



I love Easter. I don't love Easter simply because all of the candy, which keeps appearing at my office door in a plot, I suspect, to put me in a sugar coma. I don't love Easter simply because of all the nice outfits, although I must say that from where I stand you all look very nice. I don't love Easter simply because of the great music, but I have to say, it's great music, as we all knew it would be. I don't love Easter simply because the church is full, although I enjoy looking out and seeing such a great crowd, and I appreciate each and every one of you being here. I love and appreciate all those elements of Easter, but what I love about Easter, certainly, is what it represents, one of which is that Easter represents the fact that we are bound to something so much greater than ourselves. All around the world this weekend, believers gather to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, and we are part of that large fellowship of hundreds and hundreds of millions of people. And for some of those people, it is difficult and dangerous. In Egypt, members of the Coptic Christian churches will gather with the fear that they may face another deadly attack. Throughout the Middle East, Christians will celebrate the resurrection of Jesus while they worry about attacks and persecution, but still they gather, in spite of the danger. In China, millions and millions will gather in house churches, breaking the law as they do, and will risk persecution not only for attending Easter worship, but also for daring to defy the government's decree that churches must be officially sanctioned and approved before they are considered legal. In some parts of the world some people will most likely lose their lives for the act of worshiping and proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus.

That's an incredibly powerful message, isn't it? It is a message that has captivated the hearts and lives of so many millions of people throughout history and to today. The message of the resurrection of Jesus is so powerful that it moves millions and millions of people to not only risk their lives but, if necessary, give their lives. What a powerful message to inspire that level of faith! The resurrection is the heart of our faith, so hear the story of the resurrection from Luke's gospel –

Luke 24:1-12

1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.

5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why

do you look for the living among the dead?

6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:

7 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'"

8 Then they remembered his words.

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.

10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.

11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

I have no idea what it was like on that first Easter morning as the women made their way to the tomb where Jesus had been buried. Perhaps it was one of those early spring mornings when you feel the new life surging in our veins and it's a glorious feeling. I like to think that it was. You know the kind of morning of which I speak. You rise early and step outside as the birds are singing and the sun is rising. There are the smells of trees and flowers in bloom and of the freshness of the earth. Except for one detail, it could have been a perfect morning. It was a rather large detail, as the women were going to complete the gruesome task they had not been able to finish, which was to prepare the body of Jesus for burial.

Consider with me several themes from the resurrection story this morning –

1. Look for life where life is found, and experience the power of resurrection.

I am not much of a yard person. In fact, I am one of the worst yard persons in the history of yards. Before we moved, we lived between two retired guys who mowed every other day. I finally told them both, *can you give me a break?* I mow our yard and do some work in the yard, but you will never find me working meticulously outside in the yard, nurturing a good stand of grass. If you are that kind of person, God bless you. Really, God bless you. My great fear is that upon being welcomed into eternity one day God is going to say *come on in! Now, I've got some good news and some bad news. The good news is that we have a mansion for you! The bad news is that it needs some yard work. But on the bright side, you've got a lot of time to work on it.*

But somehow, in spite of my sad attempts to keep a lawn, it grows, and grows, and grows, because you cannot stop life. Life blooms and blossoms all around us, and the resurrection is certainly prove that in the hands of God you cannot stop life, even when death itself has stood in the way.

Why do you look for the living among the dead, the women are asked in verse 5. *There is no death here,* they are saying, to which the women could have easily replied, *oh yes there is! This is a cemetery. No one comes here to experience life!* But life had come to that cemetery on the first Easter morning! Life is bursting forth all around us! God is a God of life! Easter is the celebration of that life and the celebration of new life!

But as life bursts forth around us, we must remember there are places that are not conducive to life and that do not nurture life. We live in a time when there is, all around us, the tragedy of addiction. There is no life in addiction. Addiction robs us of life. All around us there are many who are in the grip of fear and anxiety and fear and anxiety do not bring life but rather they rob us of life.

Look for life where life is found, in God, and experience the power of resurrection.

2. Remember what God has done and what he has said, and experience the power of resurrection.

I find it amusing that many of you have the mistaken idea that I have a good memory. No doubt, about twenty of you will test my memory as soon as the service is over by giving me something to

remember. I think people believe I have a good memory because I do not often refer to the manuscript of my message. I can assure you, however, that I do not have a good memory. Ask my family if you don't believe me. When I'm speaking, you have no reference point to know if I'm actually sticking to my manuscript or not. I could be totally winging it for all you know.

