christ rose from the grave, he united all nations and tribes through his sacrifice. Unfortunately, over the past few millennia, humans have not yet laid ahold of this major blessing that God has given to us. We are still just as divided into nations and tribes as we were on the first Resurrection Sunday. If you don't believe me, try walking around Heinz Field on Game day wearing a Dallas Cowboys or Baltimore Ravens Jersey. You might find that the Steelers Nation is very much alive and not so inclusive. (Alex – you know what I'm talking about.)

When Tribalism is carried to the extreme, violence, grief, and pain are sure to follow. You have probably heard of the infamous feud between the Hatfield's and the McCoy's that lasted 30 years around the turn of the last century. It didn't happen all that far from here, just along the Kentucky / West Virginia border! When tribes clash, hurts multiply and can escalate into violence very quickly. Another example of the sin of tribalism is the ongoing conflict in South Sudan, which is largely Tribal conflict.

Back in Jesus's day, Tribalism was rampant. That was the norm. If you were descended from a Greek, you were a Greek. If you were descended from a Persian, you were a Persian. If you were descended from an Israelite, you were an Israelite. Those Nations were further divided into tribes. Reading the Bible we find that even God's special nation, Israel was divided into 12 tribes. The tribes were basically big extended family units, descended from one of the sons of Jacob. If you were descended from Dan, you were in the tribe of Dan. If you were descended from Asher, you were in the tribe of Asher. These tribes were further broken down into extended or multi-family units called the Beit Av, which means *house of the father* in Hebrew, and each house of the father had a patriarch. So many divisions!

Brothers and Sisters, the problem of Tribalism and division still plagues the earth. It is a shame and actually quite unacceptable for those of us who have faith in Jesus. Yet, the present time and place we live in is plagued by Tribalism. Think about the last Election, and the deep divide between Democrat and Republican. What a mess. Think about the number of denominations of Christians there are in this world! Each denomination claims to have the right teachings and controls who is allowed to be in the tribe. I am not simply talking about Catholic and

Protestantism. If I counted the number of different denominations of Christians, I would run out of fingers and toes real fast.

The problem of Tribalism is that loyalty, honor, security, and pride are misplaced. When our loyalty to our clan or tribe is more important than our loyalty to God, we fall into sin. The tribe sets up rules and we care more about being exclusive than being inclusive. For example, If you are a Presbyterian, you must agree to subscribe to the essential teachings of the reformed faith. Or, if you are in a PCA Presbyterian church, you must accept that no women may be pastors. In an ECO Presbyterian church, no homosexuals may be pastors. Congregations and tribes of Christians don't just split over big theological issues. No, sometimes they split into tribes based on which patriarch or matriarch has the power to run the congregation! Sometimes, congregations and denominations split into tribes because they like different kinds of worship music!

And let us not forget how quickly we split into white, black, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean denominations. Sometimes it seems that we Christians are no less tribal than those who do not know Christ.

The main sin here is the sin of not loving out neighbor as ourselves. You remember in Matthew 22 Jesus sums up all God's commands to us as: Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. The misplaced loyalties and pride of **Tribalism** make following this command impossible by limiting who is our neighbor.

Tribalism is a sinful version of something good that God wants us to participate in: Community. You see, Community is inclusive, whereas Tribalism is exclusive. Let me say this again. Community is inclusive and good. Tribalism is exclusive and bad. It is no wonder churches are dying at a rapid pace. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Hit the nail on the head when he claimed that Sunday Morning at 11:00 was the most segregated hour on America. That was on meet the press back in 1960. Since that time, almost all Denominational churches have declined. And "non-denominational" churches began to rise. Tribalism is a sin and I do not believe Tribal churches can survive. According to the scriptures, God's plan has always been to include and bless all peoples all tribes, and to unite them. Jesus's death and resurrection was an important part of that plan. Jesus needed to come, die, and rise again because we humans are an arrogant and stiff necked people.

It is so sad to me that Jesus gave up his life in a horrific way to unite us, and we can't even stay in fellowship with those who are different or don't agree with us for five minutes!

When I read the prophecy from Isaiah in our first scripture reading I feel like crying.

“6 On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. 7 On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; 8 he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.”

