

# EASTER CHANGES EVERYTHING

## West Valley Presbyterian Church

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Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8,12-22

I saw a cartoon some time ago that pictured two Roman soldiers standing by the open and empty tomb of Jesus.

The stone has been rolled away and there is no sign of Jesus anywhere.

Looking at the scene one soldier said to the other,

"Well, I guess now it is only taxes that are for certain!"

Something happened at **Easter** that

**changed what we thought was "for certain"!**

Death did a U-Turn

Death went back on itself, and life sprang forth instead

On that dark Friday when Jesus' lacerated, wounded, body was put in the empty tomb

All who watched were convinced that

the curtain had dropped, and the story was over;

After the wind and pelting rain whipped and stung at people's faces as they looked up at Jesus' frail bloodied body on the cross,

After the storm that raged during the crucifixion, the descent of darkness,

After the earth shook and Jesus cried out his last cry and his frame slumped forward lifeless, people thought it was the end.

A great prophet had died.

Someone they thought was their deliverer, their Messiah, had been conquered, defeated, and squelched by Roman cruelty.

The flame of hope that had made them follow him in the beginning had been snuffed out

That evening, as the Sabbath approached (you weren't supposed to bury on the Sabbath) Jesus' friends hastily put his body in a borrowed grave, and rolled the stone over the entrance.

That's what you do when people die...you seal them away

You create a space for their remains in an urn or a grave or a tomb and you begin to grieve their loss...

You don't think about the fact that just in case they might come back to life you better leave a little place where air can get in.

You don't worry about that because they are dead.

That life that you treasured so much that made the person who they were, is now gone.

And that is why we mourn...that is why it is so difficult to lose a loved one. That is why the Bible calls death our enemy. God hates death. God is the opposite of death – he is life...

And that is why God, the Author of Life himself, the One who thought up this whole thing we call Life to begin with, had a different ending in store for those weary tear stained faces that placed Jesus' body in the tomb on that bleak Friday.

It was an ending that would divide history in two

It was an ending that would pulsate down through the generations and bring hope to the hopeless

It was an ending that was the beginning of a new creation for all humanity who would receive him

That ending is considered a new beginning for Christians around the world who celebrate it today and call it Easter... Easter changes everything!

You see, Roman soldiers could scourge Jesus with their whips, they could bang their iron spikes into his hands, they could yell and curse as they gambled for his robe.

They could stand guard in their armor, they could mock him when he asked for water, they could laugh crassly and spear his side...

But despite all of their noise, and brute force, intimidation and cruelty

The strength and power of the Author of Life itself was no match for them

Out of a cold stone tomb death was shattered when in the early dawn, three days later, Jesus rose physically from the grave.(IMAGE OF EMPTY TOMB)

It says the guards at the tomb they became like "dead men" as the earth shook ...it's a bit of irony...those who guarded death, became like death themselves

When death tried to conquer Life, it was Life that trampled death – not the other way around  
Death is what people do, resurrection is what God does.

**"Immortality is the glorious discovery of Christianity"!** *Channing*

In the scripture that Ryan read this morning Paul says that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is of **"FIRST IMPORTANCE"**.

When a teacher, or a parent, or a boss would say "the most important thing you need to know is...." I would sit forward in my seat.

Paul saying..."**Sit forward in your seat! Don't miss this!"**

In other words, the resurrection of Jesus is what you need to get, before you get anything else in the Christian faith.

Because when you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ it changes everything...

And I know...I know.

Its hard to believe. That a dead man came back to life!

It doesn't usually happen ...

In fact, Paul is writing to the Corinthians, in the early church during the first century and he is saying to them, **"How can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?"**

These are people in the early church! It was just as hard for them to believe in the resurrection, in the first century, as it is for some of us now.

Lets not fall prey to a kind of chronological snobbery...that makes us think that just because we live 2,000 plus years later *we realize in a way the disciples didn't realize, how impossible this is.*

Because back then, in Bible days, coming back from the dead was just as unbelievable as it is now...

