

Easter 2024

Happy Easter, everyone! He is risen and we are so glad you came to celebrate the good news of the resurrection with us today. This event that changed everything for everyone. People all over the world are gathering to celebrate this good news. It's being talked about all over the world.

In fact, I don't know if you saw it or not, but ESPN's cameras actually caught a couple of people from right here in Bloomington talking about the resurrection at last week's IU women's game...(play video of Longs)

Easter is here. Jesus is alive. And that's worth celebrating. For people around the world, the message of the resurrection brings a sense of hope and joy to their life. Maybe that's where you find yourself today. If so, you can relate to what the followers of Jesus felt on that first Easter morning.

But, I also imagine that, in a room like this, there are some of us that wouldn't describe ourselves with words like hope and joy and peace. Instead, you might use words like grief, sadness, despair. These words better capture where you are right now. If that's you, then you can also relate to those same followers of Jesus and what they felt on that first Easter morning.

Because, when we read through the Gospels, both emotions are on full display. The lowest of lows that are transformed to the highest of highs. And the catalyst that swings the pendulum from one side to the other is an encounter with the resurrected Jesus.

You see, when the disciples woke up that first Easter morning, a few days removed from the crucifixion, they didn't know it would be a morning we celebrate for the rest of history. They woke up that day confused, afraid, depressed. They'd lost hope and were even wavering in their faith, caught up in doubts. Jesus was dead and they didn't know what to do next. Where to go. They were confused.

They're in a place that many of us have found ourselves in at some point in our life. And, I don't know about you, but at least for me, when I'm in those moments, a lot of the discouragement and confusion I feel is because I can't take my eyes off of the circumstances in front of me. I get fixated and focused on MY problems, MY perspective, MY limited understanding or unfulfilled hopes and dreams. When we're in these places and spaces, we all have tendencies to only focus on MY life.

We see that in the resurrection accounts. And because people are walking around fixated on their problems and perspectives, they actually MISS Jesus. What was true for them is true for us today. Sometimes it's hard to see Jesus through the fog of our circumstances. He's there, but we can't see him. All we can see is the pain, confusion, doubts, fears, disappointments in front of us.

That's the mood of the first Easter morning. They were blinded by their circumstances. It was all they could see. Luke records it like this in his Gospel...(READ Lk. 24:1-4a)

Don't miss this. Their assumption is that Jesus is dead. They're going to prepare the body. It's over. So, when they see the stone rolled away and the tomb is empty, they're left wondering, "What's going on?" Even though Jesus had told them this was going to happen.

A little bit later in verse 12, Peter has the same experience...(READ Lk. 24:12)

Same experience, slightly different reaction. The NIV uses the same word to capture how Peter and the women felt, but it's actually two different words in Greek. The women were left *wondering* what was going on. Peter was left *in wonder* of what was going on. He was marveling at the empty tomb. Astonished by it.

But, I think he was equally confused because a little bit later in the chapter, Jesus comes and stands amongst his disciples and Luke says in verse 37...(READ Lk. 24:37)

They were freighted and terrified. Even though they'd heard the tomb was empty, their circumstances kept them from seeing Jesus and they were scared when he showed up in the room with them.

My daughter, Norah, and I like to play this game where we try to scare each other. It's fun for me, but a little dangerous for her. When I get scared, I start swinging. Quentin scared me one time and I hit him so hard it left a mark on his chest. So I have to really control myself when Norah scares me and she's gotten me pretty good.

But, when Norah gets scared, she doesn't swing, she drops to the floor. Like, her legs give out from underneath her and she just curls up in the fetal position. It's a fun game we like to play that will probably result in years of therapy later on in life. But after that initial moment of fear that makes her drop like a sack of potatoes, she bursts into laughter and joy.

I think that's what we see a few verses later. After the initial fear, Jesus assures them it's him and verse 41 says...(READ Lk. 24:41)

I love that. Jesus is like your teenager's friend who shows up to your house and the first thing he asks is, "You got any food?"

The disciples went from fear to doubt to saying to themselves, "I can't believe it. He's alive. This is too good to be true." They woke up that first Easter morning having a hard time believing because things were so bad, and by the time the day was coming to an end, they couldn't believe because things were so good.