To help me remember, every Monday morning, one of my first tasks is to print out this list of reminders to help me keep up with what I need to do, where I need to be, etc. You can see where I add to it and on the back of some of the pages I write ideas for my message and other thoughts that I hope will be helpful. Without this, I'm kind of lost. Actually, I would really be lost.

Listen to what the men say to the women in verses 6 – 8 – *6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'*” *8 Then they remembered his words.*

Memory experts tell us that we need to process a piece of information in several ways if we hope to retain it. Obviously, the disciples had a difficult time retaining what Jesus told them *beforehand* about his resurrection. On numerous occasions, Jesus told his disciples *exactly* what was going to happen. *Exactly!* And, once again, they are reminded in this passage – *remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee.* Interestingly, that is not phrased as a question. Look at the text; it doesn't end with a question mark. It is a statement of command – *remember! You have to begin taking to heart the things God has been saying. Remember that he is working on your behalf. Remember that he loves you. Remember that he is with you. Remember that he is not going to leave you. Remember! Remember! Remember!*

At the resurrection, everything lined up and made sense. The followers of Jesus could look back and see how everything fell into place. They could see how the entire life of Jesus, and especially his final days, when it was a challenge to walk like him. Looking back at the final days, they could see how the Triumphal Entry was a challenge to remember that to walk like Jesus means we forsake pride and embrace humility, looking back at the final days, they could see that the Last Supper was a challenge to embrace the great command of love and a life of service, looking back at the final days, they could see that the Garden of Gethsemane was a challenge to walk in the paths of Jesus even when the walk is difficult and challenging and to seek the will of God rather than our own will and, finally, looking back at the final days, they could see that the crucifixion was a challenge to embrace forgiveness, as Jesus did as he hung dying on the cross.

And then there is the resurrection, which challenges us to never forget that life has conquered death. Since last Easter, some of you have experienced the sting of death. You have lost people near and dear to you, and that loss stings a great deal. In the power of resurrection, God certainly wants us to *remember this – Death has been swallowed up in victory. 55 Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?* (I Corinthians 15:54-55). The resurrection of Jesus is not the only resurrection, it becomes our resurrection as well.

3. When nothing seems to make sense – including faith – receive the power of resurrection.

I do not hold to the idea that everything in life either must make sense or will ever make sense. I still have questions that I hope to have answered some day – and while I doubt they will be answered in this life, I'm okay with that; honestly, there's a lot of questions I no longer stress over. Some things just don't make sense because we simply won't understand everything.

Verse 11 says that the disciples *did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.* That's probably an apt description for how some people look at faith; it doesn't make any sense to them. To some people, faith is nonsense. As we gather this morning, there are the skeptics of the world who will shake their heads and think us foolish because we follow after and believe what they claim does not make any sense.

But just because we don't have every question answered, and just because all things do not make sense in no way diminishes the reality and the truth of those things. Faith doesn't always make sense to us. Faith doesn't answer every question. But I don't find that in any way diminishes faith, the reality of faith, or the truth of faith. The disciples could not believe the news of the resurrection because they did not believe such an event was possible. We really don't see as objectively as we believe that we do. We generally see what we believe rather than seeing what is reality. It is not necessary that every question be answered and every doubt erased and everything line up perfectly in order for something to be true.

I used to exercise in a graveyard. I did so for a couple of reasons; one, because it was not far from where we lived and the paved road that wound through the cemetery grounds made it very convenient. But the bigger reason might have been that walking through a cemetery gave me a greater motivation to work out, as I wanted to put off as long as possible my entry into that place.

When you walk through a cemetery you notice that they can be busy places. A lot of people come and visit cemeteries. I would often see people sitting and talking to their departed friend or loved one. Often, it was obvious they were crying, still feeling the sting of loss. At such moments, the power and reality of resurrection became very real to me. I would often think, *I don't want that small plot of ground to be the very end. I believe there is more.*

The resurrection proves that there is. Believe in the power of resurrection! Hope in the power of resurrection! Receive the power of resurrection!