

“The Easter Life”
Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19
Acts 2:14a, 36-41
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In 2026, we have a lot of modern conveniences to help streamline things and make life easier. I’m thinking today of things like automatic bill pay that allows you to connect a vendor to your bank account once and after that, your bills magically get paid without your having to take the time to find an envelope and a stamp and sit down and write a check like we used to.

You can also arrange for services in a similar way. We have a water service that delivers 5, 5 gallon jugs of spring water once a month. We don’t have to buy water bottles at the grocery store or take jugs back and forth to the store for refills. We signed up, entered the payment information, and abracadabra! Full jugs of water appear, and the old ones disappear without our having to do anything.

Someone out there is probably dying to tell me that it’s even easier and *cheaper* to just drink tap water, which is true, but if you like bottled spring water, the water service is nice, and my point is, it does make things a little easier sometimes when you can “set it and forget it.” A lot of us are juggling a lot of things, and we’re carrying a big mental load, and if there are things we can accomplish without having to think about it, it feels like a win.

When we’re talking about paying bills and getting water delivered without having to give it a thought, I’m a big fan, but this week I’ve been thinking about how the “set it and forget it” mentality may not always be ideal in all areas of our lives. Some things just can’t be, or probably shouldn’t be, put on the autopilot setting.

Relationships, for example, need attention and investment if they are going to flourish.

In college, I had some very close friends and at the time I imagined we would maintain that closeness forever. In reality, 30 years later, most of those friendships don't extend any deeper than putting a thumbs up on each other's social media posts every now and then. I have good memories and feelings of affection for those people, but saying we were great friends while we were still in college hasn't translated into close and connected friendships today. Something needed to happen in the years between college and now – regular phone calls and visits that would have helped sustain and grow the connection.

Relationships with people don't grow when you leave them on autopilot, and the same thing is true about a relationship with God. It doesn't shape us and effect us in the same way when God and the story of what God has done for us is just like wallpaper in the background that catches our attention every now and then but isn't something that consistently has our attention.

It can be easy to take a “set it and forget it” approach to our relationship with God and maybe part of the reason for that is because it's true that our salvation was accomplished through God's acts that took place once and for all. Christ died and Christ rose, and through those acts our sins have been forgiven, we have been reconciled with God, and we have received the gift of eternal life. Jesus doesn't have to *keep* dying and rising, and we don't have to *keep* asking God repeatedly to save us. The work that has been done for our salvation can't be and won't be undone, and when God claims us, we belong to God forever.

This is incredibly good news, and it frees us to live without anxiety about whether we can lose our salvation because it rests on what Jesus has done for us and not on what we have done or failed to do. We don't have to worry and obsess constantly about whether Christ's work will continue to "stick," thanks be to God, but that doesn't mean that we needn't ever think about Christ and what he has done. It would be a mistake to treat what Christ has done for us in the same way as an automatic bill pay – with that "set it and forget it" mentality. Yes, we want to leave *anxious* thoughts behind, but thoughts of gratitude are ones that we want to embrace because they lead us to actively respond to what God has done, and when we are intentionally responding to God, we stay connected and our relationship with God is nourished and grows.

This pattern of gratitude and response is the one that is lifted up in our Scripture readings this morning. When the author of Psalm 116 recognized that he had benefited from God's gracious intervention, he was overwhelmed with thanks. To ignore what God had done for him or fail to acknowledge it was impossible. To simply say thank you wasn't enough. Instead, he was compelled to make commitments and follow through on actions that would give expression to his deep sense of gratitude to God. I will lift up the cup of salvation. I will offer a thanksgiving sacrifice. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of the people.

In Acts we read about the day of Pentecost when Peter, who was freshly filled with the Holy Spirit, preached to a large crowd of people. The content of his sermon wasn't included in our reading, but in that sermon, he proclaimed that salvation had come because Jesus is the Messiah and Savior. He announced to the people, God has made forgiveness of sins and new life available to you through Jesus's death and resurrection, and when they heard it, they were overwhelmed and amazed by this good news. Like the Psalmist, they were filled

with the urge to respond in some way. “*What should we do?*” they asked Peter.

If we have been followers of Jesus for some time and have long believed the good news that we have received salvation and a new life through Christ, it is possible to recognize the beauty and the glory of what God has done for us but to lose some of the sense of the awe and wonder that once inspired us to praise God and make commitments to pursue faithful actions like the Psalmist and the crowds in Acts. It is possible to slip into a kind of autopilot mentality and to neglect giving attention to the God and to our expressions of gratitude.

I’ve been thinking all week about how it does sometimes happen that the beautiful thing that God has done for us in Christ becomes almost unnoticeable to us as we go about our lives, and I’ve been thinking about something that happened this year on Easter Sunday that illustrates this experience.

Every year at Easter we put up these beautiful swooping banners. The first year I was at Lakewood I was just completely taken with them because they are so striking and beautiful. They are one of my favorite things about Easter at Lakewood and that is why I was completely shocked and a little saddened when I realized this year that Easter worship in the sanctuary had come and gone, and *I hadn’t even noticed* the banners this year. It was later that afternoon, or maybe the next day when I looked at the recording of the service and I saw the banners and realized it was the first time I was really seeing them. I couldn’t believe it. These beautiful swoops were hanging here the whole time, brightening up the sanctuary and it making it glorious for Easter, and I guess I had so many other things on my mind that day that they just blended into the background and were invisible to me. It was tragic, and it’s even more tragic when Christ’s beautiful work

that has brought us freedom, and life, and a restored relationship with God becomes almost invisible to us the other things in life take up all of our attention and awareness.

Thankfully, we have times like Holy Week and Easter each year, when we tell and hear again the story about Christ's work and what was accomplished for us. It's important that we tell and hear the story again so that it comes back to the front of our minds, and if the memory, and meaning, and power of the story has faded into the background, we can be amazed yet again by God's love and kindness. And when we have been amazed again by the story of Jesus and his love, we are reminded on this second Sunday after Easter to be thankful and to find ways to express our gratitude to God. We are challenged not to tell the Easter story and then forget about it until next year but to tell the Easter story and then respond and recommit to responding with praise and faithful discipleship.

This is what I would describe as the Easter life. It is not a "set it and forget it" approach where Jesus gets relegated to periphery of our lives. Instead, it is a life in which we regularly remember what has been done and what we have received and we allow that good news to influence and direct all the aspects of our lives including how we use our time and what we do with our resources. An Easter life is a life in which we are always willingly and consciously finding ways to express our gratitude to God - with worship, and acts of love done for others, and obedience and faithfulness to our Lord Jesus.

Of course, it's important to know that the Easter life is delivered to us in the first place as a gift from God, but it is also sustained, not through our efforts alone, but by the grace that Jesus also delivers to us on a daily basis. If we don't want to "set it and forget it" with God, and we want to stay connected and close by intentionally living in a way that gives expression to our faith and gratitude, Jesus will help us

do it, and if we keep trying to pay attention, he will help us to keep seeing the depth of his love for us, the beauty of his sacrifice, and the glory of his resurrection. May we seek his grace and his help today and always. Amen.