

## Resurrected Living

Sermon 148 | Greystone Baptist Church | July 31, 2022  
Colossians 3:1-11

June 28, 1914. (Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand and the beginning of the first World War)  
October 1929 (Stock Market Crash)  
September 1939. (German Invasion of Poland, Beginning of World War Two)  
December 7, 1941. (Pearl Harbor)  
August 6, 1945. (Atomic Bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki)  
October 24, 1945. (Foundation of the United Nations)  
November 22, 1963. (Assassination of John F. Kennedy)  
April 4, 1968. (Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.)  
July 21, 1969. (Apollo 11, Neil Armstrong walks on the moon)  
November 9, 1989. (Fall of the Berlin Wall)  
September 11, 2001. (Terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centers)  
March 12, 2020. (NCAA President Mark Emmert cancels the Division 1 basketball tournaments due to the COVID-19 Pandemic signaling to ACC fans and American people everywhere that everything was about to change)

These are the dates that have shaped modern history. Each one signaling quick and unprecedented changes to the ways we govern, the ways we live, and the ways we think about life. These dates represent the events about which we are often asked: *Where were you when...* Not being alive when Kennedy was assassinated, and being too young to remember the fall of the Berlin wall, I do remember sitting in my Senior English class one September morning. We were just getting settled in when the principal got on the intercom and told everyone to turn on their classroom TVs. A historic event was happening. Before anyone knew when or how or why we saw smoke billowing out of the World Trade Center. Before we could understand what we were looking at, a large object, one that looked like an airplane, flew straight into the second tower. What was going on?!

At the risk of quoting too many Alan Jackson songs in a short span of time, I must admit that whenever I think about these dates, these history-altering moments in time, I always hear his deep voice crooning out the words: *Where were you when the world stopped turning, that September day?*

It's a reminder of just how significant these moments are, moments when it really does feel like the world stopped turning. Of course just like we have this shared list of dates, we each have our own lists as well. Birth dates, death dates, start dates, retirement dates, first dates, and even holy dates... all dates we remember and honor each time they roll around because they mark life's most significant events. They remind us of times when everything changed and we had to figure out for the first time or for the millionth time, how we were going to live in light of the change.

Early Christianity is marked by its own list of significant or history-altering dates. For lots of reasons our dates can seem a little fluid, more connected to story than time, but for our

purposes, we can say the following historical moments have shaped the church and the early movement of Jesus followers:

1 B.C. Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem

12-20 C.E. Jesus reads the Isaiah scroll in the Synagogue identifying himself as the Messiah

30 C.E. Jesus death, resurrection, ascension. His followers settle around Jerusalem

35-36 C.E. Saul's Damascus road experience, name change to Paul

50 – 60 C.E. Paul's ministry expands as he plants churches, visits congregations, and writes letters to Christians around the ancient Near East. Many of these letters would become the oldest artifacts of early Christianity.

60 - 65 C.E. Death of Paul, signaling a new generation of leadership and a new phase of life for the church.

Each of these moments signaled major changes for those who followed Jesus. Some of them seem kind of obvious, like the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But others – like the death of Paul, may be a bit more hidden between the lines.

Paul's legacy was so influential that biblical scholars believe after he died, other early Christians continued to write letters in his name. Building upon the foundation of Paul's work, these new writers would use his name, as a pseudonym. While we would never consider doing this now; in the ancient world, it was a form of honor. To write in Paul's name would not be dishonoring or defrauding his ministry; it would be quite the opposite. Those who had learned from Paul, who had benefitted from his ministry and wanted to see the church of Christ live on, [they] continued writing the churches as a way of honoring Paul's legacy, serving Christ, and guiding the church into a new era.

In these later letters such as Colossians, the letter from which we read today, scholars note substantial shifts in attitudes toward things like marriage and baptism and a distinct move away from the belief that Jesus would return in their lifetime.

While some readers may deny these shifts or worry that the evolution of thought contained within the pages of our Bibles threatens the value or veracity of scripture, I find these little nuances to be liberating and incredibly helpful as we seek to live as faithful people in our day.

