

Dear friends,

Someone has pointed out that our individual responses to the resurrection can be likened to the punctuation marks that we see written before us every day. For many people the resurrection is still a large question mark. They ask, "Is it really possible for Jesus, - for anyone, - to rise from the dead? How can that be? How could I, or anyone else for that matter, believe such a remarkable story?"

To many others the account of the resurrection is a comma. It's a pause. There's Good Friday, Saturday, Easter Sunday - a three day weekend! And then life goes on; the rat race resumes. The Easter break, - that comma in the hectic pace of life - will come again next year, and then they say, "Maybe we will spend a week down south, on the beach, Aruba, Mexico, or at least Florida or even Texas!"

To still others it is a period. A period ends most every sentence. A period is boring. You can grow up in the church, young people and us older ones too, and say, "I hear this account of the resurrection every year. It's the same story. It gets old. And every year the pews get harder and harder. It's the same old story. I have heard it all before."

For those who see the resurrection as a period there may be acknowledgment in the head that Jesus arose, but no blessing in the heart. There may be an intellectual acknowledgment of the resurrection, but no real faith in the risen Savior. The people who see the resurrection as just a period in the punctuation marks of life can go through all the right motions. They can cross their theological "t's" and dot their theological "i's" - but there is nothing in the heart; there is no joy, no blessing from taking the gospel to heart.

But those who believe in the resurrection with a heartfelt, saving faith can exclaim with Thomas of old, "*My Lord and my God!*" (John 20:28). The resurrection is the exclamation mark of their life! In the resurrection they see the exaltation of their Lord! They rejoice at His true identity as the eternal Son of God! They rejoice that He is "*the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth*" (Revelation 1:5). They rejoice that their risen Savior is the "*Alpha and the Omega, who is, and who was, and who is to come, - the Almighty!*" (Revelation 1:8).

They rejoice that He has power to forgive sins, that through faith in Him they are reconciled to God the Father, for "*He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification*" (Romans 4:25).

And through faith in Him we need not fear death because He has conquered death in all its forms, as He Himself says, "*I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys to death and Hades.*" (Revelation 1:18). We who believe know that death, the last enemy to be destroyed, is for the believer the passageway to glory, the passageway to seeing our risen Savior, not through a glass darkly, but face to face. Consequently, we make the goal of our life to live as an exclamation mark to the praise of God's glorious grace!

As the month of April brings to our mind the reality of the life, death, and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ may it also bring an exclamation mark to your heart and to mine. Alleluia! He is risen! He is risen, indeed!

Blessings,  
*Pastor Ted Gray*

Dear friends,

Sometimes people ask, “Why do we worship as we do? Is it because we are stuck in a rut? Are we unimaginative and uncreative? Or is there a purpose for the way we worship each week?”

Reformed churches have historically structured their services with an effort to worship God reverently, thoughtfully, in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). If you wonder why we worship as we do, this guide may be of help in answering those questions:

*Call to Worship:* The Lord summons us to worship Him through the reading of an appropriate passage.

*Silent Prayer:* We pray individually for the Lord’s blessing on our corporate worship.

*God’s Greeting (Votum and Salutation):* In the votum we confess our need for help from the Maker of Heaven and Earth, not only in our worship, but in all things. In the salutation God welcomes us and assures of His grace, mercy and peace.

*Psalter or Hymn of Praise:* The Lord is praised as we extol Him in song.

*Reading of God’s Law:* The Law reveals God’s will for our life and drives us to Christ as we confess our inability to keep it perfectly and yet are assured of His forgiveness.

*Psalter or Hymn of Confession and Assurance:* We sing of our Redeemer, praising Him for His sacrifice as we confess our sin and our need for His forgiveness.

*Congregational Prayer:* Both praise and petitions are brought to the Lord as we recognize our constant dependence on Him.

*Offerings and Tithes:* We express our gratitude through the grace of giving.

*Psalter or Hymn of Preparation:* Singing prepares us to hear the Word of God.

*Sermon:* The Lord speaks to His people through His Word and servant by His Spirit’s presence.

*Prayer of Application:* We ask God to apply His Word to our lives.

*Psalter or Hymn of Response:* We respond with singing, emphasizing the themes of Scripture.

*Benediction:* The Lord dismisses us with His blessing through a passage of Scripture.

*Doxology:* We celebrate the glory and supreme majesty of God, and our need for His continual presence in our lives.

