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Thriv'era | We Are...Thriving

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The story of Easter is the story of new life. It's the story of Jesus's resurrection, and that changes everything. When Jesus was raised from the dead and walked out of that tomb on that first Easter, everything changed, not just for a few people there and then but for all people here, now, and everywhere. To encounter the empty tomb is to consider what that event - that catalytic event that took place over 2000 years ago - means for us today. In John's Gospel, Jesus' words are clear: "I am the Door. To enter through me is to experience life, freedom, and satisfaction!" As we move through the season of Easter, the image of an empty tomb becomes an open door that leads to something more, something new and different, something meaningful and life-giving, something deeply hopeful, something thriving! There is movement in all of this. It's the movement from the darkness of the grave to the bright sunlight of a sun-drenched new day of life, the movement from where we've been to where we're going, the movement from despair to hope, from fear to courage, from isolation to connection, from weakness to strength, from doubt to insight, from merely surviving to truly thriving. So, we step through the open door of Easter, which leads us to the kind of Christ-life that allows all people to thrive.

We're in a brand-new worship series called "Thriv'era." That's probably a new word for you, although it's a fusion of two familiar words: 'thrive' and 'era.' Our intention is to explore what it means to thrive in this and every moment of our lives with the understanding that thriving does not happen apart from the challenges of life, but rather, thriving takes place amid challenges. Thriv'era is not a program or a curriculum; it's not a course that you take and complete by taking a test and then moving on to something else. Thriv'era is a purposeful integration of our profound longing to thrive as the people of God and God's desire for all people everywhere to experience "life, and more life," in the context of the resurrection. Over the next eight weeks, we'll walk deeply into this transformational experience together toward a

deepened sense of our identity as a community of Christ Followers—that we are... spirited, creative, and connected people, called to be present, grateful, generous, and missional with our lives. These seven thriving rhythms will give some shape to our thinking about what it means to be the people of God whose identity, purpose, vision, and mission is to bring some good to each moment, something better to each day, and our best to each other as we encounter the world around us.

I've often wondered what it was like for Jesus' followers in the early days after the resurrection—like the week after! What was going on in the disciples' hearts and minds as they tried to make sense of everything? For some, I suppose, it was "business as usual." Some went back to their boats and nets, others to their offices and day jobs. After all, they still had to feed their families and go to work and school. But the resurrection had changed everything. And along with the changes came a lot of questions. What did Jesus' resurrection mean? How does resurrection inspire us to engage in God's work here and now? How does it inform the way we live as a community? Maybe, most importantly, how did the resurrection change them? Jesus's resurrection was the catalytic event that called for a reframing, a reimagining, a reinvention of life itself. The future of the church would depend on followers of Jesus [in every age and time] asking important questions about how they would live and thrive as people of the resurrection.

In this season of Easter, Jesus's resurrection is the filter through which we see and do everything, including how we understand who we are, what we're doing here, where we're going, and how we'll get there. The resurrection raises these questions, and these are the questions at the heart of Thriv'era—questions of identity, purpose, mission, and vision. Let's look at these questions together.

As the early church embraced the mission of taking the good news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to the ends of the earth, the Apostle Peter [1 Peter 2:9-10] boldly proclaimed this: "But you are the ones chosen [spirited] by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly [servant] work, chosen to be a [connected] holy people,

God's instruments [creative] to do his work [mission] and speak out [generous] for him, to tell others [present] of the night-and-day difference he made for you [grateful] —calling you out of darkness into his marvelous light [missional]!

As followers of Christ, we thrive by asking, "Who are we?" This essential question both challenges and clarifies our identity. "Who are we?" On the first page of the biblical narrative, we learn that we are spirited – we carry in us the breath of God. "Who are we?" As image bearers of the Divine, we are spirited human beings animated by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are creative human beings designed to explore healthy connections with others. We thrive by being present and attentive to what each moment has to teach. When we do that, we discover that practicing gratitude releases generosity, which is our mission.

Second, as followers of Christ, we thrive by asking, "What am I doing here?" An ancient hero of mine, Saint Teresa of Ávila, was a well-known and respected Spanish mystic, Carmelite nun, and theologian who lived during the 16th century in Ávila, Spain. She famously provided clarity about this when she wrote, "You are the presence of Christ in the world—who has no body now but yours; no hands, no feet on earth but yours—yours are the eyes through which Christ looks with compassion on the world. Yours are the feet with which Jesus walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which God blesses all the world." By asking, "What are we doing here?" we gain greater clarity about our values, theological convictions, and mission as a congregation in this community, and ourselves as members of this community of faith. Saint Teresa continues... "You are here to reach across the gap – across the chasm into the life of someone in need. You are here to be the hands, the feet, the eyes—the body of Christ because Christ has no body now on earth but yours." To know who we are and what we're doing here for the sake of the gospel is to thrive in our identity and purpose.

As followers of Christ, we thrive by asking, "Where are we going?" and "How will we get there?" We really can't fault the disciples for returning to their boats and nets, offices, and day jobs—back to business as usual. After all, they still had to feed

their families and go to work and school. But to ask, "Where are we going?" and "How will we get there?" is to stand at the open door of the empty tomb, not looking back in there, but looking out and beyond to where Christ is going.

So, what do these four questions have to do with Thriving? Let's go back to where we began. The resurrection of Jesus changes everything. The resurrection changes you. But how? Easter is the announcement that we can reframe how we understand our identity, our purpose, our vision, and our mission as Christ followers wherever we live and work, wherever we play and go to school, wherever we shop and work out, wherever we drink coffee or tea, wherever we have meaningful conversations with others. What would really happen if you began to think that way? How would your life be just a little different if you made a fresh commitment to be the hands and feet of the resurrected Jesus in the world? What if you made a conscious decision to bring some focused attention to how these seven thriving rhythms could unfold in your life? How would that help us bring some good to each moment, something better to each day, and our best to each other as we encounter the world around us? Good questions!

Let's make this sticky. Here's a practice for you this week:

- First, wrestle with the "Identity" question: "Who are you?"
- Second, think about how the resurrection reframes your purpose: Ask yourself, "What Am I doing here?"
- Third, ask the vision question: "Where are you going?"
- Finally, What's your mission? How will you get there?