

A New Era

Good morning and good to see. There are certain things in life you never really get over. You don't get over having your first child, rather it sets up a new stage of life. You don't get over getting married, it's something that changes you. You don't get over winning 2 million dollars in the lottery, or in my case going on the Price is Right they just flavors your new, awesomer reality. Well, it's the week after Easter. And we don't get over Easter, nor did the early Christian Church. The reality of the resurrection of Jesus stuck with them. Changed the day they gathered. Changed the conversation, and it hasn't really ever let up. So we also are not getting over this message, it influences our gathering and gives life and hope every time we meet. Victory is won friends, it's not something we get over.

And every now and then something happens that initiates a new era completely. I hoping this is not the sign of a new era. (Blackhawks loss) Sorry, Hawks fans still the most winning Chicago team in the last decade. While I am hoping this did signal a new era (Cubs win). There are so many signs and signals that a new era has come, Trump elected, Bill O Reilly fired, Ben and Jen split, I am groot. Have you ever experienced an event that signaled a new era for you?

I will never forget some new eras as a parent. Like the new era when the child can finally speak to you, in sentences and you don't have to decipher any codes of crying. Or a glorious era called the end of diapers, anyone remember that one? Now it doesn't happen overnight but when you are there it is glorious. Our girls have grown up and now we are in the era of young little ladies. New stages set up with conversations over make up and clothing and emotions. It's crazy friends we are definitely in a new era.

At this church we are approaching a new era. Getting in prints for renovations for this space. Starting a second service in September. God is good friends.

Have you ever needed a new era spiritually. Maybe it's been too long that you've been without God, and you feel the void in your life. Maybe it's been too long fighting against that pet sin, it's always got you down and you need a new era. Maybe you've been battling with depression and anxiety and crave a new era. I believe all these changes are possible. God is the God of fresh starts and new beginnings because the same spirit that rose Jesus from the dead lives inside of us and it can establish a new era in walking with God. Let's hear again that passage of hope, "*If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.*" (Romans 8:11) Maybe for the first time, and maybe like never before. I believe it friends.

Well, after Jesus rose from the dead, it signaled a new era of what following God would be like. Jesus died on the cross and the curtain split between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. I don't know if you remember that detail. But what it meant is that the way of worshiping and following God would now be different. And things kept changing.

Let me set things up as we dive into the Word of God. We have the account here of the early Christian Church after Jesus ascended into heaven. And one of the leaders of that church was Peter. God changed him from coward to courageous. But he wasn't done teaching Peter or the church. Peter had just had a vision from God. It contained all these animals that for a Jew were not kosher, but were unclean. Reptiles and four footed animals like pigs. And in the vision Peter heard God say kill and eat. And Peter's like no, I would love bacon, but bacon ain't clean. And God was like, don't talk back, don't call unclean what I have made clean. And so basically it was the most awesome day for Peter's diet, 'cause he could now eat bacon. But then Jesus also sent a Gentile or non Jew to Peter called Cornelius. And God had worked in a vision with Cornelius to send him to Peter. What God was initiating was a new era. Not just bacon eating, but Gospel sharing with a new approach and intentionality with the Gentiles. So we have here Peter's interaction with Cornelius, the Gentile. Amazing. A new era. Peter the Jew spreading the Gospel to a Gentile. Baptizing him and the household. But this was just the start. The God who said I want all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth was beginning a new era. Could you turn to the person next to you and say, "He's making all things new."

This past year was pretty big for me because I was able to meet some pretty incredible people. Who I met last year is found on my Facebook page. Some say he is the face of baseball along with Kris Bryant. I was let in with one of our members Otto Tomes, and we were there at Batting practice. And I so remember the anticipation of meeting some Cubs players. The autographs I got were Rizzo, Len Casper - the announcer, Dexter Fowler who is now a Cardinal, Jorge Soler, and Jason Heyward. I still remember my interaction with Heyward, I was using my preaching voice saying, "Mr. Heyward can I get an autograph." Sometimes you don't know if they can hear you so louder. Until during his practice he turned and said not now but later. I was kind of like. I'm such a doofus. I don't know if you've ever been around a celebrity but you can be tempted to act a little different because of the pedestal there are on.