We freely acknowledge that our form of worship, whether in the morning or the evening, is not the only acceptable form of worship. But we are also thankful for this structure which helps us worship with reverence and awe, in spirit and truth, remembering that our God is a God of order who tells us to do everything in a fit and orderly way (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Blessings in worship!

*Pastor Ted Gray*

Dear friends,

Growing up in a Christian Reformed Church and going to Christian Reformed schools as a youngster often brought inquisitive and sometimes not so pleasant questions from neighborhood kids. Most of them didn't understand why I went to a special school and many wondered just how bad a boy I had been to end up in a "Reform School."

That name "Reformed" has touched the curiosity of many outside the church, and in more recent years seems to have confused many within the church. A popular definition of what it means to be "Reformed" is that we are always changing, reforming, doing things in a "new" way. But each fall, as we remember "Reformation Day," we are reminded of why we are truly reformed.

Our reformation stems back to the historic Protestant Reformation, best known by the posting of Martin Luther's 95 thesis on the castle door at Wittenberg, Germany in 1517. Luther was a monk in the Roman Catholic Church who had tried everything he could to be right with God, but never gained the satisfaction in his soul that he was right with God. Then, finally, he came across Habakkuk 2:4c quoted three times over in the New Testament. That verse simply says "*the righteous will live by faith.*"

Finally it dawned on Luther that righteousness is not something we obtain by works; we cannot obtain it through an ascetic lifestyle, or buy it with tithes and offerings. He realized that the righteous will live by faith as the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed - credited - to the account of everyone who believes in Him.

Meanwhile, the Roman church was selling "indulgences," slips of paper that people could buy, and according to one especially eloquent friar, John Tetzel, the moment the money went into the church's coffer the soul of a departed loved one would rise from purgatory into heaven. Luther, having finally realized that the righteous live by faith, objected greatly to the sale of indulgences, which his 95 theses (statements or propositions) were against.

That historic posting on October 31, 1517, marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Many other leaders carried the Reformation forward, leaders such as John Calvin, John Knox, and many others. They were called "Protestants" because they protested the corruption of the Roman Church, and they were "reformed" because they sought to reform the teaching of the church back to the teaching of the Bible.

The Bible teaches that our salvation is all by grace through faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9) and that we are saved not by righteous things we have done but by God's immeasurable mercy (Titus 3:4-7). As a result we do good works which were before ordained for us to do (Ephesians 2:10), and live to the praise of the glory of the One who chose us in sovereign grace before the world was even created (Ephesians 1:4-6,11-12).

Consequently, to be a Reformed Church means that we are a Bible-believing congregation. In whatever way we can "reform" to be more in tune with Scripture we are to change. But change, just for the sake of change, has nothing at all to do with the essence of being a truly Reformed Church.

It was hard to explain that as a child, especially to the kids on the block who were quick to ridicule "that Gray kid who goes to reform school." But what a blessing to be, by God's grace, reformed to the eternal truths of His Word! May we rejoice in that blessing every month, every day, of the year.

Blessings,  
*Pastor Ted Gray*

Dear friends,

My family has not been a family of campers. When I met my wife she said she was a camper, and since I had often camped out as boy with one of my brothers in the remote wilderness areas of Montana, I was impressed that she, too, enjoyed camping. In the first year of our marriage, when we lived in Philadelphia, we went on our first camping trip; we ended up in the “remote wilderness” of northern New Jersey. It was then that I found out the truth about my wife’s concept of camping out. Her view? You get the spot closest to the rest rooms and showers, you pay to buy wood to burn in the fire pit, and you go to the soda machine to get a cold drink!

The only other camping experience we had was when we, along with our three young daughters, went from Florida to Lake Cumberland, Kentucky, one summer. On the way we spent a night camping in a fairly remote area of Tennessee. We had taken the back roads through Tennessee and it was beautiful country. We had an old blue Ford “hippie” van and we had a tent. Because the area was beautiful and remote our daughters begged us to sleep in the tent which was set up next to the open side doors of our van. Karen and I liked that idea; we could stretch out and get a good night’s sleep while the girls enjoyed a night camping out in a beautiful and serene area of Tennessee.