As the ancient Greek philosopher said: *Change is the only constant in life.* And when change comes in major ways, when life as we know it is interrupted and everything is turned on its head, we are forced to pause, to re-assess, and to decide what really matters.

In the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, Americans displayed unprecedented unity. The same thing happened in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic as restaurants were forced to close their dining rooms and hospitals were slammed with patients often receiving care in hallways and makeshift medical tents. People rallied to buy take-out meals from their favorite restaurants, each person trying to do their part to keep these businesses afloat. Public campaigns praised nurses, doctors, sanitation workers, and other frontline medical employees for their diligence and commitment in the worst of

times. Partnerships emerged as people remembered that we all needed one another in new and unprecedented ways if we were ever going to make it through.

It reminded me of stories from the WW2 era when women left home and went to work in factories to support the war effort. When civilians endured rations and military personnel put their bodies on the line for the common good.

These were valiant responses to global crises, historic moments calling us all to put on new clothes (so to speak), in order to face the challenges ahead.

Of course, the other thing about these historic moments when crisis arrives and it's an all-hands-on-deck response is that we never quite go back to *what was*. We can't. Because on the other side of crisis, we realize we have changed. We have become a new person, a new people, a new community, a new country... a new world. And the "clothes" that used to fit just fine, well, they don't fit so well anymore.

Now, on the one hand, this feels like good news! Maybe those old pants were starting to get a little snug in the waistband anyway. Maybe it was time to replace them. But on the other hand, we really liked that dress, that tie, those shoes.

Some say it's time for the church to get a new wardrobe. To strip off some of the old judgment and hypocrisy, to leave behind the love of purity and perfection in order to embrace a design that has some growing room, or even one that anticipates brokenness. Some say it's time for the church to be renewed.

Of course, on the one hand, this renewal feels like good news! But on the other hand, many of us really liked the old clothes. And in some ways, the stability we thought we could find in church was a sanctuary when everything else changed around us. Yes, some of us are dying for renewal while others are reaching for a lifeline.

This is where history becomes hopeful.

Remember that little abbreviated church history timeline I shared earlier? The one that began in the year 1 B.C. and then spanned the next oh, 60 years or so? It was just the tiniest glimpse of a much bigger picture. An unending story that predated the birth of Christ and long outlasted the life and ministry of Paul, because that story – though it was ripe with conflict, crisis, and change – was all a part of the story of God's love unfolding, taking root, and taking shape here on God's beloved earth.

We could have been here all morning reading a long, long list of moments of historic interruption, change, and transformation *just within the Christian tradition*, but what is more important than the list of events, is that God has been with us through it all, teaching us in Wisdom, growing us in Grace, and expanding our hearts so that we might be reminded of what really matters.

So what clothes then, shall we put on as we begin to emerge from this historic moment?

Hopefully, we have learned that we cannot move forward thinking only of ourselves, our preferences, and our own life experiences. If we have learned anything from this season of COVID-19 and all the changes resulting from it: surely it has been that even though our lives are different, our news is different, our political parties are different, and some of our most deeply held beliefs are different... despite all of that, we need one another.

This may seem like a lesson we are learning in our public lives but I believe it is profoundly impacting our spiritual lives and I also believe it will take a beautiful wardrobe of spiritual garments if we are ever going to build a better future together.

In fact, as we look at the world and see all the many crises and challenges that we face in our daily lives, crises caused by differences of race, economic, political, and social systems of oppression and exclusion... we may begin to wonder if there is even a possibility of resurrection at all.

But then we turn to the church. And even if it is only once a week, it is *at least* once a week that we know the people of God will gather across those lines of difference, they will worship a God who desires to liberate us all from them, and we will recommit ourselves to the Love of God that will not let us go.

So as we prepare to face the world another time this coming week, embracing the truth that change *is* the only constant in life, and without a clue what awaits us on the other side of tomorrow, what we can know is this: if we want to live resurrected lives, we have to start by putting on the clothes of our resurrected Lord.

Letting go of everything else.

Stripping off all the stuff that perhaps served us well in the past and clinging only to compassion, kindness, humility, and meekness...

Patience, forgiveness...

And first of all, last of all, and most of all... Love.