And scripture doesn't soft- pedal this

The Bible is replete with reactions that *we would have today* if we had been witnesses of Christ's resurrection after we watched him die...reactions like **"they were terrified", "they doubted when they saw him," "They fled from the tomb", "they disbelieved for joy"...**

They are thinking the same thing we would thing...

How can this be? It blows our minds. It rocks our world.

And yet Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that as hard as it is to believe, the truth is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ happened, and it is of first importance because it changes everything...

Paul tells us in this passage that if you don't believe in the resurrection you might as well throw out everything else you have ever associated with being a Christian because it means nothing.

He says, **"If Christ has not been raised, don't listen to anything I say when I preach because its just words...**its in vain...its got no power...just stop listening to me right now people. It means nothing."

He says, **"If Christ has not been raised it means I am lying, and you might as well do what you want –you are going to die in your sins anyway.** There's no one to rescue you – no one has won the victory...stop trying to be good. Don't end your prayers in Jesus name...in fact don't pray at all...What's the point?

He says, **"If Christ has not been raised then those who have died...they are lost"**...and the term lost here means not hell so much as "we don't have a clue where they are."

He says, **"If it is only for this life that we have believed in Christ** – in other words if we've just hoped in a dead Jesus because he was a good guy - kind of used him like a crutch to get through our four score and ten meager existence, **then we are most to be pitied,**

Paul is saying, "If you don't get this thing that is of first importance, which is Christ's resurrection, you don't get it at all, because the resurrection changes everything."

Maybe you are thinking...well that's not necessarily true for me. Jesus had some good moral teaching.

I can follow the good things he said and did without believing in the resurrection.

He was a good man. I like what he said about love, and forgiveness and I can use him as an example to follow...but I will leave his body in the tomb.

The problem with that?

Its very simple.

Everything that was recorded about what Jesus taught – his moral teachings – were written down by eyewitnesses who also said he rose from the dead. **Matthew, Peter, Mark, John, Luke, James, and Paul – all wrote and testified...HE IS ALIVE...**

The very fact that you believe that God is a loving and forgiving God is because of them...those people who claimed that Jesus rose from the dead.

So the choice remains...either throw out all of Christianity because it must have been written by a bunch of deceivers and forget the whole thing...or take it all lock, stock and barrel...but you cannot with integrity waffle somewhere in between...picking and choosing what you like and throwing away what you don't like because it doesn't make sense...

Jesus' moral teachings mean nothing if they were written by a bunch of liars who made up a good story to fool everyone.

Lets go back to the scripture...because in

1 Corinthians vs 20 we have this wonderful transition after Paul has said how futile it is without the resurrection...he then says which the NIV Bible reads, **"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead"**...but in the original Greek– and its the only time it is ever used is the phrase "nunee/day" which means... **"YOU HAVE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME"...**

In other words,

**You have got to be kidding me...**  
**Of course Christ has been raised from the dead!**

*What do you think?*

There's 500 witnesses who saw him, says Paul (vs 6).

Some of them have died, but most of them are still around  
So, if you doubt it Corinthian church, get a bus ticket, go down to Jerusalem and interview them.  
Imagine! 500 witnesses. That's enough to corroborate just about anything.  
Not only that but Paul mentions James, Jesus' brother as one of the believers, who saw Jesus alive!

What would take for your brother or sister to believe that you were the Messiah?  
It would take a lot. Probably a resurrection appearance.

And you might say, too bad we don't have 500 people here, still alive right now to interview – people who saw Jesus alive.  
We may not have 500 people who are witnesses to his physical death and resurrection– but we have thousands across the globe worshiping Jesus Christ today as living Lord

Because they have experienced the reality of his living presence in their lives  
And they know he is worthy of our honor and praise, because he has changed their life because the resurrection changes everything

This is not a small little movement...this thing called Christianity  
It has survived the centuries because it is an awesome truth  
Jesus Christ conquered death and rose from the dead...splitting history in half

And his resurrection, Easter, changes everything! That is why it is of first importance.

