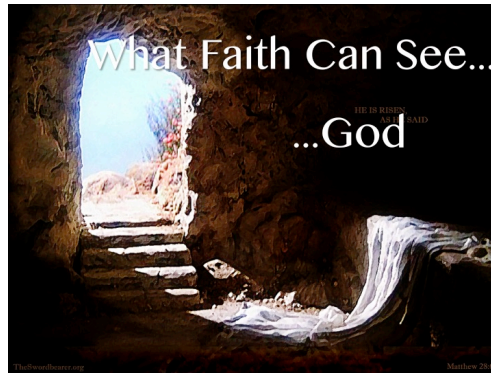


April 1, 2018  
Luke 24:1-12  
I Corinthians 1:18, 25  
Easter



Good morning, and Happy Easter!

Today is not only Easter. Can anyone else tell me what today is? That's right; it is also April Fool's Day. I'm certain there is more than one skeptic making a joke out of the fact that Easter and April Fool's Day fall on the same date. I can hear it now – *the joke is on you for believing! What a fool one must be to believe such nonsense! How can you believe what you cannot see? How can you believe what cannot be measured or tested in a laboratory?*

I have a quote I want to share with you – *Seeing is not believing. Our senses can deceive us.* Who do you think made that statement? Sounds like something you would hear in church, doesn't it? Sounds like a statement right out of a sermon about faith. Actually, the quote comes from last year's TV special, *Cosmos*, and was spoken by the astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson. It's interesting that a scientist (especially one who is a skeptic when it comes to faith) would make such a statement, as science is very precise about needing to see proofs and evidences (and I say that as one who is thankful for and grateful to the work of science). As far as his quote, I could not agree with Tyson more.

For the past month I have been preaching a series of messages under the theme of *What Faith Can See*. The overall point of those messages has been that we are not always as perceptive as we think, we do not always see as clearly as we believe that we do, that we are not always as open-minded to truth as we believe, and we are conditioned by different forces in life to believe things that might not be true. Our eyes do indeed, at times, deceive us. Our senses do, at times, deceive us. So when someone makes a claim that faith relies too much upon things that we do not see, remind them that it is not always possible to trust what we do see.

Our Scripture text for this morning is, no surprise, one of the resurrection accounts in the gospels. We will read Luke's recording of those events and then add on two verses at the end from Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. The text is printed in the program this morning so you can follow along.

Luke 24:1-12 and I Corinthians 1:18, 25 –

*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.*

*18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

*25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom...*

When I was in college four of us traveled to a remote location in the mountains in the far western corner of Virginia. One of our friends lived way up on a mountain and invited us to visit his home. It was far from any town, and I will never forget the winding drive up through the mountains, where the roads became more and more narrow, and we eventually passed a sign that said *End of State Maintenance*, and I was fairly certain we passed one that said *End of Civilization As You Know It*. We finally turned off onto a narrow dirt road and traveled through the woods and came out into a clearing, and there was his house. When I stepped out of the car the first thing I noticed was the quiet. There were no sounds of humanity – no traffic, no industry; there was nothing but the sound of nature. And then that night, wow. It was a clear night and I had never seen so many stars. It was like standing in the middle of the Milky Way and seemed as though it would be possible to reach out and touch all the stars. There was no artificial light to wash out the light of the sky. I stood on that beautiful evening, on the edge of the forest thinking, *you know, out here away from everything, caught up in the beauty of the moment, a bear could sneak out of those woods and have me for dinner and no one would ever know what happened to me*. It's true; I really did think that. But then I relaxed and realized there was so much in that night sky that I had never seen before. I had never seen stars, planets, and the Milky Way in such glory, but just because I hadn't seen them in such detail didn't mean it wasn't there. I will say this as well – artificial light is certainly no match for real light.

The apostle Paul actually embraced the idea of faith as foolishness when he wrote his first letter to the church at Corinth. Paul raised the question of what is wise and what is foolish. Well, it depends on your perspective, doesn't it? The cross, he says, is foolishness to some because that's their perspective and their perspective doesn't allow for any other conclusion. Not only did Paul encounter a good deal of skepticism about the resurrection, even those closest followers of Jesus expressed their share of doubt and skepticism, because their perspective did not allow them to grasp the idea of the resurrection. The women went to the tomb on the first Easter morning because they expected the body of Jesus to still be there (verse 1). When they went to the disciples to tell them of the resurrection, the reaction of the disciples was that *their words seemed to them like nonsense* (verse 11). Their perspective did not allow them to see the truth. They were absolutely convinced that the tomb could not be empty and that Jesus could not be alive because their perspective did not allow such a thing to be true. Obviously, then, our perspective matters when it comes to determining what is true and real. When you are conditioned to see the world in a particular way and when you are conditioned to believe in a certain way, we will be convinced that is the way the world works. Or does it?

