**Easter 2018**  April 1, 2018

The Beautiful Empty Tomb

**Coffee/Question:**

What would change for you if the remains of Jesus (his bones) were found?

The symbol of Christianity is an empty cross.

The good news of Christianity is that…Jesus is alive.

The leader of every world religion lies in a tomb or a grave.

But there is no tomb that holds the body of Jesus.

C.S. Lewis wrote: *Jesus has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought and beaten the king of Death. Everything is different because he has done so.*

Jeremy McKeen says: “*If Jesus is physically alive, then he’s in a category all by himself, and the only logical response is to live for him…But if he’s not alive, then the only logical response is to live for yourself…”*

Let’s consider the events that happened in Jerusalem almost 2000 years ago.

We are going to look at Luke 24 today.

But first, there are several important details that happened on Good Friday that I want to remind you of.

Very early on Friday morning the religious leaders brought Jesus to Pilate.

Pilate’s first question to them was: *”What charges are you bringing against this man?”* They answered: *“If he were not a criminal we would not have handed him over to you.”*

The religious leaders considered Jesus to be a criminal.

Somehow in their minds, when they looked at Jesus, they saw an evil man.

Pilate was not in the mood for this kind of bantering so early in the morning.

He told them, *“Take him yourself and judge him by your own law.”*

Their answer: *“But we have no right to execute anyone.”*

When Jesus was betrayed into the hands of sinners, what they did to him, showed the very essence of sin, which 1 John 3:4 describes as “lawlessness.”

The religious leaders assaulted the Son of God with the intent to kill.

John’s gospel doesn’t tell us what else the religious leaders said to Pilate, but we know from Pilate’s first question of Jesus, that they accused him of treason.

*“Are you the king of the Jews?”*

*“My kingdom is not of this world.” “But yes, you are right in saying I am a king.”*

*“The reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth.”*

You and I need to carefully ponder these statements of Jesus.

They speak of who he is and why he had come.

Jesus as he answered Pilate, talked as if he existed before he was born as a baby in Bethlehem – which he did.

Jesus lived in community with the Father and the Spirit before anything was.

The first verse of John’s gospel says: *“In the beginning was [God the Son]…*

Jesus came to testify to the truth.

Every facet of Jesus’ life… from his conception, to his birth, to his escape to Egypt as an infant; to his childhood years lived in Nazareth, to his baptism in the Jordan River, to his temptation by Satan in the desert, to his years of public ministry, to his betrayal, arrest and trial, to his crucifixion, death and resurrection….… revealed the truth.

With anger in his voice, Pilate snapped at Jesus, stating, *“What is truth?”*

What a profound question!

But it was not a question Pilate wanted an answer to.

Do you know how we know that?

Because as soon as he said, “What is truth?” he walked out of the room.

As he talked with Jesus, I can’t help but wonder if Pilate felt like he was the one on trial?

Jesus said to Pilate: “Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

Jesus refused to be one of many possibilities; and this makes people uncomfortable.

If Pilate had waited for Jesus to answer his question, “What is truth?” Jesus would have told him, “I am the truth.”

Truth is not abstract; but personal.

Truth is rooted in and comes out of the very essence of God’s “otherness,” his holiness. God cannot lie.

He doesn’t just speak truth; he is truth.

Truth is personal.

Truth has a name and that name is Jesus.

We’re ready now to jump ahead in the story of Easter to resurrection day.

If you have your Bible or tablet, find Luke 24.

**v.13-24**.

While the scope of the conversation between these two men was broad -*“everything that had happened”* - the theme of their discussion was narrow –

it focused solely on Jesus.

Isn’t it incredible? The risen Jesus walked with them and talked with them, but they didn’t know it was him.

Why was that?

The clue, according to Jon Bloom is found in **verse 25-26**.

*“Jesus called them "foolish" and "slow to believe" the Scriptures.*

*Their* ***outward inability*** *to recognize Jesus mirrored their* ***inward unbelief*** *of what the Scriptures revealed about him.*

*Jesus fully intended to help them see him. But notice his priority… As he walked along the road with them, he [walked them through the OT Scriptures].*

*It was of utmost importance that they [learn to] "walk by faith, not by sight."*

(2 Corinthians 5:7) *Jesus knew… his ascension was nearing. That meant these two men, and all the other witnesses of the resurrection, and every generation of believers to come… would not have him bodily present to guide them. They would, as Hebrews 4:12 says, need to [learn to] rely on his "living and active" Word*. https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/cleopas-the-eyes-that-are-most-important-to-jesus

What was the perplexing issue for Cleopas and his friend?

The crucifixion.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 – *“If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death…*

*and his body is hung on a tree… you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree…*

*is* ***under God’s curse.”***

They couldn’t figure it out.

They told the stranger who walked with them…Jesus had been powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.

How could he thn – in light of who he was and what he had done - be cursed of God?

What these two disciples had missed; what they had not recognized…was **“what”** the Messiah would redeem Israel from.

They had thought Jesus would redeem politically; that he would drive out the Romans.

Jesus dealt with the confusion, the despair and the misunderstanding of those two disciples by teaching them the Scripture.

