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**West Valley Presbyterian Church
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Easter changes everything!

What we celebrate today is the linchpin of our faith, the groundbreaking truth that a man, Jesus Christ died and rose again...That's the reason the church exists today

It's the reason we have hope.

It's the reason we sing.

It's the reason we are filled with joy and celebration...

Any informed historian worth their salt would tell you, whether they believe in the resurrection or not – any informed historian worth their salt will tell you...

That those uneducated scrappy fisherman – the disciples - who followed Jesus could *never* have created a movement called Christianity that has continued down through the centuries like a mighty drum roll

Like a symphony of praise

Like a heartbeat that will not stop and will not be quenched

Unless something *profound* and *unusual* happened...to shake them out of their complacency and fear

To move them beyond themselves, to thrust them forward to proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior *without inhibition*

In the early morning dawn that first Easter something profound and unusual did happen –

Something no one could have predicted, that the world had never seen or experienced...something that defied all expectation burst into “the normal” - procession of human history

And laid its claim on every human life that accepted its gift

This unusual out of the ordinary occurrence feeds our souls

Comforts our worst fears

Restores our hope in God and in the purpose and meaning of life

It gives us courage to laugh in the face of death's dark gloom

It gives us hope for the future and restores our vision to see beyond this life into the next...

We are supposed to get the point today friends
We are meant to reel and rock at the profound and exalted truth
That Jesus Christ is risen! That death's chains could not hold him
down...AND...AND..AND
That death for all who believe in Jesus Christ, is not the end – it's the
beginning
Why? Because...
We have a God who loves and cares for us beyond our wildest dreams
We have a God who made a way for us - for just as he with victory burst
out of the other side of death - triumphant and victorious
He made a way for us as well - to do the same
You and I today can scoff at death and the dark ominous **NO EXIT** sign
(**IMAGE**) that looms at the end of the road for all of us
We will all die...death is the perfect statistic friends...one for one every
time
There is NO EXIT
We are all going to leave this place...we are all going to expire, pass away,
say it whatever way you want – we are all going to DIE
And yet for those who belong to Jesus Christ, who trust in him, we know
that there is eternal life beyond the grave

For those who are skeptical this morning – I am glad you are here...it is
good to question
We are never asked to check our brains at the door when we come to
church

It is right to inquire, ...it is human to doubt, to be ill at ease with simple
answers to the complexities of life
It is healthy to wonder at formulaic responses to human despair and
struggle
May I just reiterate – that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is no fantasy,
no child's myth – it is not something that is made up or concocted to
make us all feel better
Some of the greatest minds, intent on disproving the resurrection
When truly researching the facts...find undeniable historical evidence
for this absolutely astounding unprecedented event

That is why you were handed the document you were today...please research if you want to, each of these people – read what they did and what they have to say - great intellectual minds...coming to believe in the resurrection...

Not because of a great emotional experience that can only be subjectively known

Not because they were raised in a Christian family, although that can go either way sometimes

Not because they decided to capitulate to social pressure, or were manipulated by group psychology

But each of these intellectuals came to believe in the resurrection based on historical fact alone...

And it changed their lives. That's because Easter changes everything.

The Judeo-Christian faith is the only “religion” that bases its claims, and bases its faith on historical events that happened here...in our world

What were these events? What happened here in our world?

Well...it all started

In the early morning gloom of the first Easter; to particular people, in a particular place ...all of these people were different, and yet all of them were affected and changed because of the resurrection.

There's Mary Magdalene who is herself in despair, as often we can fall into despair when adverse circumstances happen to us that we don't understand

She has gone to the tomb, and found it empty – the stone rolled away – and no one in the tomb

The empty tomb was bad news for her – not good news by any stretch cause she didn't know the rest of the story – at the time she couldn't figure out what any of this meant.

So she runs to Peter and John...two of Jesus' closest disciples...but both of them very different...

“They have taken away my Lord...they've stolen his body,” she tells them. **“There's no one in the tomb...it is empty!”**

Peter and John are shocked, and they set off, running toward the garden where the tomb was located.

John is younger than Peter, and probably a bit lighter in stature, so John gets to the tomb first.

You've got to understand the make up of each of these disciples. They are polar opposites really...

Which one do you identify with? Is it John?

Maybe its John.

