

**The Seven Words of Easter**  
**Easter Sunday**  
**March 27, 2016**

THE FIRST WORD OF EASTER - Matthew 28:1-6 "He has risen, just as he said. Come and see!"

Let's just address it right now. There are a lot of people who believe that what we're doing today is silly--that we're celebrating something that didn't happen, that the resurrection is a story that doesn't stand up to a scrutiny.

To them the angel would say "Come and see."

Come and see the empty tomb. Look closely. How do you explain what you see—or, more precisely, how do you explain what you **don't** see here?

Over the centuries people have come up with all sorts of explanations for it, but they're all quite far-fetched.

Come and see. People suggest that the disciples merely spread a story that Jesus had risen. They don't explain why the Jewish leaders and the Roman leaders didn't put a quick end to that story by producing the body. I can explain it. Because the body wasn't there!

They've suggested that the reason the body wasn't there is because the disciples stole it. Yes, they've actually suggested that the same disciples who ran like frightened animals a couple days before somehow got up the courage—and the strength, and the weaponry—to overpower a group of trained and armed Roman soldiers who needed to successfully defend that tomb or else lose their jobs--and maybe even their lives.

Even if either of these scenarios are within the realm of possibility, neither of them explain why nearly every one of Jesus' disciples, if they knew that "Jesus rose from the dead" was a lie, was willing to be killed for telling it. People will tell lies for all kinds of reasons, and they will even hold onto those lies at some cost because they believe that the rewards are worth it. But what possible reward would be enough that nearly all of them would be willing to die for this lie? No, if the disciples knew that it was a lie, they would have dropped the charade and fessed up at some point.

Other ideas--ideas like "Jesus passed out the cross, woke up in the tomb, and got up and left"--are so far-fetched and raise so many questions that we won't bother to address them here.

Come and see, and you will see that there is no explanation more believable, more reasonable than this: Jesus, a man who performed hundreds of miracles, a man who always did what he said he was going to do--this same man performed one more miracle, doing exactly what he said he was going to do. He rose from the dead.

Come and see. He **is** not here. He has risen!

THE SECOND WORD OF EASTER - Luke 24:1-5 "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

What makes Christianity different from every other religion? I hope that your first answer would be that only Christianity teaches salvation by grace. But one of the other great distinguishing features of Christianity is pointed out by the words of our reading. If you want to find leaders of so-called great religions, it's easy enough to do. You go to their tombs. If you

consider communism a religion, then perhaps you want to find Lenin. Go to Moscow, and you will find his body displayed under glass. If you want to find Mohammad, go to Medina. There in a coffin you will find the dust of Mohammad. If you want to find Buddha, go to Asia and look for a number of burial mounds under which portions of his ashes are reputed to be stored. In other words, if you want to find the leaders of so-called great religions, you look among the dead. Because there, next to their followers, they lie--dead--leaving behind nothing but some advice on how to live. There they lie, powerless to do anything, powerless to help anyone. Like Socrates (if you want to find him, I imagine you'd have to go to a tomb in Greece) said, "Must not all things be swallowed up in death?"

But if you want to find Jesus, don't go to Israel. Don't go to his tomb. Like the angels say, he's not there. He was not swallowed up in death, but rather--as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians--"*death has been swallowed up in victory.*" (1 Corinthians 15:54) You do not have a teacher or a guide who is among the dead, but a Savior who is living!

THE THIRD WORD OF EASTER—Luke 24:13-36 "Peace be with you."

Why do you think "Peace be with you" is the first thing Jesus says when he sees his disciples on Easter Sunday? Why not "I'm back" or "Surprise!" Why "Peace be with you?"

Could it have been because the disciples were more than a little bit uncertain about their relationship with Jesus? After all, they hadn't exactly been there for Jesus in his hour of need. After his arrest, all of them disappeared--with the exception of John and Peter. But Peter had then three times violently denied even knowing Jesus. For that matter, John hadn't exactly been there for Jesus in his hour of need, either—falling asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane when his friend's soul had been "*overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*" (Matthew 26:38) and Jesus had desperately wanted company from John.

We know that we haven't been there for Jesus either. We have abandoned him when following him would have been a bit dangerous--or even just mildly uncomfortable. We have betrayed him with our disobedience and our rebellions against his commands every bit as much as Peter did. Even when we have desired to be faithful followers of Jesus, we have become sleepy, caving in to the weaknesses of our flesh.

We have good reason to feel like the disciples must have felt that evening--heartbroken and fearful about the fact that they had left things with Jesus in failure. Failure to watch and pray, failure to follow, and in Peter's case, failure to confess.

But that was not where Jesus had left them. While they were sleeping in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was praying--that he might do what God had sent him to do for them. While Peter was denying Jesus, Jesus was suffering for Peter. While they were running for their lives, Jesus was giving his life up for them.

And because of this, Jesus could assure them of peace.

People talk a lot about having peace, but they don't have the faintest idea of what sort of peace is important, and they don't have the faintest idea of how to achieve it. They talk about "being at peace with myself " But you know what? In the end, that's not really the issue. The main issue in our lives is not how **we** feel about ourselves, but how **God** feels about us.

Here Jesus tells us how God feels about us. God is at peace with us. Therefore we have a peace which surpasses all human understanding. Peace be with you!