When it comes to how God looks and acts we need to hear Peter again say v.34, "God does not show favoritism." He doesn't treat some like Rizzos better than Tommy La Stella's they are all equal. It goes with us I am not any more or less loved and important to God, and neither are you. That is what Peter who walked with God was learning. If anyone thought he had a higher place maybe it was Peter and the disciples. But he was stating that God shows equal love to all. And I think this idea is really what our world craves. As people are crying over black lives matter, or equal rights for women, or oppressed minorities. We live in a world that never gets this completely right but God says all lives matter. All are wanted, all should hear this message. All, the whole world, needs to know there is victory through Jesus. I consider the picture of heaven, "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." (Rev 7:9) The heartbeat of God has always been for all people! God so loved the _____ that he gave his only Son.

But what this set up was an *new era of outreach*. Before others had to come and see the nation of Israel in order to get to know God and look at his power as he worked through that, but now it was about going out to others. We live in that new era. And the very first word of God's great commission is...GO.

And I believe part of the new era is being *called out of your comfort zone*. I read the Bible and I don't know of any passage where it says as a disciple of Christ I call you to be comfortable. I hear about a cross, but not comfortability. In fact I think the most effective servants of Christ are often the least comfortable. I think Peter was uncomfortable here, look what he said previously, "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean." (10:28) This may very well be Peter's first time in the house of a Gentile. You been in new environment the first time? Kind of like a dad's first time at American Girl store. Uhh, what is this. I don't feel at home here.

I remember listening to a pastor Steven Furtick describe how you get olive oil. You know how that delicious stuff comes, you have to squeeze the olive. This is what he said, "I think it's significant that the Bible says Jesus prayed in the place of the olive press, because the only way you can get oil from an olive is to press the olive. The anointing of God is only produced under pressure." If Jesus accomplished the work of our salvation under such stress and squeezing, is it possible he still produces the best out of us under the squeeze. Friends I've been walking with Jesus all my life, sharing my faith living for him. And I believe it's the squeeze - talk to who, say what, do that, you kidding me - that produces such great oil for the kingdom. I remember all the times it felt my heart was going to explode before sharing my faith in Jesus or approaching someone new. If you're in the press right now, maybe there is a significant reason and purpose you are there.

A little about how that applies here. Has anyone ever heard the *culture eats strategy for breakfast*? The idea that the group you create, and it's environment is even more important and will influence what is created. I was reading a blog recently about church change. And a paradigm used to be if you build it they will come. Build a big, beautiful building and you will be set. That isn't true any more. The new paradigm they cited and I believe in is, "if you create it they will come." If you create an environment or culture that is so loving being outward focused, that is so engaging being relevant, where things are done with such excellence bring our best. It will be compelling to all who see. But you know what it takes the squeeze. What we see also is that personal invitation is still key as Peter is called to go to Cornelius I believe we are called to share the Gospel with or invite others to this place. So I believe God still says, people around you don't know Jesus, not connected. Go, step out. Invite.

What this would also set into motion is a *new era of worship*. For centuries all the Jews would gather in the temple at Jerusalem to worship the Lord. Gentiles weren't even allowed to enter in various parts of the temple. So when Gentiles started worshipping the one God it was different to say the least. They met in homes talking about the Word, receiving communion. But the system of sacrifice, the system of intercessory prayer by the priests and them only praying for you, the songs. Well it doesn't actually mention the songs other than psalm lyrics. All changed. And change in that day was hard. I was reading about how Paul died. And he died at the hand of the Romans, but was actually handed over by the Jews in Jerusalem. And one of the things that got them so upset, "This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place." (acts 21:28) This was the verdict against him that led to his arrest and ultimately to his death. Pretty much he represented change.

And it speaks of how hard change can be. Speaking of hard change. Anyone every have to move? Can't that be hard? It's especially difficult if selling or buying a house. Packing up and moving. I find it takes a good 2 years to be comfortable in a new setting, or even use your home properly - oh that's how I set up the family room. And there so much to reestablish, friends, and neighbors, jobs at times, schools at times, your whole way of life is upset. There is a naturally groaning to change, because it's not really every comfortable. One change I do not appreciate is the text sales stuff. My pocket is buzzing because Jersey Mike's is having a deal on Giant subs - come on I thought this was important.

