

The Defeat of Defeat Pastor Morgan Murray West Valley Presbyterian Church

Luke 24:1-12

24 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵ The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶ Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” ⁸ Then they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹² But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Intro: Our must-have's and must-do's:

- Must-have's are the things we can't live without. Each time I move, my must-have's shrink a little: I must have my laptop, my Bluetooth speaker, and my coffee mug. I can always buy more socks.
- Must-do's are the activities we can't live without doing. They can have positive or negative connotations. We can't imagine going to Paris without seeing the Eiffel Tower. We don't want to imagine going through life without seeing a dentist.

So when I hear the angel's message to the women, I notice the word “must.”

The angel's message: Remember that Jesus said:

“... the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.”

Why the “must”?

In a word, the answer is Victory.

When we think of this word, we are pretty well conditioned to think of sports, competition, or war. For one person or group to win, the other has to lose... Some of us remember the introduction to ABC's Wide World of Sports on Saturday afternoons: “The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.” But the thrill of victory never lasts very long, and the agony of defeat is inevitable.

In one sense, Christ's resurrection was indeed an act of vindication on God's part. By raising his Son from the dead, God gave Jesus victory over the critics, the detractors, and over the people who believed Jesus' life was theirs to control – or end – as they saw fit.

But when Christ rose from the dead, he didn't merely have victory over the chief priest in Jerusalem. His victory wasn't over Herod or Pilate, or even over Caesar and his Empire. Thinking in these terms is far too small. Paul understood this, which is why he says:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

55 “Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Co 15:54–57 NRSV)

The victory was over nothing less than death itself, along with the pain of sin. There is nothing more complete than Christ's victory, for every person and indeed for all of creation.

It's the defeat of defeat.

Core

The resurrection is joyful confirmation that Christ has defeated everything that can defeat us.

Where have you felt defeated?

- By your own failures?
- By the hurt caused by others?
- By the overwhelming problems we face in the world?
- By the inevitability of death and loss?

To be human is to be defeated by all these things and more. To be part of this world is to know that no one and nothing gets out alive.

That is why it was a “must” that Jesus go through these things.

He *had to be* handed over to sinners. He *had to be* crucified. He *had to* rise again.

For God, uniting with us suffering with us through all the things that defeat us was a “must do.”

- Jesus was handed over to sinners so to reveal that our sin does not have the last word.
- Jesus suffered and died the most painful and shameful execution humans could devise to reveal that our suffering does not have the last word.
- Jesus rose from the dead and left tomb and wrapping behind to reveal that even death does not have the last word.

The last word is victory. It is God's. And it is given to us. Freely, with no strings attached. The gift is difficult enough to wrap our heads and hearts around it without imagining that we somehow could make ourselves worthy of it or earn it in some way.

Earning is not the same as love, we know. The gospel truth for us is that we are permanently, irrevocably, absolutely loved. This is true, always has been true, and will never NOT be true. This truth is the greatest we can know and probably the hardest for us to accept.

Paul prays that we might be able to accept it: *I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph 3:18-19).*

How might this prayer be more fully answered for us today? What do we need to keep doing until we are filled with the fullness of God? What does the little passage of scripture have to say to us about our "must-do's" in order to live into the Victory that is already ours?

First, **We can keep choosing to do "the next right thing" when it comes to showing our love for Jesus.**

The women in this story are engaged in a "must-do": They have come to express their love for Jesus by caring for his body and finishing the work of preparing it for burial. They are doing the next right thing, based on what they know. It is while they are doing the next right thing that the fuller reality is revealed to them! They keep showing up with love, which means they get to be the first evangelists proclaiming that love to the rest of the disciples.

We really want to know "the right answer." But we won't ever know that. We will never know all the exact right things to do to get the story to turn out the way we want it to. We don't need to know all the answers in order to do the next right thing. When we do it, we can trust that God will work it out for good.

If you aren't sure what the next right thing to do is, open your heart to the people around you. Start small. Do some small acts of love and kindness to others, as unto your Lord. Then see what opportunity comes up next!

Second, **We can keep choosing to be open to amazement.**

Part of the reason Luke includes the part about the male disciple calling this an "idle tale" is because he wants to contradict the conspiracy theory that the disciples hid the body and faked the resurrection. Luke is essentially saying: Dear reader, if you are finding this hard to believe just know that Peter did too!

Peter is skeptical. That's okay. So he goes and looks for himself. And in seeing what he sees (or rather what he doesn't see), he leaves the empty tomb amazed.

If you are skeptical this morning, that is okay. Doubts and questions are the marks of thoughtful

faith. We can stay curious, stay open, even stay skeptical and still protect our hearts from the poison of cynicism.

This may all sound very nice, but I must warn you: If you keep choosing to stay open and continue to do the next right loving thing, you will encounter suffering.

This is the way Jesus has marked out for us.

If we want to experience the fullness, we have to know something about emptiness. We have to know about coming to the end of ourselves, about the fullness of loss. Surely that must be part of the reason for the “must’s” in this story.

During Lent we have been reading the gospel of Luke and asking, “What do these stories say to me about how deeply God loves me and how Jesus makes this love known to me?”

For God so loved that world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that nothing other than God’s love will ever have the last word.

That is the defeat of defeat. Let us pray.