

April 4, 2021

“A Message for Us All”
John 21:1-18

FCF: Struggling with the personal relevance of Easter

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Christ is risen!

(magnet) This is a message for us all.

SERVICE INTRODUCTION:

Jesus’ tomb is empty. And that reality cannot be contained. In a 2018 *Wall Street Journal* article, George Weigel gives a combination history lesson and apologetic for the Resurrection:

There is no accounting for the rise of Christianity without weighing the revolutionary effect on those nobodies of what they called “the Resurrection.” They encountered one whom they embraced as the Risen Lord, whom they first knew as the itinerant Jewish rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, and who died an agonizing and shameful death on a Roman cross outside Jerusalem.

As N.T. Wright...makes clear, that first generation answered the question of why they were Christians with a straightforward answer: because Jesus was raised from the dead...As they worked that out, their thinking about a lot of things changed profoundly.

The article lays out the positive outcomes brought to the ancient world by Christianity ([READ](#)):

- A new dignity given to women in contrast to the classical culture.
- A self-denying healthcare provided to plague sufferers.
- A focus on family health and growth.
- A remarkable change in worship from the Sabbath to Sunday.
- A willingness to embrace death as martyrs - because they knew that death did not have the final word in the human story.
- Living as if they knew the outcome of history itself.

Weigel suggests that it’s only through what he calls “The Easter Effect” that these changes make any sense. He’s right. The changes that followed Good Friday occur only if the early Church actually believed in the resurrection of Jesus. And why did they believe it? Because it was real.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Let me come back to “The Easter Effect”, mentioned earlier in the service. It was like a healing bomb blast, sending shock waves from the blast radius. When you think it through, it becomes a strong argument for the reality of the Resurrection and the historicity of the Gospels.

But even at this moment, you may well be thinking, “Well, the logic makes sense. Those things wouldn’t just happen. There has to be a good reason and explanation. I get the point as to how Easter would make such a difference in the world. I do. But how can it do that in my life?”

That would be a very good question. Let’s go to one of the accounts and think it through.

SCRIPTURE READING: [John 20:1-18](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

The traditional Easter greeting in churches all across the world is, “Christ is risen!” And the response is, “He is risen indeed!” They are words of wonder and celebration, something of an echo of the announcement by the angels that morning as recorded in the other accounts. That said, there can be hurdles to wonder worth climbing, obstacles to our celebration worth clearing.

One has to do with definitions. By “resurrection,” some might think we mean that Jesus lives as an idea, his teaching being a wise way to live. That is not it at all. When the Bible says

“resurrection”, it means a dead man got up and walked again - His heart beating, lungs filling with air, a finger moving, an eye twitching. This man stirred, sat up, stood up, and walked out.

Definitions can be one hurdle. Another can be assumptions, especially about miracles. You might say, “Science doesn’t allow for that.” But what is the role of science? Isn’t it to look at an event, extrapolate what happened from the standpoint of natural causes, and then say, “This is how things normally happen”? Science done that way is a great gift to us. But it needs to stay in its lane. Its role is not to weigh in on the super-natural, on exceptions coming from outside.

In fact, many who resist the idea of miracles admit they do so out of a faith position. “It doesn’t happen because it can’t.” Or it could be the frightening implications, what it would mean, if they were real. I get that. It’s a seismic shift. But not all the implications are frightful.

Think of what we see in our text. Christ is risen! Christ is risen and this is a message for us all. It is a message for the doubting, the dismissed, and the despairing. Again, it’s for us all.

I. FOR THE DOUBTING

First, we see that Easter is a message for the doubting, when we wonder if God is real.

A) The Common Assertion

You may have heard or embraced a common assertion. The pushback goes like this.

1. A conspiracy

“Look, the whole thing was a conspiracy. Sure, Jesus was an historical figure. But his followers hijacked his cause after he died and made all this supernatural stuff up as a big power play.”

2. Credible sources

Okay, let’s run with that. They would need to enlist credible sources to make their case. Right?

B) The Counter Evidence

But if you take a hard look at the evidence, it’s pretty clear they did anything but that.

1. The disciples

Look at our text. The disciples are hardly heroic. They are scared, skeptical, and slow to see.