John is younger than Peter...but he is also more pensive, thoughtful, and careful. His gospel – the one that documents this story - his account of Jesus' life that we have in the Bible – is all about the *meaning* of things.

He is always asking the deeper questions...

But maybe you identify more with Peter. (on slide – Is it Peter?)

Peter –is impulsive, and does not look before he leaps

He just goes, does, speaks before he thinks – and get himself in all kinds of difficulty because of it

But Peter despite all of his fumbblings and failures has a big heart, and a deep love for Jesus

He wants to do the right thing, but he just messes up a lot because he is so impulsive

But given the two characters here, as they are represented in scripture It makes sense that even though John gets to the tomb first – he outruns Peter because he is younger- he doesn't go in to the tomb because of his more cautious nature

He stands outside it...

He is also thoughtful, and I can imagine him thinking, "Is this a trap that the Jews have set for us? We go in, and they capture us because they now know that we also were followers of Christ?"

Or he might be thinking, "What is going on here...if the tomb is empty maybe those who stole the body are thieves and are still around. Maybe they are waiting in hiding to jump us, mug us, steal whatever they can." So he waits, and does not go in the tomb right away..

But Peter has none of these thoughts
None of this probably occurred to him.
He comes lumbering up, running the best he can, probably trying to catch his breath, he reaches John who is standing outside and without bothering to think about it... goes right in....for better or for worse
He has no qualms about it...he just wants to know where Jesus is...what has happened.

So as Peter enters the tomb...

In the Greek it says **Peter keenly observed** what was before him...the body of Jesus definitely was gone...but the grave clothes were still there. Peter investigates....looking with a careful detective kind of eye at the grave clothes – the linen pieces that had been used to wrap up Jesus' body –

And he notices that the napkin – the piece of cloth that covered the face of Jesus was folded up in a place by itself.

That's when John finally enters the tomb.

Peter was the guinea pig – *well nothing bad has happened so far, John is probably thinking, if he is still ok and safe....I guess I'll venture in.*

It takes John a little bit longer.

He is careful, not easily swayed

And yet when he gets up his courage and goes into the tomb, and sees the linen pieces there, the way I just described them to you, scripture says, **"He saw and believed."**

It wasn't that he understood everything yet...but he knew enough by seeing those grave clothes moved about that Jesus was risen. That death had not conquered him.

Now I could have chosen a story for you from scripture that actually has Jesus appearing to his disciples

There are lots of those stories in the New Testament

But I chose this part of the resurrection story to share with you today because in Silicon Valley in 2013 – we don't see the physical Jesus, nor have many of us seen an appearance of the resurrected Christ

What we do have however, along with the historical evidence, that I alluded to earlier – is the evidence of changed human lives

What we have basically...is what Peter and John had that morning that allowed them to believe

We might not see Jesus, but we see the effects of his resurrection

I call this ***The Testimony of the Grave clothes***

As much as Peter and John observed the grave clothes – the linen pieces that had wrapped up death – had wrapped up the body of Jesus - in a dark tomb

Now on that resurrection morning....those same grave clothes that should have been lying immobile around a lifeless, brutalized, cold body Those grave clothes had been unwound!

They'd been moved about! Face cloth folded, just like when you fold laundry – right? Takes some work...and some intention. And then the linen shroud in a heap – left there – no longer needed.

Somehow movement and energy had entered the tomb and the linen grave clothes used for burying the dead were unnecessary now – ***they were left in the tomb where death belonged...as Life walked out the door.***

In the same way, we see human beings today, coming to life spiritually because of the resurrection of Christ– leaving their grave clothes behind - once bound by sin and its strangle hold on them – once fearing death and its power – once wrapped up in the grave clothes of spiritual death & darkness

They come to Jesus and are set free – I hear stories about this happening all the time

As one gentleman who had struggled with multiple addictions ranging from gambling, to alcoholism, to pornography told me...

“Once I came to the place where I could pray,

‘Lord Jesus come into my life and be my Lord and Savior, take these addictions from me - I felt a sudden release...and I never had the desire to engage in these self destructive behaviors again. I was healed of those addictions. I asked for forgiveness from my kids and my wife and we have been able to heal together.”