What faith allows us to see is the truth of the ultimate question, which is the question of God. The

perspective of faith will look around and see that God is everywhere. God is infused in everything around us. The hand of God in nature and creation will be obvious. The hand of God will be obvious in every expression of love. The hand of God will be obvious in every expression of kindness. The hand of God will be obvious in every truth of science, every work of art, and every note of music.

But for some, doubt continues to persist. For some, belief in the resurrection will continue to be foolish. But what is wise and what is foolish? Is it always as clear as we believe it to be? Well, let's think of it this way. Wouldn't it be wise to keep all of your money, saving and investing it all for your own use and security and enjoyment? Wouldn't it be wise to be a modern version of the rich young man who built his fortune and then proclaimed that it was time to *eat, drink, and be merry!* (Luke 12:16-21). But we read about the early church, and how they had all things in common, supporting one another and those in need and that set the template for the church, so keeping everything for yourself is not so much wise as it is foolish and impoverishing. And wouldn't it be wise to save all of your time for yourself? Why not come home from work and do what you want to do, and keep your weekends for yourself rather than giving up that precious time? But there are people that need some of our time. There are people in hospitals and nursing homes who need us to be there for them, there are neighbors who are lonely, there are kids who need role models, there are Sunday School classes that need to be taught, youth groups to be lead, people who have no family nearby and need a family to care about them, so it is impoverishing and foolish to keep our time just for ourselves.

So faith can help us to see that we are called to live for more than just our own self-interest. And when we speak further about what faith can help us to see, there is no greater example than that of the empty tomb. Faith is what allows us to see, and believe, that the tomb is empty because Jesus was raised from the dead. It is a false claim and a false narrative that everything in life can be tested and measured and determined to be either absolutely true or patently false. Everything takes some measure of faith. Just as you cannot take a collection of scientific instruments into the tomb and expect to prove the resurrection, neither can many other parts of life be tested and measured. Can you, for instance, really prove love? If I asked you to prove to me that you love your spouse, for example, how would you do so? How do we know that love is nothing more than chemical reactions in the brain that produce within us a wonderful feeling that we call love but might only be a function of biology? How do we know that sacrificing for our family is love when it could be nothing more than some form of self-preservation? Whatever evidence you can offer for the existence of love, I can present a reason to doubt that evidence. And stop thinking right now *I sure feel sorry for his wife and kids*; I'm just presenting an argument to make my case for love and faith!

Thomas, the disciple, the one labeled, *doubting Thomas*, said *unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it* (John 20:24). Thomas wanted proof. People continue to ask for proof. But what is proof? One person would point to the vastness of the universe and the order in which the stars and planets move and say *how could this be chance? Surely this is proof of God*. Another may look at the vastness of the universe and the order in which the stars and planets move and say *it's all chance*.

Faith, you see, is the willingness to take the step to receive the reality of Jesus. It is choosing to believe; it is choosing to see. For all of my life I have believed. There have been doubts along the way, and a whole lot of questions. I have come to the point in life, however, when I no longer need to have every doubt assuaged or every question answered. For me, the resurrection is a reality that supersedes any question or doubt I might have, and the reality of the resurrection is all I need as the basis of my faith.

Francis Collins is the Director of The National Institutes of Health. He is a world-renowned scientist who also directed The Human Genome Project, which mapped the human genome. As one who has been on the cutting edge of science for years, he writes that he was raised in a family where faith *just wasn't important* (*The Language of God*, Francis S. Collins, page 11). As he grew older he became an

agnostic and then moved into what he described as confrontational atheism, writing that *I felt quite comfortable challenging the spiritual beliefs of anyone who mentioned them in my presence, and discounted such perspectives as sentimentality and outmoded superstition* (page 16).

And then one day, as he sat and talked with a hospital patient who was suffering with untreatable heart disease, the patient asked him what he believed. In spite of all his training in science and medicine, the only reply he could manage was *I'm not really sure* (page 20). The patient's question began to haunt him and he decided that as a scientist it was his duty to examine the question of faith, so he set out on a spiritual quest.

After studying all of the major world religions he still wasn't sure what he believed, so he walked down his street to visit a Methodist minister who lived in his neighborhood, and asked the minister whether faith made any logical sense. The minister listened and then gave him a book to read. The book was *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis, the legendary Oxford scholar who had once been an atheist but came to faith while trying to disprove faith (page 21). The arguments of Lewis were very convincing to Collins, and writing of the gap between belief and unbelief he says, *for a long time I stood trembling on the edge of this yawning gap. Finally...I leapt* (page 31).

Francis Collins moved from disinterest in faith to hostility towards faith and finally to embracing faith. What changed his way of seeing faith? Why did he see faith in a different way? There were spiritual and intellectual arguments that he considered, but it came finally to the question of *what would he see?*

What do you see in the empty tomb? I believe that when we look into the empty tomb we see God. We see God, the creator of heaven and earth and all things and the God who became one of us in the person of Jesus and who lived, died, and was resurrected. He is risen! He is risen indeed!