2. Mary Magdalene

The one person who gets it is Mary Magdalene (Mary of Magdala). But what do we know of her? (**READ Luke 8:1-3**) So Mary is a former demoniac. Not just that, she is a woman. In that culture, women were seen as unreliable, their testimony inadmissible in a court. Yet she is chosen as “the apostle to the apostles,” the first herald of Easter. Which was fuel for the critics of the Church in the early years. So, knowing that, why make this up? Why write it this way?

Unless, of course, it happened this way. And you are committed to the truth.

Application:

Do you see? This is just one bit of a mountain’s worth of evidence worth considering.

Christ is risen and this is a message for us all - even for us in our doubting.

II. FOR THE DISMISSED

The second thing we see is that Easter is a message for the dismissed, the rejected.

A) Women in That Day

I've already alluded to this as we see Jesus intentionally appearing to Mary first.

1. Examples

But there are many other examples of His relating to women in that day - the Samaritan woman at the well, the widow of Nain, the woman with the bleeding, Mary and Martha, and His mother.

2. Historical impact

This was extraordinary. More is being said in our own day of the historical impact Christianity had here. In those days, men were deemed superior. Women were objects. Now we say that we all have equal dignity. But where did that come from? Not the Enlightenment. It was Jesus.

B) Others As Well

But Jesus cared compassionately for other groups overlooked and cast off in His day.

1. Children

He did not dismiss children. We read of His delight in them, welcoming them into His arms.

2. Outcasts

Every outcast - the blind and lame, lepers, tax collectors and sinners. He approached them all.

Why? Jesus sees every person as having infinite worth as an image bearer of God.

Application:

Every person, even you. No matter your story or your past. No matter what's been said.

Christ is risen and this is a message for us all - even the dismissed, the forgotten.

III. FOR THE DESPAIRING

The third thing we see is that Easter is a message for the despairing, the hopeless.

A) Coming in the Dark

We read here that Jesus comes in the dark. John is pretty emphatic on that point.

1. The time of day

It's a reference to the time of day, early in the morning as the sun was just beginning to rise.

2. A deeper image

But there's a deeper image here. For John, darkness has both a physical and a spiritual meaning. Even literally, night has a dark connotation. But it can mean more than that. It has the sense of misunderstanding, confusion, spiritual oppression, and death. Nine times here, John mentions the tomb. So what's going on? (**READ John 20:1**) Jesus enters and disrupts the darkness.

B) Returning to a Garden

But there's something else. This all happens in a garden. Jesus returns to a garden.

1. Where this happened

John wants us to see this as well (**READ John 19:41; 20:15**). What is a garden? A watered space set apart for the cultivation of life. It's an image of provision, beauty, abundance, satisfaction.

2. Where it all started

Now think with me. When was the first time in the Bible we read of a man and a woman in a garden? Eden. As Paul tells us, Jesus is the second Adam. Listen to the contrasts ([BP quote](#)):

The first Adam yielded to temptation in a garden. The Last Adam *beat* temptation in a garden. The first man, Adam, sought to become like God. The Last Adam was God who became a man. The first Adam was naked and received clothes. The Last Adam had clothes but was stripped. The first Adam tasted death *from* a tree. The Last Adam tasted death *on* a tree. The first Adam hid from the face of God, while the Last Adam begged God not to hide His face.

The first Adam blamed his bride, while the Last Adam took the blame *for* His bride. The first Adam earned thorns. The Last Adam *wore* thorns. The first Adam gained a wife when God opened *man's* side, but the Last Adam gained a wife when man opened *God's* side. The first Adam brought a curse. The Last Adam *became* a curse. While the first Adam fell by listening when the Serpent said "take and eat," the Last Adam told His followers, "take and eat, this is my body."

It all started in a garden. Jesus rose in a garden. And, in fact, that's where we're heading.

Application:

Easter is the dawn of hope, the beginning, the promise of everything sad coming untrue.

Christ is risen and this is a message for us all - even to the despairing and hopeless.

CONCLUSION:

"Christ is risen!" (He is risen indeed!) What a greeting! This is a message for us all.

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