Everybody's story is different, not everyone gets immediate release...but in this case, Christ touched this man and he experienced freedom from

his addictions;. The life of Christ brought new life for this man.... the grave clothes of addiction were left behind... No longer needed...no longer wanted

That's because Easter changes everything.

Or as another woman told me,

"I was grieving for the loss of my daughter, not sure if the resurrection was real. I came to the place where I prayed,

'Lord, if you are real please show up for me. I can't stand the pain anymore. If my daughter is with you, please let me know.'"

A few days later she experienced a presence with her that she had never experienced before. Her heart that had been heavy and breaking, was filled with a warmth and inexplicable joy. "I know that God is real she told me. I know that Jesus is holding my child and that the resurrection is for real..."

The grave clothes of sorrow and sighing left behind. No longer necessary. No longer needed.

Easter changes everything!

Maybe today you identify with Peter. You are ready to plunge in and ask Jesus to take over your life, be your Lord. Maybe you did that a while ago but you want to rededicate yourself to the Lord – go deeper in your faith – find out more about what this is all about. Go for it!

But maybe today you are a little bit more like John the disciple– standing outside the tomb –

You came to church this morning because it's Easter

But commitment to Jesus Christ and his living presence is not something that you are too sure about

Its good to be thoughtful and careful about these things;

In the gospel of John, John characterizes himself as being a disciple whom Jesus loved

You are loved today, by Christ, no matter what you believe, no matter why you came, no matter what your past, no matter how difficult it may be for you right now...

You are someone whom Jesus loves and gave his life for

I would simply encourage you to look at the evidence and take this all very seriously...because it is a matter of life and death for you
You must make a choice to accept this Jesus, and ask him to come into your heart...if you too want to leave the grave clothes of death behind... in the life here and in the life to come...

And I know, I know, I know
We are hi-tech Silicon Valley folks
We don't get easily swayed by stories, that claim inexplicable phenomenon
And we also live in a very relativistic culture where what you believe may be fine for you, but not for me
We sort of decided on our own, because it seems politically correct in the current climate, that we can pick and choose our religious preference and it really doesn't matter what we believe, as long as we believe something because all roads lead to the same destination...

But that is not what Scripture tells us
Scripture tells us that there **'Is no other name, in heaven (the name of Jesus) given to the human race, by which we can be saved.'**

So again, being thoughtful and careful is a good thing; not plunging into something that you are not sure about is reasonable.

But I would encourage you this Easter 2013, if you have not made a commitment to Christ, for you to move a few steps closer toward looking at the evidence...assessing the situation... cause this is the most important choice that you will ever make.

Take a step of faith closer in, and examine the truth. Look at the grave clothes of peoples old lives that led to death and destruction, now lying there unused – freed from addiction, mourning – and countless other stories I could tell you - these people now live a new life in Christ.

Because the truth is **Christ is Risen!**
History testifies to it...Human lives testify to it. Those who have found Jesus have left their grave clothes behind and are living as forgiven freed human beings.

I'd ask that you join with me in an honest open prayer right now. Because what no intellectual argument, or someone else's story can communicate about Christ's love and longing for you...the Holy Spirit is able to communicate. You don't need to stand outside any longer...come into God's presence... the evidence is there....see and believe...because...

The reality of Easter changes everything.

Would you pray with me?

Lord God you know everyone here by name, and you know their stories and the burdens they carry. Everyone is different in this room...no one is the same...and yet you know all of us so well. You see every heart, you see every motive, you are aware of every resistance to you and every sorrow and every joy.

O Lord for those who are seeking, wondering, unsure about who you are and what Easter in this year 2013 is really all about, I pray that you would touch them and give them an experience of you so that they will know that you are alive and that you are real. Help all who are seeking today to find you, and to ask you into their heart....to choose for you – that's all you ask...

And for those of us who have only nominally believed, and not fully embraced all this...we may be involved in church activities but we've been standing at a distance from a personal relationship with you in our own way...help us to move towards you more fully this Easter loving you with all of our heart, our soul and our mind. May we hold back no longer in being fully committed to you...

Thank you for coming to us...for showing us that you are bigger than death. That we don't have to fear. Thank you for your resurrection... thank you that Easter changes everything. We praise you...we adore you...and we celebrate this day because you are worthy to be praised – you who in your amazing grace conquered death and the grave for us. Hallelujah! Amen