

How the Empty Tomb Gives You a Life that is Full
Luke 24:1-6, John 11:25-26

Good morning! Happy Easter! Happy Resurrection Day!

I'm glad you're all here this morning. It's a bit chilly and thanks for braving the cold. Jesus is here and I'm sure he's pleased to see all of you come today to celebrate what he has done for us. You see, without the resurrection Christianity has no meaning and our faith is in vain. If Christ is not raised from the dead, then the sum of Christian thought is little more than yet another of the world's moral philosophies.

There was this woman who wrote J. Vernon McGee, a famous Bible teacher: "Our preacher said that on Easter Jesus just swooned on the cross and that the disciples nursed him back to health. What do you think?" McGee replied, "Dear Sister, beat your preacher with a leather whip for thirty-nine heavy strokes. Nail him to a cross. Hang him in the sun for six hours. Run a spear through his heart. Embalm him. Put him in an airless tomb for three days. Then see what happens."

In 1 Corinthians 15:13-16 the Apostle Paul writes, "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either."

We know for a fact that Jesus Christ has been raised according to the Bible, Amen? Christ is risen? He is risen indeed. During early Christian times that's how they greeted one another. Someone says, "Christ is risen". The other person says, "He is risen indeed!" And because he is risen, the tomb is empty.

So, this morning, I've entitled my message, "How the Empty Tomb Gives You a Life that is Full". When we hear or read the phrase "Empty Tomb", like the word Easter, immediately what comes to mind is the resurrection of Jesus. But what does the resurrection of Jesus signify? How does it impact my life? That's my topic this morning. I'd like to share with you how the resurrection of Jesus can give full meaning to your life even though you may feel empty inside.

Some people feel empty because their marriage is in trouble, it's in the rocks. They feel like giving up in their marriage. Some people feel empty because of a health problem, a disease that's ravaging their body. Some feel empty because of their financial situation. They're deep in debt, bills are mounting. Some people feel empty because of sin in their lives. They are constantly struggling with sin and feeling guilty of sin. There are so many reasons why we can feel empty.

Let me read from John 11:25-26. Then, Luke 24:1-3.

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'" (John 11:25-26)

"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. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus." (Luke 24:1-3)

The passage in John refers to an event just prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus said those words to Martha, the brother of Lazarus, who was already dead for four days. Martha was understandably distressed. She was grieving because of the death of her brother and at the same time she felt Jesus had abandoned them. She said in verse 21, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." She was heartbroken.

Then, Jesus assured her in verse 23, “Your brother will rise again.” She replies, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day”. But Jesus was talking about raising Lazarus there and then and that’s when he said those words, “I am the resurrection and the life.” And we know what happened next. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. He gave him new life. About a week later, Jesus himself died, he was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead. His tomb is now empty.

Today, I’d like to share with you the **three messages of the empty tomb** for us. First,

1. Jesus takes away your fears.

Every one of us has fears. Some more than others. There’s healthy fear and there’s unhealthy fear. Unhealthy fear is what we call phobia. It’s a Greek word that means “irrational fear”. So, there’s arachnophobia – fear of spiders, acrophobia – fear of heights, aerophobia – fear of flying, claustrophobia – fear of crowded spaces (in other words, fear of getting covid), and there’s a phobia for many of us called obesophobia, do you know what it is? Fear of gaining weight. Do you have that fear? I have the fear of losing weight. And there’s a phobia that concerns our men – gametophobia, can you guess? Fear of wife. Then, there’s trichophobia – you know what it is? It’s a new fear. Fear of losing hair. Ok, it’s a joke. Please don’t come up here. I have trichophobia, too.

Seriously, our fears can have debilitating effects on us. It can make us lose our appetite, it can make us lose sleep, it can make us sick, it can paralyze us. To fight their fears, many people resort to various things to calm their nerves like sleeping pills, meditation, alcohol, entertainment, cigarettes, tranquilizers, music, and a host of other things. They find out, however, that all these don’t take away their fears permanently. They’re temporary. I used to be a worrier.

I fear a lot of things like I was afraid of people, I was afraid of failing, I was kind of a jumbled mess when I was a young man. So, I tried yoga and eastern meditation because I heard they could help. They did. For some time. But my fears were still there. They only took care of the symptoms, not the underlying cause. Until I stopped doing them.

