

The First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
“Resurrection Recognition”  
Rev. Dr. John Judson  
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Isaiah 65:17-25, Luke 24:1-12

These are my numbers (showing a lottery ticket). These are my lucky numbers. They are precious. These numbers are secret. These numbers are handed down generation to generation like my grandmothers meatloaf recipe. And when they win big...then wow it's going to be great. These are my lucky numbers. Every year people spend \$1.5 billion on Mega Million lotto tickets and about the same amount on Powerball. They, or should I say we, spend almost another \$6 billion on lottery games of all kinds. And we do so knowing that the odds are against us. In fact the odds of us winning the grand prize are somewhere in the neighborhood of 292,201, 338 to 1, and even the smallest prize of \$4 the odds are about 38 to 1, meaning on average you would have to buy 38 lottery tickets in order to win \$4. You would think then that we would quit, give up, save our \$38 and pay ourselves \$4 for doing so. But no, we keep on buying because we believe. We believe that the prize is worth the risk.

In some ways this is a lens through which to view the attitude of the people of God, the Jewish people living in the time of Jesus. They believed that they too could be winners; that if they just believed enough, were faithful to God enough, then they could win the prize held out by Isaiah in the passage we read this morning. For more than five-hundred years they had been believing that the promises they contain would pay off. And the promises they contain certainly seem like they would be the jackpot of a lifetime. The city of Jerusalem would be a joy, meaning it would be free of outside interference and political oppression. In an age of high infant mortality, children would live long, prosperous lives where they live to be one hundred-years old. People who work for their living would not have it stolen by invading armies or corrupt governments. Even carnivorous animals would become vegetarians. This was the prize worth believing in. And so, even when things were going from bad to worse they still believed. The question becomes then, how could they believe when it never came true?

Perhaps it was because there were those moments when it appeared that the new heaven and earth were on their way. When they were in exile in Babylon a Persian King set them free and sent them home. It looked like this might be the moment of victory but it was not. Then there were the people called the Maccabees, Jews who helped them win independence. Maybe this was the kingdom come, but no it was still not to be. And then there was this Jesus of Nazareth. He was doing all of the right Isaiah things; giving sight to the blind, making the lame walk, feeding the hungry and healing people of their diseases. He was saying all of the right things. He was talking about the Kingdom of God. He was talking about a transformed world. He appeared to be running for the kingship of creation. So the people bought in. The people saw in Jesus the one who could make them winners. But then there was the arrest, the trial, the flogging, the crucifixion, the death and the burial. And like a worthless lottery ticket he was crumpled up and thrown away, buried in a tomb to be forgotten by everyone except a couple of women who loved him.

For Jesus' disciples and the people who had flocked to him a week or so before would have to wait for someone else to make them winners and not losers.

It was with that understanding that the women came to the tomb. They came as those who had lost once again. What they didn't realize was that they were actually winners. They didn't realize that they were winners because they were not playing the right game. They were playing the Let's Get Rid of the Romans scratch off game; scratch off three Caesars and you are free. Jesus however was playing the, let's defeat sin and death game. The women and their friends were playing the short game and Jesus was playing the long one. Jesus had come not to exchange one political system with another. He had come to exchange one reality for another. He had come to exchange the reality of death for life, hatred for love, prejudice for acceptance, greed for generosity and fear for faith. He had come to bring about a new heaven and a new earth...one person, one community and one world at a time. And the only way he could do this was by giving his life for the world and trusting that God would raise him from the dead.

The women and the world were winners and it was only when the angelic figures appeared reminding the women of the fact that the resurrection had come, that they realized it. For you see, the Jews understood that the resurrection was the kickoff of the new reality coming into being. It was the sign that their belief, their faithfulness had paid off; that things were about to change. So when the women learned that Jesus was raised, they recognized that they had won. Excitedly they ran back to their male counterparts and let them know that they were all winners. Yet, like the dozens of people who have held million dollar winning tickets and never turned them in...yes that's right, dozens of \$1 million dollar winning tickets have expired unclaimed...the other disciples could not believe that they had won because they were still playing the wrong game. They still didn't recognize the resurrection and what it had done for them. Jesus would still have to work on them.

The question for us this morning is whether we recognize the resurrection? Whether we recognize what Jesus has done for us. Whether we recognize that we are winners. When I say winners I don't mean winners in the way the world means winners; winners in terms of achievement, accumulation and appearance, or the Leo DiCaprio syndrome. What I mean by winners is that inside of each of us, because of Jesus' sacrifice and God's resurrection work, is the potential to become new people. We have the potential to become people of great sacrificial love, incredible compassion and extraordinary generosity. We have the potential to become people who transform the world because we have been transformed. We have the potential to leave behind our past and take up a new and better future. We have the potential to mirror Christ into the world. We have this potential because the lucky scriptures are the fulfilled scriptures; because in the cross and resurrection a new world has broken through.

My challenge to you then on this Easter day is this, to ask yourselves, how am I living into my potential as a follower of Jesus Christ, knowing that in his death and resurrection I have won and am a new creation capable of living the Christ-like life?