Changes have continued to happen in the way we worship God. Just look over the last 100 years. 100 years ago many of the services were in the German language. Then for many years all we used was the King James Version with thees and thous. Then switched to NIV 84 edition, now NIV 2011 edition. I remember 30 years ago a different hymnal, and introducing that. 100 years ago we didn't have styles of music that we are now accustomed to. Didn't have access to login to a sermon online. Things continue to change whether or not we like it.

So what drove change at that time after the first Easter. I love it when they were debating with Gentiles should they have to conform to the Mosaic codes. Get circumcised, follow clean and unclean, and James said, "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God." (15:19) And I think he established a new paradigm, one where you can change the things that can change, for the sake of reaching people. Reminds me of Paul who said I've become all things to all people so that by all possible means we might save some. In this new era change was acceptable because there were people to reach. We have the freedom to change. Not the message, but the way the message is shared.

But again all this is hard. Peter getting out of his comfort zone going to Cornelius' house. The church changing they way they worshiped, and what the gathering looked like. It's hard for us. And how many times have been unwilling to get out of our comfort zone, or unwilling to become all things to all people for the sake of the Gospel. You know Jesus is the one of whom it is said, he didn't come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom. And he set the new way. So may repent if at times we've haven't taken seriously God's call to Go. Repent if we've been unwilling to consider what changes we might do in order to carry out the great commission.

And let us look again at what is the same. It's the message of Jesus. That in every age at every time, it was always about the promise of a Savior, and the promise was fulfilled. He is the one whom Peter talked about was killed but on the 3rd day raised to life. He is the one who brings peace to every heart and our hearts as well. Peace is ours this day. Won by Jesus. Won because of his ridiculous crazy love for us. And the great thing about Jesus is that he stays the same. We have the *Same Jesus in every era*. The one who is the same yesterday and today and forever. The one who was and is and is to come. The alpha and omega, beginning and the end.

Jesus kind of reminds me of a style that never goes out of fashion. My wife was at the store the other day, and said to me. That was in style when I was a kid. And now it's back. Anyone live long enough to see styles come, go and come back? When are these coming back. Zubaz. Remember. Actually I think they did they're now called lu la roe. Or Hammer pants, don't know if we'll live long enough to see those come back. Well Zubaz come in and out. But Jesus he remains in style. In style for every time, every people, in every place.

And I love the two things this same Jesus is always doing, v.38 “He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil.” First I hear this *same Jesus is always doing good*. I love how generic this is. Like Jesus what are you up to. I’m just doing good. Well, why’s that. That’s just what I do. You’re a salesmen and sell stuff, you’re an accountant and you count, well I’m Jesus and I just do good. That’s what I do.

Reminds me of the 7 year Ryan Hickman. He started recycling at the age of 3 and then started his own business. Because of his efforts he’s helping the planet, but he has also saved \$10,000 for his own college fund. He has donated \$1500 to the Pacific Marine Mammal Center in Laguna Beach, CA. And looking to raise more through the sale of some T-shirts. That’s a boy who is just up to some good stuff.

Well so is Jesus. And Jesus says you put me in your household, look what I can do. I’m Jesus I do good there. You put me in your business, watch out all I do is good. You put me in your thoughts, didn’t think I could be there. But no me and my words there, will do you good. You put me in your finances, your future plans. I’ll be there working the good that I always work because that is who I am. I’m Jesus I just do good.

But there is something else today. v.38 said he heals those under the power of the devil. So what I see is the *same Jesus brings new healing*. I don’t know if you’ve ever felt under attack by the devil. But I know one person who did. Martin Luther. And he writes about him, “The devil takes no holiday; he never rests. If beaten, he rises again. He labors until he is in (us). He uses great cunning and many a plan. When one miscarries, he has another at hand and continues his attempts until he wins.” And while the devil may have some power, and may try as he might. He does not win. He will not rule. Our God has power over him.

One great picture that was shown by my wife is this one. Isn’t that great. Jesus may have had his feet nailed there, but the devil, the serpent’s head is crushed. And so Jesus still heals those under attack in new ways. The devil has might, the devil has ways, but our God has superior might and superior ways. So we call on him in our time of need and I believe he can bring to each of us new healing. Yes same Jesus in every era. Who conquers over the devil.

Maybe this Sunday is the start of your new era or first era with the Lord. It’s good friends. It’s good to walk with the Lord. But may we learn from Peter. May we become all things, and allow change so Jesus can continue to do good, bring peace, and new healing in every era. Amen.