It's hard to live when fears are your constant companion. Life is unbearable and loses its meaning when you are always afraid of something or worrying about something. It can lead you to depression.

Now, all the fears I've mentioned, they're nothing compared to the no. 1 fear of people. The fear of death. This is the ultimate fear. But we know there are people who welcome death rather than continue on living a meaningless life. Still that all points to a life of fears and worries and anxieties that's why they'd rather give up living.

Folks, Jesus loves you so much that he doesn't want you to be that way the rest of your life. Today is the beginning of your new life. He wants to set you free from your fears. He wants you to know that he has resurrected and because of his resurrection he has the power to turn your life around. Paul says in Ephesians, "I pray that you will begin to understand how incredibly great his power is to help those who believe him. It is that same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead." (Eph. 1:19-20b TLB)

See how the apostle Paul describes God's power –incredibly great. That word "incredibly" is incredible because the original Greek word can be translated in different ways – surpassing, exceeding, immeasurable, incomparable. It is power raised to the power of infinity. It's mind-boggling. But, to me, it says simply, God is in control. The incredible greatness of his power enables him to control the whole universe.

Here's the thing. If he can control the whole universe, he surely can control my reaction to my circumstances. In short, he can give me peace in the midst of my chaotic circumstances.

Jesus says, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) Prior to these words, Jesus was talking about his death and resurrection during the last supper. His disciples were really worried and fearful because Jesus was telling them that he was going away. But Jesus said that he was coming back and they will see him again. So, when he said I have overcome the world he was talking about his rising from the dead, overcoming death itself.

Friend, you don't have to be afraid of anything, even of death itself, because Jesus has overcome them for you. He will give you his peace that passes understanding. As the Bible says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:6-7)

Another message of the empty tomb is

2. Jesus takes away your sins.

Since the fall of man, we've all had a bent toward evil. Even at our best, we still harbor evil intentions. Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." This means that we have all been infected with the "germ" of sin and this infection will keep us out of heaven. Sin is so evil that it separates us from a holy God. Isaiah 59:2 says, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."

Now, some people may say that despite sin, man is basically good. They cite examples of people who are helpful and merciful toward others. People who give more than they receive.

Yes, there are people like that, but if man is basically good, how come, in this world, evil is more apparent than good? How come every year, violence rises, and moral values decline? How come, there are now more killings in schools than ever before? How come people are adding more locks to their doors? And we can cite other disturbing facts such as an increase in alcoholism, in drug addiction, in theft and murders, and in wars and chaos around the world.

I believe this trend just tells us the opposite. Man is inherently evil. In fact, man is totally depraved. This is a hard saying but it is true. The Bible tells us in Romans 3:10 **“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”**

That, my friends, is a sweeping indictment of man. We have no excuse. We cannot come to God and claim that we are worthy to go to heaven because of our good deeds here on earth. We cannot say to God, "God, I have followed the golden rule. Can I enter heaven now?" No, we cannot say that because as it is written in Isaiah 64:6, **"Our righteous acts are like filthy rags."** In Hebrew, these filthy rags are synonymous to menstrual cloths used during a woman's period. Isaiah employed this imagery to picture our utter uncleanness. Thus, our best efforts are still infected with sin.

Sin is a universal phenomenon that people all around the world throughout history have recognized. Even societies who don't know the Law of God have moral codes to guide people's behavior. They have come up with such because their consciences accuse them of wrongdoing when they commit sinful acts.

What's interesting is that people have invented their own religious rites and rituals to rid themselves of sin and somehow save themselves from eternal destruction.

Some sacrifice to their gods, some bathe in a river, some don't eat meat, some pray five times a day, and some punish their own bodies with a whip on Good Friday.

And then there are others who pursue non-religious means. Like those who try to be kind to others, who do not cheat and lie, who give to the poor, who are prudent and morally upright, who volunteer for every social cause.

The question is, will anyone of them get saved and go to heaven? The Bible's answer is a resounding no. For they are still infected with the disease of sin. The Bible says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23)

Every one of us is guilty of sinning. We, therefore, cannot save ourselves. Who can save us then? The Bible tells us that Jesus is our Savior who takes away our sins. The Bible says in John 1:29, "*The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*"

Folks, Jesus came to earth not just to model obedience to God or to perform miracles and make the blind see and the lame walk but to save sinners from their sin. God sent his own Son Jesus Christ to earth to save us from our sins. You see, a wide gulf separates us from God because of sin. We are alienated from God. There is no way we could bridge this gap.