God had foretold hundreds and hundreds of years in advance specifics that would happen to his Messiah.

In John 5:39-40, Jesus had said (to the religious leaders in the presence of his disciples): *“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think by them you possess eternal life. These are* ***the Scriptures that testify about me****, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”*

God had said to Eve a Rescuer would come.

And then across the centuries that followed, he foretold the story of Jesus, proving that he is the Sovereign One who brings about his purposes on the earth.

(See Isaiah **44:6-9a; 24-28; 45:18-22**)

As they walked along the road to Emmaus, Jesus referenced and explained to the two men, passage after passage.

Isaiah 7:14 – foretold his virgin birth

Micah 5:2 – foretold his birthplace

Isaiah 53 – foretold his rejection by his people; his silence before his accusers; his

substitutionary death

One thousand years before it happened, and long before the Romans even thought it up, **Psalm 22** described the crucifixion of the Messiah.

v.16 – foretold his feet would be pierced

v.17 – foretold his bones would not be broken

v.18 – foretold lots would be cast for his clothing

v.1 – foretold his cry of abandonment, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Along with Psalm 22… Isaiah 53, Hosea 6 and the story of Jonah (see Matthew 12:40), foretold the Messiah’s resurrection.

After they recognized Jesus, they said to one another: *“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us and opened the Scriptures to us?”*

*“The Greek word for burn is "kaio.”*

*In Luke 24:32, kaio is passive, meaning that the act of burning was done to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus by Jesus…”* http://livingroomtheology.com/2017/10/31/not-hearts-burn-within-us/

How did Jesus burn their hearts?

By **“opening the scriptures”** to them.

They experienced what Jeremiah 23:29 spoke of: “Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”

We are reminded here that the OT is not a book of random historical stories; nor is it a book of rules to follow. It tells one story – the story of Jesus…

On the road to Emmaus, the author explained his story to those two disciples.

Finally, the moment came when their eyes were opened.

It happened at the supper table…in the most ordinary of ways.

As Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them, they recognized him.

When they did…he disappeared from their sight.

The news that he had risen, had to be shared.

Even though night was falling, they hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the others – “It is true! He is risen!”

And while, they were still talking about what had happened and what Jesus had taught them...Luke 24:36 says, “Jesus himself stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

He showed them his hands and feet.

Then he did for all of them in the room what had been done to the two who walked with him on the road to Emmaus – “He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.”

What does this impress upon us? Two things.

**Jesus is the sight-giver.**

Zac Hicks says, *“What set their hearts ablaze — was an interpretation of Scripture that put Jesus and his finished work front and center.”* https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/set-our-hearts-on-fire-again

Do you know why the words of this book are like a fire that burns; and like a hammer that shatters; and like a sword that pierces?

The Bible is living and active because it is God-breathed.

This book is timeless – it speaks and is relevant to every generation…because these are the words of the One who has always been and always is and always will be.

Jesus who is the truth, uses the scripture to reveal truth to us.

He uses the scripture to open our mind and heart.

And when he does…our hearts will burn, as theirs did.

The risen Jesus is the sight-giver

**He is also the hope-giver.**

Tim Keller writes: *On Easter I always say to my skeptical, secular friends that, even if they can’t believe in the resurrection, they should want it to be true.*

*Most of them care deeply about justice for the poor, alleviating hunger and disease, and caring for the environment. Yet many of them believe that the material world was caused by accident and that the world and everything in it will eventually simply burn up in the death of our sun.*

*They find it discouraging that so few people care about justice without realizing that their own worldview undermines any motivation to make the world a better place. Why sacrifice for the needs of others if in the end nothing we do will make any difference?* http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2017/april/8041017.html

Jesus’ resurrection is the motivation for why we who follow him, spend our lives to make a difference.

N.T. Wright says: *The message of the resurrection is that this world matters! Because Jesus Christ is truly risen from the dead, Christianity is good news for the whole world…* *Easter means that in a world where injustice, violence and degradation are endemic, God is not prepared to tolerate such things— this present world must now be addressed with the news that healing, justice, and love have won.*  *This is why we work and plan, with all the energy of God, to implement the victory of Jesus [into every facet of life].* http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2017/april/8041017.html

This is why we as a community of faith are passionate to make a difference in our community – through various service groups where we help; through ministry to kids, youth, adults, seniors; through Big House Breakfast; through Grace Garden – and to share the story of Jesus wherever and to whomever we can.

**Jesus is the sight-giver and the hope-bringer.**

On Easter, justice and love won.

This is why there is good news for the captive; good news for the shamed; good news for those who’ve walked away; good news for the doubter…

The call to action I leave you with is based on the song we are going to sing.

**come to Jesus… and be chainless**

**come to Jesus.. and be fearless**

Paul would later speak to this same puzzling question, in his letter to the church in Galatia, 3:13-14 – *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us… He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”*

The word ‘redeem’ (exagoradzo) means “to buy out” in order to set free.

What was the price for our redemption?

Jesus had to be cursed; in order for us to be blessed.

As Jesus said in his conversation with Pilate, he is a king, but his kingdom is not of this world.

Jesus rule and reign, in this present time, is in the lives of those who follow him.

His kingdom transcends all ethnic and geographic borders.