## THE FOURTH WORD OF EASTER - Luke 24:37-39a "Look at my hands and my feet."

I don't particularly enjoy looking at other people's scars. I suppose that's partly because the scar makes me think about how it got there and what it felt like and partly because they're just plain ugly. But people with scars, on the other hand, sometimes take great pride in showing them to others. I suppose that's partly because the scar means something to them. It means, "I'm a survivor of heart surgery." Or "This big scar on my arm proves how much I love my son--because I got it when defending him from a dog that was attacking him."

In our 4th word of Easter, Jesus wants us to look at his scars. It's hard to do so because we can (sort of) imagine what it must have felt like. It's even harder to do so because we know why they're there--because Jesus was crucified for our sins. But actually we ought to take great pride in those scars--because they mean something to us.

Those scars mean that we are loved. They mean that our sin has been paid for.

Do look at his hands and feet this Easter morning. Those scars tell us that he is a survivor. They tell us how much he loves us--because he got those scars as he was defending us from our enemies. They are truly "battle scars." And the fact that the one showing them to us is alive tells us who has won that battle.

They tell us that the battle is over. They tell us how the peace that Jesus spoke to his disciples that evening was accomplished. This morning's closing hymn calls them "rich wounds." ("Crown Him with Many Crowns", verse 2). Rich, meaningful, and yes, beautiful wounds.

## THE FIFTH WORD OF EASTER -John 20:11-16 "Why are you crying?"

Why was Mary crying here? Because that's what people do at the death of a loved one. The death of a loved one may be the one thing in this world that saddens us the most. You cry at a tomb (or a deathbed, or a funeral) because it's the end--the end of their life, the end of your time with them. They're gone--not "gone to the store" gone, not "gone for a couple weeks on vacation" gone, but "gone for good" gone.

That's what Mary thought had happened to Jesus--that he was gone for good. And now she had gone to the tomb to pay her last respects to the only part of Jesus that he had left--and even that was gone!

And so was all hope.

But then Jesus appears to her and she realizes that he has risen from the dead, that this is not the end of her time with him, and that even when she died, it would only be the beginning of time without end with him in heaven.

Yes, when a fellow believer whom we have loved dies, it's OK to cry at their funeral. There's nothing wrong with grieving--but the apostle Paul tells us not "grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope." (1 Thessalonians 4:13) We not only have hope, but it is a sure hope.

We know that although they are gone from us, it's not a "gone for good" gone, but a "gone to heaven" gone--and one day we also will be "gone to heaven", where the question "Why are you crying?" will never need to be asked--because there will be no more crying--just joy with them and our risen Savior.

## THE SIXTH WORD OF EASTER-Matthew 28:8-10 "Do not be afraid"

What are you afraid of? No, really—what scares you? There is a whole list of things from which to choose. Let's use a list that the apostle Paul used in the Bible. He mentioned death first. That's a fearsome thing for a lot of people. But we already talked about that and dealt with that in previous devotions. We know that we don't need to be afraid of death. We know that we can do as one can do when something has been exposed as a blustering bully with all bark and no bite. We can do as Paul did, and—far from fearing it—taunt it, saying, "*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?*" (1 Corinthians 15:55)

But what about life? There's plenty to fear there too, isn't there? Sometimes just life itself is enough to overwhelm us and frighten us. And then there are the things that can be frightening because they are so obviously more powerful than we are—and generally invisible to us—things like angels or demons. Do you fear the present? Is the only reason that you don't "borrow trouble from tomorrow" because you have too much trouble just today? What about the future? After all, while the present may be painful, at least we know it. The future can bring all sorts of things—international unrest, crime, violence, economic disaster, accidents, sicknesses, loss of love—and it can do so at a breakneck pace.

And I suppose that it makes some sense to fear all those things. After all, each one of them is more powerful than we. But then as all these fears rush at us, Jesus steps in the way and says to us, "Do not be afraid." Sure, it would make sense to fear those things if Jesus were not risen, if he were still among the dead, if we did not have a risen and living Savior. But we do have such a Savior who is in complete and constant control.

What are you afraid of? Whatever it is, take it and wipe away that fear, saying with Paul, "*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (Romans 8:38-39)

No, Christians, do not be afraid—of anything—for Christ is your loving, your living, your ruling Lord.

## THE SEVENTH WORD OF EASTER - John 20:18,25--"I have seen the Lord."

You can only imagine the eagerness and joy with which Mary said these words. You can only imagine the speed with which she ran to share this good news to others. All hope was not lost! She had seen the Lord!

This morning you have once again through the eyes of faith "seen the Lord." Do what Mary did, do what the Emmaus disciples did, do what Jesus' disciples did. Tell people that you have seen the Lord. And tell them what it means. Tell them that he has risen. Tell them that he is not merely some great teacher who is now among the dead, but a great Savior who is living. Tell them that they have peace with God. Have them look at Jesus' hands and feet and know that those scars mean something—forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. Let them know that they don't need to cry like the rest of the world--because they know that their troubles here are light and momentary and that even death is not lasting. Tell them that since their Savior is among the living instead of the dead--and since he has been given power over all things--they do not need to be afraid of anything. You have seen the Lord! Be sure to show him to others! Happy Easter! Amen.