Our sins condemn us. We deserve to die. But, instead of us dying for our sins, Jesus died for our sins. His death was necessary because as the Bible says, "without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness." (Heb. 9:22)

Jesus offered himself as the sacrificial lamb to appease God's wrath on sin. Unless our sins are taken away, God cannot accept us. But now, because of the death of Jesus we have direct access to God.

His cross has bridged the gap between God and us.

Last Friday, we observed Good Friday. We did it because we want to remember the death of Christ on the cross. His death is the greatest demonstration of God's love for us. The Bible says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8)

But we know that after Friday, Sunday was coming and it is today, Easter Sunday. The Bible tells us that Jesus rose from the grave on the third day. His rising from the dead means that he has conquered death forever. And he has opened a way for us to receive eternal life.

If you receive the gift of eternal life in heaven, then it means you're no longer condemned to eternal death in hell. There's this B.C. cartoon where 2 women are sitting on a small hill. One is reading the Bible and says, "Oh, my goodness. . . It says here. . . Jesus descended into hell!" The other is shocked and says, "You're kidding!" Then the woman with the Bible says, "Oh, no. . . Not to stay! He just dropped in to cancel our reservations!" I hope your reservation is cancelled already.

This brings us to the third message of the empty tomb which is:

3. Jesus gives you a new life now and forever.

If you're not a Christian today you most likely have been led to believe that Christianity is a dull, boring experience with little joy. Some people think that Christians don't have fun, they don't dance, they don't watch movies, etc. Well, there are some ultra-conservative Christians who are like that. But I think they also have some fun in their own way.

The fact is, as Christians, we have the ability to live life to its fullest because we don't have to worry about things like fears, sin, or our eternal destiny. We have the freedom to live lives of enjoyment because we have faith in a resurrected Lord. Jesus came to this planet not only to save us from our sins, but also to give us a life that is abundant with joyful experiences.

Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”
(John 10:10b)

Different versions of the Bible put it in different ways – have it in abundance, have it in its fullest, full and good. But I like how the Message version puts it, “I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.”

What is your dream life? A life that’s healthy, a life with a loving wife and adorable children, a life with no lack, you have a house and a car, a kind of life that you had before the pandemic? But did you ever dream of a life that never ends, where there is no pain, no sorrow, no death? Jesus says it’s possible. It’s possible to enjoy life now and beyond. In this life, if you have Jesus, he will give you joy. And that joy will be complete when you die and go to be with Jesus in heaven.

Now, joy is different from happiness. Happiness depends on happenings in your life that are good and pleasant. And when they’re not, happiness turns to loneliness. But joy is something you have inside of you whatever is happening all around you, good and bad. Jesus tells you that you can have this joy in your heart if you have him in your life.

Around the world, there are Christians who are being persecuted for their faith. Some are harassed, some are attacked, some are put in jail, and some are killed. But why are they able to persevere? It is because of the joy that’s in their hearts. The apostle Paul himself wrote a letter to the early Christians and told them to rejoice. He wrote this letter when he was in prison. When he was literally bound in chains. He said, “Rejoice in the LORD always. I will say it again: Rejoice.”
(Phil 4:4-13)

So, that’s what He is offering us today—a life better than we’ve ever dreamed of.

If you haven't already taken Jesus up on His offer of salvation, now is the time – because you see, when you're completely sure of your future, the problems you're experiencing now, they don't seem quite so fearsome. Since I know that, come what may, I always have Christ, and He always has me. Peter also wrote to some people who were going through some terrible times of persecution and was speaking about Jesus:

“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.” (1 Peter 1:8)

Folks, because of the empty tomb, your life can change. It can be full of meaning and purpose. Why? Because Jesus takes away your fears, Jesus takes away your sins, and Jesus gives you new life now and forever.

I'd like to end by telling you a true story. It was written by Ida Mae Kempel and appeared in the Focus on the Family magazine. It's entitled “Jeremy's Egg”.