All went well for the first hour, in fact I was sleeping tightly when our three daughters came piling into the van. They had been awakened by some roving creature, maybe a coon, or maybe even a bear; they said it was really big and scary. We assured them that it was nothing to worry about, but they had enough of the nocturnal sights and sounds of outdoor Tennessee. They all piled into the van for the night. Needless to say, five people, even when three are kids, don’t fit very well in the back of old blue Ford hippie vans.

For my own comfort, as well as to prove a point, namely, that there was nothing to fear in the great outdoors, I went into the tent to sleep. Again I fell asleep quite quickly and peacefully until I heard drops of rain falling on the tent. The tent was old; we had never tested it in the rain. As the rain picked up in intensity I realized that I had made a big mistake. Torrents of rain were coming into the worn out tent. I made my way back into the van, but now I was not only squished, but soaking wet as well.

Because of those experiences my family is not a family of campers. But I have often thought about that night in Tennessee, with fond reflection, not just for the comical aspect of a rain soaked night with my family, but also a biblical aspect that comes to mind whenever a dear elderly saint goes to their heavenly home. I think of that because the analogy that Scripture uses is the analogy of a tent. Not a brand new water proof deluxe all weather tent, but an old worn out leaking one. 2 Corinthians 5:1 says: “*Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.*”

One day my body, and yours, will be just as worn as that old tent in Tennessee. Our body will no longer be able to sustain our soul, and the two will be separated. But whenever that day comes I won’t be stepping out of a worn out soaking wet tent into an old blue Ford hippie van. I’ll be stepping out, - along with all of us who have saving faith in Jesus Christ, - into “*an eternal house in heaven not built with human hands.*”

And from that perspective, I suppose, I should correct myself. My family is a family of campers. This earth is not our home. We are just camping out here, because “*our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so they will be like His glorious body.*” (Philippians 3:20-21).

Happy camping!

*Pastor Ted Gray*

Dear friends,

On Labor Day, when you are outside enjoying a barbecue or picnic, consider taking some time to watch the ants. That's not my advice, but rather the advice of Scripture to a sluggard (and no, I am not implying that you are a sluggard!), but all of us humans are prone to some sort of laziness at times in our lives.

There is the temptation to be physically lazy, which is what we most often picture when we think of a sluggard, but there is also a sense in which we can become mentally lazy. The mind, if not cultivated and challenged, becomes lazy and dull. A third type of laziness, spiritual laziness, is the most serious of all. Spiritual laziness is evident when a professing Christian becomes too lazy to pursue devotions, too lazy to faithfully and systematically read the Bible and pray.

At those times when we feel lazy Scripture tells us to *"Go to the ant...consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provision in summer and gathers its food at harvest"* (Proverbs 6:6-8).

The first thing that the ant teaches us, through the wisdom of Scripture, is self motivation. When we were children most of us had to be told what to do. We weren't self motivated to do the daily chores around the house and our parents told us, "Clean your room." "Do the dishes." "Mow the lawn." Later, as we matured, hopefully we saw what needed to be done and did it before our parents told us to do it. Unfortunately, many adults fail to be as wise as the ant which goes about its work with enthusiastic initiative even though *"it has no commander, no overseer or ruler."*

The passage in Proverbs also teaches us that the ant provides for itself and for others. You will never find an ant looking for a free handout, rather the self motivated ant works hard, and also works smart. Studies at Purdue University discovered that ants not only haul food home to feed themselves and others, but they also plant underground mushroom spores which over time sprout and provide additional food.

Not only are ants horticulturists in this way, but according to the same Purdue University study ants are in the dairy business. Dr. John Silling, a Purdue University entomologist, explains: "Some ants get the majority of their food by 'milking' aphids or plant lice which are often known as 'ant cows.' The ants sometimes herd the aphids down into ant nests at night or when it starts to get cool, then when it gets warm again they herd them back up to the plants."

The ant not only works hard and works smart, but the ant looks ahead and plans ahead, as *"it stores its provision in summer and gathers its food at harvest."* In fact, the ant seems to grasp the wisdom of these words of Solomon's while many humans miss their importance: *"Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well"* (Ecclesiastes 11:6).

The average ant lives and works seven years, all the while teaching us humans what Labor Day is really all about. Isn't it interesting that the Lord uses the smallest of creatures to teach the largest of lessons to those of us who are created in His image!

I do hope that you have a blessed Labor Day, but when you are relaxing by the barbecue or resting on the picnic table, don't forget to look at the ants!

Blessings,  
*Pastor Ted Gray*