

“Covenant: Fulfilled”
Isaiah 25:6-9; John 20:1-18
A Sermon by Rev. Bob Kells

Our message for this morning is one of great joy!

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Something in our world has changed. Christ has conquered death and given us new life!

That new life begins here and now.

And with it begins a new relationship with God.

Before Christ came, we were alienated from God; separated from the holy by our human sin.

Now, Christ has taken the sins of the world upon himself. We are no longer prisoners to sin; through Christ, God has forgiven our sins.

Because of that, we are on different terms with God. We are the saved ones, the ones redeemed by God for the purpose of transforming the world for God. We’re on God’s team now.

Instead of strangers, we are now God’s beloved children. And like children, our relationship with God is more familiar. Example:

Back in high school and college, I took some classes in German. It’s an interesting language. A lot of similarities to English, but a lot of differences too. One of the differences is with the word “you.” In German, there are two ways of referring to someone else. If you don’t know them well, you use the word “Sie.” This is a formal way of addressing a person. The other word, “du,” is the familiar or intimate way of talking to a person. It’s used with children, family and friends. So if you meet someone in Germany for the first time, the rules of the language are that you use the

formal “Sie” word until they invite you to use the more familiar “du.”¹

Now, I don’t tell you this just because I wanted to give you a lesson in the German language. When this church was built, it was part of the United Brethren in Christ, a German-speaking denomination, and most of its members spoke German. So it’s been quite few years since German has been spoken here.

I tell you this story because it has so much to do with John’s story of Easter morning.

All through the Gospel of John, Jesus refers to God as “my Father,” “the father,” or “the father who sent me.”

His followers he called his “disciples,” “servants,” or “friends.”

Now, in the garden where Jesus was buried, Mary encounters the risen Savior.

She recognizes him and calls him “Rabbouni,” which is a familiar form of the word “rabbi,” or teacher. (“Teach”).

Then Jesus tells her to “go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Listen to the difference:

- Now the disciples are on familiar terms with God—they are “brothers.”
- Now the father in heaven is “my God and your God.”²

This is kind of like the German language: it’s like God saying now you can call me “daddy.”

¹ Idea for the comparison in German from Tom Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 2*, (London: Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, 2002), 144.

² *Ibid.*, 145.

Disciples have a new, more intimate, relationship with God because Jesus Christ is risen from the grave.

During Lent I've been talking about the major covenants God made with human beings: Noah, Abraham, Sinai (Ten Commandments).

The common thread that ties them all together is that in the covenants, God remains faithful all the time, and desires relationship with human beings. In Jesus, we see the climax of the Covenant.

And in this story of the Resurrection from John we see God's desire for relationship with human beings is made complete.

On this first day of the week, something new and completely different entered into the world—resurrection life.

It is unlike anything anyone had ever seen before.

It signifies the end of life as we knew it, which was a life without hope, full of fear and uncertainty, and based solely on “what's in it for me?”

If we were to think of a picture of the difference, think about the movie *The Wizard of Oz*. This classic film begins in Kansas in a black and white world. When Dorothy and her dog are taken up into a tornado, they land in Oz. And when Dorothy opens the door of her house and steps out into Oz, everything changes from black & white to glorious technicolor.

That's how different resurrection living is.

A good biblical picture of resurrection life is in the reading from Isaiah 25. Here, it says God will:

- Set a feast for God's people on the mountaintop where only the best foods are served;
 - the mountain is Mt. Zion, the location of the Jewish Temple;
 - the place where Jewish faith held that heaven touches earth.

- God will remove forever “the shroud that is cast over all people,” which is the shadow of death;
 - o Death will be no more.
 - o God will wipe away all tears, there will be no more need to cry, for God is with us and we are with God.

And the reason we share in the Resurrection life is this: Jesus Christ is risen from the grave!

I am a big fan of good movies. Not bad movies, good movies. A couple of the good movies I like are the *National Treasure* movies. These movies follow the story of Benjamin Gates, a treasure hunter who has the uncanny ability to unravel a series of clues that lead him to ancient treasures. In the second *National Treasure* movie, Gates has to solve a riddle in order to redeem the good name of his Civil War ancestor. The first riddle he has to solve is: “The debt that all men pay.” The answer is death.³ It is something that every human being on the planet must experience. You cannot be born into this world without having to go through death.

My friends, the Good News of the Bible that we celebrate today is this: Jesus Christ has paid the debt that all men (and women) pay.

Because Jesus Christ is risen, we share resurrection life with Christ.

God kept his covenant with human beings and has established a familiar, intimate relationship with us through Jesus.

Going back to my example from the German language, we can use the “du” word, the familiar form, with God because of Jesus. (elsewhere: Abba, father).

Our task is to live into this Resurrection life.

We do this by accepting God’s grace daily.

³ *National Treasure: Book of Secrets*, 2007.

And we do this by having faith in God through Jesus, the Son.
Amen.