

May 8, 2022

“Our Deepest Longings Realized” John 20:19-23

FCF: Our disconnect with Easter

PROPOSITION: (magnet) With the Resurrection, our deepest longings are realized.
(anchor) Let us then consider the empty tomb.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Some of the most interesting news stories can be filed under the category of “Person Not Knowing What They Have.” Case in point, this story that was reported just last week ([READ](#)):

Laura Young was browsing through a Goodwill store in Austin, Texas, in 2018 when she found a bust for sale. It was resting on the floor, under a table, and had a yellow price tag slapped on its cheek: \$34.99. She bought it. Turns out, it wasn't just another heavy stone curio suitable for plunking in the garden. It was an actual Roman bust from the late 1st century B.C. or early 1st century A.D., which had been part of a Bavarian king's art collection from the 19th century until it was looted during World War II.

How it got to Texas remains a mystery. But the most likely path suggests it was taken by an American soldier after the Bavarian king's villa in Germany was bombed by Allied forces.

No doubt this will increase the traffic at Goodwill stores and yard sales in the coming weeks.

But the greatest of these “not knowing what we have” stories is that of Easter - the news of Jesus' resurrection from the dead and its implications. I fear we don't know what we have.

The plan is to return to the Leviticus series next week. But let us linger here a bit more.

SCRIPTURE READING: [John 20:19-23](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

I came across this bit from an interview with historian David McCullough. He was asked about the motto set over his desk. It says “Look at the fish.” Here's the explanation ([READ](#)):

It's the test that Louis Agassiz, the nineteenth-century Harvard naturalist, gave every new student. He would take an odorous old fish out of a jar, set it in a tin pan in front of the student and say, “Look at your fish.” Then Agassiz would leave. When he came back, he would ask the student what he'd seen. “Not very much,” they would most often say, and Agassiz would say it again: Look at your fish. This could go on for days. The student would be encouraged to draw the fish but could use no tools for the examination, just hands and eyes. Samuel Scudder, who later became a famous entomologist and expert on grasshoppers, left us the best account of the “ordeal with the fish.” After several days, he still could not see whatever it was Agassiz wanted him to see. But, he said, “I see how little I saw before.” Then Scudder had a brainstorm and he announced it to Agassiz the next morning: Paired organs, the same on both sides. “Of course! Of course!” Agassiz said, very pleased. So Scudder naturally asked what he should do next, and Agassiz said, “Look at your fish.”

There are some things worth considering, worth gazing upon. Why is this worth saying? Because of what we find at Easter in the resurrection of Jesus. The empty tomb is the realization of our deepest longings. So we need to look into the tomb. We need to examine and consider it.

And, as we do so, what do we find? What are these deep longings that are realized there? These three things - the peace of God, the presence of God, and, finally, our purpose from God.

I. THE PEACE OF GOD

The famed psychiatrist, Karl Menninger, said that if he could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals their sins were forgiven, 75 percent of them could walk out the next day.

Think about that. We are plagued with guilt. We can labor to fix it and compensate, trying to outweigh all we've done. Or we can try to forget it, drowning it out through numbing distraction. None of that works. We need to be washed clean, set free. How? How can this be?

Consider the peace of God ([READ John 20:19-20](#)). There are some amazing things here.

A) From God

Peace from God. The world is a frightening place, full of much danger and harm.

1. The doors were locked

Consider the disciples. The doors were locked. Why? They were afraid they might be identified as followers of the One the Jewish authorities had pushed to be crucified just two days before.

2. And Jesus came in

And into that space, Jesus came - either by passing through the door or unlocking it from outside. It's a miracle either way. And it demonstrates that nothing can restrain Him or keep Him back. For He is the Shepherd. He will guide, provide, and protect His own. This is peace from God.

B) With God

1. What they were feeling

But we also see a peace with God. Consider what the disciples were feeling. Disappointment, discouragement - all their hopes had been in Jesus. Grief and guilt - they had abandoned Him.

2. What Jesus said

And then Jesus comes. What did He say? He did not rebuke or remind them of their desertion. He extends a greeting, "Peace," twice for emphasis. He offers acceptance, assurance, friendship, forgiveness. All of which makes clear He brings not just peace from God but peace with God.

Consider, look into the empty tomb. There we discover this astonishing peace of God.

Application:

What happens when you know you've been forgiven by God? To the extent you do, you are able to extend forgiveness to others. Do we need that? The online magazine *Vox* recently ran a series of stories under the title "Americans Struggle for Forgiveness." Listen to this ([READ](#)):

The state of modern outrage is a cycle...We wake up mad, we go to bed mad, and in between, the only thing that might change is what's making us angry. The one gesture that could offer substantive change, or at least provide a way forward—forgiveness—seems perpetually beyond our reach.

It goes on to list a number of celebrities who've been cancelled. And then observes ([READ](#)):

We have absolutely no coherent story—none whatsoever—about how a person who's done wrong can atone, make amends, and retain some continuity between their life/identity before and after the mistake.