What does it change?

1. **First, Easter changes the way I see life.** I can have hope. If God can overcome the grave, he can overcome any obstacle I have.

A minister was in Italy, and there he saw the grave of a man who had died centuries before who was an unbeliever and completely against Christianity, *but a little afraid of it too.*

So the man had a huge stone slab put over his grave so he would not have to be raised from the dead in case there is a resurrection from the dead.

He had inscriptions put all over the slab saying, **"I do not want to be raised from the dead. I don't believe in it."**

However, evidently, when he was buried, an acorn must have fallen into the grave. A hundred years later the acorn had grown up through the grave and split that slab.

It was now a tall towering oak tree.

The minister looked at it and asked, "If an acorn, which has the power of biological life in it, can split a slab of that magnitude, what can the acorn of God's resurrection power do in a person's life?"

Because the minute you decide to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, the power of the Holy Spirit comes into your life and begins to move the seemingly immovable stones that are there. It's the power of the resurrection—the same power that raised Jesus from the dead ....

Think of the things you see as immovable slabs in your life—your bitterness, your insecurity, your fears, your self-doubts. Those things can be overcome and rolled away by the power of risen Lord.

Easter changes the way I see life

## **2. Second, Easter changes the way I see death.**

Some of you need to be encouraged today. You have lost a loved one – maybe its a spouse – a beloved wife or husband, a mother, a father, even a child.

And on this Easter Sunday you may be feeling their loss quite profoundly.

The great promise of Easter is this: death is not the end. Jesus conquered death in the resurrection so now...

In Jesus Christ death is a portal, a door, that leads to eternal life. Easter tells us that our tears are not in vain, our funerals are not in vain, our separation from our loved one who knew the Lord is part of grieving and is necessary, but is temporary.

We will see them again.

**This promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ is all through scripture. God does not lie. His promises are true and his faithfulness endures for all generations.**

That's why Paul can write... **O Death where is your victory? ...O Death where is your sting? Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

That's why Jesus said, **"let not your hearts be troubled...if you believe in God believe also in me....I go to prepare a place for you (in heaven) that where I am, there you may be also."**

Easter changes the way I see death.

## **3. Easter changes the way I see God.**

Friends, people have not gathered for the past 2,000 years to say, 'The stock market has risen. It has risen indeed.  
They have not gathered to say, "Commercial real estate has risen, it has risen indeed.  
Or "The dollar has risen. It has risen indeed" Or "The value of your 401k has risen. It has risen indeed."

None of this gives holds us together in times of trouble. None of this lights our way or heals our souls.

Here's the one hope that has held human beings together across every continent and culture for two millennia of difficult times of struggle, war, disease and even death: "Christ is risen. He is risen indeed."

It has held us together because our deepest longing, whether we know it or not,  
The deepest longing that gives us the hope we long for is to be in relationship with our Creator God. That's why we were made...

Our deepest desire is to know him, and be known by him.

The crucifixion and the resurrection tells us who God is.

If we thought before that God was distant and aloof, uncaring and judgmental we need to think again...if we thought before that God had it out to get us, or was somehow not real, we need to pause and sit forward in our set.

The reality is that the God of all eternity, our Creator, and our Sustainer is a God who humbled himself, went through an excruciating death, took our sins on himself, was laid in a grave, and then broke forth from death to life, and appeared to us **to show us that it was so...**  
means  
that God will go to any lengths to restore us to a relationship with him.

Peter Marshall once said that "**The stone was not rolled away from the tomb so that Jesus could get out. It was rolled away so that his followers could get in.**"

God wanted to show us in our world, on our terms who he is – the God of the empty tomb – so we would understand his power and his grace alive in a mortal world.

Easter shouts his victory over all that would separate us from him.

Easter shouts that it is not what we do, but what he did that restores us to him.

Easter shouts that the grave is not the end

Easter shouts "**For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him, shall not die but have everlasting life.**"

Friends, he is RISEN! HE is Risen Indeed.  
And that changes everything.

Let us pray.  
AMEN