You see, God has always intended to unite all peoples. When you compare God's hope for this world with the reality of our current tribalism, does it not make you feel sad? Do you feel outrage? Do you feel anger? Brothers and Sisters, the current state of believers in Christ being Tribal is an unacceptable reality. It is no good.

But there is hope! Because God is good, God has provided a solution to the problem that is real and attainable. The solution is contained in our reading from the book of Acts today. God shows Peter, through a dream that Jesus has broken down the wall separating God's people Israel from all other tribes and nations.

It always dumfounded me how at first the Apostles didn't understand that Jesus made us all one tribe. Especially after Jesus gave the Apostles the Great Commission to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” In Matthew 28. But somehow, the Israelites didn't get it. Perhaps they thought that people needed to convert to the Hebrew religion first, before they could become disciples of Jesus? This thinking is Tribalism.

And so, Jesus gave a vision to Peter and called him to meet an Italian soldier, who was clearly not a Hebrew. Once Peter realized that God sent him to a non-Israelite to preach salvation, he finally got it! That is when he begins to speak and says, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.” Peter finally realizes that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, “everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

The Risen Lord Jesus is the answer to the problems of human Tribalism! It was the answer back on the first Resurrection Sunday, and it is the answer this morning! Because of what Jesus did, standing in for all of our sinful bad choices, EVERYONE who believes in him receives forgiveness. That is about as inclusive as it gets!

So why then, are followers of Jesus today so tribal? What must we overcome to build real community? In a word: Idolatry. Anything that is more important to us than God is an idol. Our power, our comfort, our security, our church history and buildings, all these things become an Idol. Even our doctrines and teachings about God can become an Idol if we value it more than we value God. But there is an antidote to the Idolatry that keeps us Tribal. It is the same solution that God gave Peter. It is a vision.

We know the current state of Jesus followers in this world is tribal, and that that is unacceptable. But can we envision a world where this is no longer the case? Can we see how God wants us to be?

Let me attempt to help us to lay hold of this vision. Imagine all the people in Monroeville and Turtle Creek who follow Christ being able to go to whatever church is closest to their home and be truly welcomed and included?

What if each of those places of worship trained up disciples of Jesus without expecting them to meet exclusive requirements for that particular tribe?

What if these kinds of congregations were able to reach out to those on welfare, or those who are hopeless and addicted to drugs? What if they could be empowered by the Holy Spirit to begin making good, Godly choices in their lives? That can happen when people who feel unloved are filled with the love of God. But these folks are not going to want to join our tribe as it is. We need to go bring community to them.

The vision of Jesus Christ is that we are all one tribe, or truly a community of people. Even the ones who don't think they are in our community, they are. They just don't know it yet!

What if we change our minds today? What if we stop being tribal and start being community? What would that look like? No more little divisions that don't make sense like Catholic, Presbyterian, or Methodist. No more divisions like Hillcrest church or Crossroads Church. No more silly imaginary dividing lines like

what separate Monroeville from Turtle Creek and Pitcairn. No more favoring those who are like us and are in “our small tribe.”

People would really be included. They would know that we love them! and they would know Christ by our love. People would really be evangelized! Then, we would be really laying hold of the significance of Jesus Christ’s resurrection. We would be living as one new people united in Christ in every place! Just like we pray for when we worship together and take the Lord’s Supper together.

Because of Jesus, our risen Lord, we are all one tribe. This Tribe is unlike any other in that it is a true community. Where all people are included because of Jesus. Peter learned this through a vision, I hope that we are beginning to catch this same vision of inclusion.

Now, before we wrap up this sermon and unite ourselves to Christ by celebrating the Lord’s Supper, this sermon has a specific challenge for you. Call it homework if you will. After all, a sermon is just ideas and words unless it has a life application.

The challenge is this: envision true community in your neighborhood, and what it might look like. With that vision in your head, single out one person who is not like you at all. Someone who would never be in your tribe. Perhaps they are a different race, or a different economic level. Reach out to this person and befriend them. Make it an intentional decision to extend your tribe to include them, instead of making them fit into your tribe as it is. Then you will have taken the first step toward turning tribe into community. You will be doers of the word, and not only hearers and thinkers of God’s word.

If you intentionally work to turn tribes into communities, then in word and DEED you will be telling the world: He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!