But the Gospel does offer a coherent story - the reality of a God who absorbs the debt we owe, cancels it, enabling us to do the same with one another. And, in fact, He insists that we do so.

The resurrection is the realization of our deepest longings, a longing for God's peace.

II. THE PRESENCE OF GOD

The peace of God. But also His presence. A story from Japan - dozens of elderly women are admitting to crimes of petty theft, hoping to go to prison. ([READ](#)) "There are always people around," one inmate said, "and I don't feel lonely here." That's not just in Japan. A recent study said three in five Americans are lonely, many feeling left out, misunderstood, with no friends.

Our text speaks not only to the peace of God but His presence ([READ John 20:21-22](#)).

A) The Question of the Breathing

His body can be touched. Not only that, His breath can be felt. But what does this mean?

1. Not an initial bestowal

There are differences among the commentators here. Some say this is an initial bestowal of the Holy Spirit, a foretaste of the fuller pouring out of His presence before what came at Pentecost.

2. But an acted parable

But, likely, this is not an initial bestowal but an acted parable. It's symbolic, a picturing of who was to come. As at creation, as God had breathed life into Adam, another breath was coming.

B) The Reality of the Spirit

All of which speaks to the necessity, the reality, of the presence of God in the Holy Spirit.

1. The promise

Jesus had promised this in John 14-16. He was leaving but we would not be left behind. We would not be abandoned. As we read at the end of Matthew's Gospel (**READ Matthew 28:20b**).

2. The Paraclete

But, if He was leaving, how could this be? (**READ John 14:16**) Through the presence of another Paraclete - another Helper, Advocate, Counselor. Jesus had been this thus far. And another was coming to continue that. He was sending the Holy Spirit, the indwelling presence of God. To us.

Listen to what Jesus is saying. There we discover the astonishing presence of God.

Application:

"I am with you" is the promise of God to His people. (**READ Psalm 121:5-6; Isaiah 49:14-16**) It is a message repeated throughout the Bible. We need to hear this and lay hold of it.

That said, we need to know that there are times when God may not feel near. Think of Mary at the tomb. Jesus was standing right there. But she did not recognize Him. His presence with us can be mysterious. But it is still real. We are never powerless, hopeless, or alone.

The resurrection is the realization of our deepest longings, a longing for God's presence.

III. OUR PURPOSE FROM GOD

Which brings us to this third point, our purpose from God. Mark Twain once said the two greatest days in a person's life are the day they're born and the day they discover why. (**READ John 20:21-23**) We are not left to handle things on our own. Nor to figure things out on our own.

A) The Commission

We have been given a commission, what many have described as a "great commission."

1. The parallel

Note the obvious parallel Jesus points out. The Sent One of the Father sends out His disciples. Then and now. His mission was not over. It was to continue through them. And through us.

2. The implications

This is His charge to us. Think of the implications. This is deeply humbling and emboldening. Think of what we can expect. It will be costly. We will need His Spirit and to depend on Him.

B) The Proclamation

This is His commission. That commission involves a proclamation (**READ John 20:23**).

1. Not pronouncing forgiveness

This is so strongly stated that it can be confusing. Cosmic treason has been committed by man against God. God is the offended party. We do not because we cannot pronounce forgiveness.

2. But pointing towards it

But we can point towards it. That's what this is about. Telling people of our need of forgiveness, the reality behind what our consciences tell us. Our need of forgiveness and its means, the work of Jesus who has lived the life we should have lived and died the death we deserved to die.

Listen to these words of Jesus. There we discover this awesome purpose from God.

Application:

This proclamation is our commission. This is - whatever shape it takes - our purpose. Is that not what so many are looking for today - a cause to join, some meaning and reason to live? Is this not why we see such fervent devotion to even misguided pursuits? It may not be mere madness. For there is a deep hunger within the human heart. And every one of us feels this.

The resurrection is the realization of our deepest longings - including that of purpose.

CONCLUSION:

The Corps of Discovery, led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, is said by many to be the most momentous expedition in American history and one of the greatest adventure stories of all time. Their task, as stated in the words of President Thomas Jefferson (**READ quote**):

"...the object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river, and such principal streams of it, as, by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific Ocean, whether the Columbia, Oregon, Colorado or any other river, may offer the most direct and practicable water communication across this continent for the purposes of commerce..."

The preparation was extensive. Lewis studied astronomy, navigation, botany, medicine, biology, and other disciplines. He collected two tons of goods – guns, ammunition, medical supplies and scientific instruments. And he had to, given all that they knew this endeavor would demand.

They left Pittsburgh in May 1804 and returned to St. Louis in September 1806. Their journey covered nearly 8,000 miles - moving through harsh, hostile, and mostly unknown terrain. It was an extraordinary effort. But they wanted to find out what was there, to press into this new land purchased from the French. There was so much there. They couldn't just turn away.

Can we not say the same about the resurrection of Jesus? Think with me. Put yourself in the room with the disciples. You've seen Him and heard His words. The peace of God, the presence of God, and the purpose from God. Let that settle in. What does it stir within you?

The resurrection is the realization of our deepest longings. Let us consider the tomb.

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