Jeremy was born with a twisted body and slow mind. At the age of 12 he was still in second grade, seemingly unable to learn. His teacher, Doris Miller, often became exasperated with him. He would squirm in his seat, drool and make grunting noises.

At other times, he spoke clearly and distinctly, as if a spot of light had penetrated the darkness of his brain. Most of the time, however, Jeremy irritated his teacher. One day, she called his parents to come to St. Theresa's for a consultation. As the Forresters sat quietly in the empty classroom, Doris said to them, "Jeremy really belongs in a special school. It isn't fair to him to be with younger children who don't have learning problems. Why, there is a five-year gap between his age and that of the other students!"

Mrs. Forrester cried softly into a tissue, while her husband spoke. "Miss Miller," he said, "there is no school of that kind nearby.

It would be a terrible shock for Jeremy if we had to take him out of this school. We know he really likes it here."

Doris sat for a long time after they left, staring at the snow outside the window. Its coldness seemed to seep into her soul. She wanted to sympathize with the Forresters. After all, their only child had a terminal illness. But it wasn't fair to keep him in her class. She had 18 other youngsters to teach, and Jeremy was a distraction. Furthermore, he would never learn to read and write. Why waste any more time trying?

As she pondered the situation, guilt washed over her. "Oh God," she said aloud, "here I am complaining when my problems are nothing compared to that poor family! Please help me to be more patient with Jeremy!"

From that day on, she tried hard to ignore Jeremy's noises and his blank stares. Then one day, he limped to her desk, dragging his bad leg behind him. "I love you, Miss Miller," he exclaimed, loud enough for the whole class to hear. The other students snickered, and Doris' face turned red. She stammered, "Wh-why that's very nice, Jeremy. N-now please take your seat."

Spring came, and the children talked excitedly about the coming of Easter. Doris told them the story of Jesus, and then to emphasize the idea of new life springing forth, she gave each of the children a large plastic egg. "Now," she said to them, "I want you to take this home and bring it back tomorrow with something inside that shows new life. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Miss Miller!" the children responded enthusiastically - all except for Jeremy. He just listened intently; his eyes never left her face. He did not even make his usual noises.

Had he understood what she had said about Jesus' death and resurrection? Did he understand the assignment? Perhaps she should call his parents and explain the project to them. That evening, Doris' kitchen sink stopped up.

She called the landlord and waited an hour for him to come by and unclog it. After that, she still had to shop for groceries, iron a blouse and prepare a vocabulary test for the next day. She completely forgot about phoning Jeremy's parents.

The next morning, 19 children came to school, laughing and talking as they placed their eggs in the large wicker basket on Miss Miller's desk. After they completed their math lesson, it was time to open the eggs.

In the first egg, Doris found a flower. "Oh yes, a flower is certainly a sign of new life," she said. "When plants peek through the ground we know that Spring is here." A small girl in the first row waved her arm. "That's my egg Miss Miller," she called out.

The next egg contained a plastic butterfly, which looked very real. Doris held it up. "We all know that a caterpillar changes and grows into a beautiful butterfly. Yes, that is new life, too." Little Judy smiled proudly and said, "Miss Miller, that one is mine!"

Next, Doris found a rock with moss on it. She explained that moss, too, showed life. Billy spoke up from the back of the classroom, "My Daddy helped me!" he beamed.

Then Doris opened the fourth egg. She gasped. The egg was empty! Surely it must be Jeremy's, she thought, and of course, he did not understand her instructions. If only she had not forgotten to phone his parents! Because she did not want to embarrass him, she quietly set the egg aside and reached for another.

Suddenly Jeremy spoke up. "Miss Miller, aren't you going to talk about my egg?" Flustered, Doris replied, "But Jeremy - your egg is empty!" He looked into her eyes and said softly, "Yes, but Jesus' tomb was empty, too!"

Time stopped. When she could speak again, Doris asked him, "Do you know why the tomb was empty?" "Oh yes!" Jeremy said, "Jesus was killed and put in there. Then His Father raised Him up!"

The recess bell rang. While the children excitedly ran out to the school yard, Doris cried. The cold inside her melted completely away.

Three months later, Jeremy died. Those who paid their respects at the mortuary were surprised to see 19 eggs on top of his casket, all of them empty.