That's the power of the Easter story. **Easter reminds us that things are not always as they seem.** Going into that morning, the disciples thought Jesus was dead. It was all over. They were confused, downcast, disillusioned. They couldn't see Jesus through the fog of their circumstances, even though he was literally standing right in front of them at times. They missed him. Just like we do.

And, I think verse 21 gets to the heart of why we often miss Jesus when we go through hard times. Why I've missed him in those times in my own life. In verse 21, Jesus is walking with two of his disciples...two people who knew him and followed him, but didn't know it was him. And he's asking them questions about why they were so sad and the guys were like, "Are you kidding?" And they start telling Jesus about what happened to Jesus. In that moment, I don't think they just retold the story, they relived it. It was all still so fresh to them, so they probably felt it all over again.

When life or relationships or circumstances don't go the way we wanted them to, we retell it and replay it over and over. We keep living in our pain and loss and confusion. And, eventually, these disciples get to the heart of the issue for them and for us. They say in verse 21 **...(READ Lk. 24:21a)**

Did you catch it? Did you catch the thing that keeps us living in the pain and confusion of our circumstances? That keeps us from seeing Jesus in the midst of them? It's that phrase they used, "We had hoped..."

These guys had hoped Jesus was going to redeem Israel by conquering the Romans and rising up to power. They were so focused on their unmet expectations that they missed what God **WAS** doing! That Jesus wasn't just redeeming Israel, he was redeeming the whole world. He wasn't rescuing them **from** pain and suffering, but through it. They were so caught up in what they had hoped Jesus **was going to do** that they missed what Jesus **had actually done**.

We all do this. Something happens that's different from our expectations. What we had hoped for. It leaves something in us feeling unfulfilled which leads to disappointment. And when we focus on our unmet expectations, we get caught up in our doubts and disappointments and fears and confusion. Unmet expectations leave us feeling a little disoriented. It's true in life. It's true in our relationships. It's even true in our faith.

You had hoped Jesus would heal you, or someone you love, just like he healed so many others, but he didn't. And now you have a hard time seeing him through the disappointment of your unmet expectations. You had hoped Jesus would change that person's heart, but they still went through with the divorce, or they still won't talk to you after all these years. You had hoped things would be different, but they're not, and now you're left wondering, *where's Jesus?*

You can't see him through the fog of your circumstances, but remember...things aren't always as they seem, which means, **Your circumstances don't tell the full story of your life.** Your failures and struggles, fears and doubts, your weaknesses and unmet expectations, those things are real and painful, but they don't tell the full story of your life.

The Easter account is filled with men and women who believed and felt one thing about their circumstances, but when they encountered the risen Jesus, it changed everything. Each person in the resurrection account experienced renewed energy and restored hope after an encounter with Jesus. They see Jesus for who he really is, not what they hoped he would be, not what others had told them, not what they felt was true. They encountered Jesus and it changed everything.

Why? Because he's alive!

And, if Jesus is alive, then God is up to something much bigger than we can imagine, which means he probably has something in store for us that's much better than we can believe. And as we lift our eyes from our circumstances, the fog clears and we begin to see Jesus, which is who we've been looking for all along. We discover that things are not always as they seem and that our circumstances don't tell the full story of what God is doing.

The account of these 2 guys walking to Emmaus ends like this. They get to where they're going and talk Jesus, who they still don't know is Jesus, into staying with them for the night. They say, "Jesus, let us host you." But when they arrive, it's actually Jesus who takes on the role of host. Verse 30 **...(READ Lk. 24:30-32)**

The moment is all clicks is when Jesus breaks the bread and pours the wine. They weren't retelling and reliving their pain. They weren't talking about theology anymore. Now it was a relationship. It was a friendship, shared over a meal. And there was something so familiar about that friendship that it opened their eyes and they were able to see Jesus, who had been with them all along.

That personal presence of Jesus changes everything. When we rest in the presence of Jesus, the fog begins to clear and we find him in the midst of whatever it is we're facing, walking with us and seeing us through it all.

Easter is a reminder that we follow a risen Savior and his presence in our lives changes everything.

In the words of the old hymn, Because he lives, we can face tomorrow. Because he lives, all fear is gone. Because he lives, we know who holds our future. And life is worth the living, just because He lives.