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SERMON: EASTER 2014//HE IS RISEN!!

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Today we share the good news that Christ is risen... with 2.5 million Christians across the globe

Christians are by far the world's largest religious group; proclaiming today all around our sorry planet with mortal lips...that death is not the end.

Proclaiming that there is hope beyond the grave

Proclaiming unabashedly that the infinite God of the universe, entered finite human history in the person of Jesus Christ, conquered death on the cross, and came back victorious...leaving an empty tomb, and creating his church .

This is an event we can point to in history.

The Christian faith is based on an event that happened here on this planet

It is not an idea that we worship today, not a philosophy, not a system of ethics, or a list of rules.

We worship the person of Jesus Christ who became flesh for us, broke into our space time continuum, and conquered death in his resurrection.

I loved your declaration this morning...so full of life and conviction...**HE IS RISEN INDEED!**

What hope we have in Jesus Christ our risen Lord! What great news!

But the thing about news is this...**If it doesn't appear that the news I hear is relevant to my life, it can go in one ear and out the other...**

There's too much information out there nowadays for us to fully assimilate anyway

But, the truth is that when we hear news that affects us, that affects our lives, we always respond

Like the local news broadcaster on TV who was routinely going through his list of events concerning what had happened in that last 24 hours in his community. (IMAGE)

And he starts to tell his audience in a monotone voice that a house is burning down on 2639 Maple Ave. He is just sort of going through the list

And then he pauses.

Maple Ave? 2639?

His face falls.

It dawns on him...That's his house!

His voice becomes animated, his eyes grow wide...then he drops everything and rushes out of the newsroom.

The resurrection is like that.

It's personal, friends. It affects our lives. Its relevant!

In this case though its good news, that's meant to grab our attention We are meant to respond to this news. Not just hear it and move on...because this is news that means that we can have a life with God for all eternity.

Now that's relevant to me!

So, if the grave is not the end, then I want to get in on the action. I want to respond to this news somehow so that I don't miss out.

Now there's lots of ways to get news today. **What is your favorite method of getting the news? What do you respond to the most?**

You may get your news through **FACEBOOK...**
Facebook Vignette:

Went to Jesus' tomb. His body was gone. Saw his grave clothes in a pile. All signs point to the fact that he is alive. (John) (IMAGE)

Would you respond to this? What would your comment be? Would you like it?

Some people Respond better to Twitter...
Twitter Vignette: **# He's alive! (Mary)**

Would you like to learn about the resurrection this way instead? Would hearing it on Twitter help you to respond? Would you re-tweet it?

Maybe Texting is more your style...

TEXTING – (typed out on screen? Possible?) U R not going to believe this. Just saw Jesus alive this AM.

How would you text back? Maybe something like...

R U sure? Want coffee? It is pretty early...

PERHAPS YOU READ THE NEWSPAPER OR WATCH CNN

Do you respond to news better this way if its in the paper? If you read an article in the Mercury News that said

“Jesus, the one they call Christ has risen from the dead, would you write a letter to the editor? (IMAGE)

Or maybe Anderson Cooper is your guy...If you saw this broadcast on CNN would you call in the station? Would you respond if Anderson Cooper announced it?(IMAGE)

Each one of us has our favorite way to get the “latest” news – we respond better to some ways of communication than other ways;

In the same way because

God longs for our response to him...he tries multiple ways, multiple strategies, to get us to respond to him

And many of you have responded already...You are here today bc you’ve said yes to Jesus Christ- you’ve said Lord come into my heart and life
I want to follow you and be your child and live eternally after this life is over...

But I also know that if we went around this room and I asked each of you to share why you responded with such conviction that **“HE IS RISEN INDEED”** – *there would be as many stories in this room as people.*

God knows us so well.

And he knows how to communicate the good news of the gospel to us given who we are, to make it relevant to us so that we will respond.

He uses mediums to communicate to us that he is alive and with us in exactly the ways that we can receive, given who we are as individuals...he’s so personal with us...

John 20 – we read almost the whole chapter this morning. I had Tim read all this so that you could hear this catalogue that is an account of the different ways that Jesus communicated his resurrection– to his disciples and followers that first Easter

Its not just that – TA DA – Jesus appears once in a blinding light and we're all supposed to rally

No...notice please the appearances are varied...and multi-faceted so that different people, with different tendencies, proclivities, perspectives on life, engaged in different things can still respond to him.

Wherever they are! Whoever they are!

Its God going that extra mile – he always does - and saying...do you understand now?

Do you get that I am alive, that your sins are forgiven, that death is not the end?

That I love you? That I want a relationship with you...

And what about you? And you? And you?

Let me proclaim the good news to you this way...

And the let me try to show you that way...

I want you to respond to me...this is a matter a life and death for you...so I am going to come at this in every way possible so that you can receive me, and respond

Now there are more resurrection appearances than what I am reviewing today.

But since John 20 catalogues four different appearances, I am going to run through them right to show you how personal God is, and how aware he is of our need to be

dealt with in different ways, so that we can respond to him right where we are – whoever we are...and say “YES LORD. YOU ARE ALIVE. YOU ARE RISEN FOR ME. COME INTO MY HEART LORD JESUS”

Or maybe for some of us its – I’ve responded once but I want to renew my faith in you Lord. I’ve kind of gotten off the track. Help me to grow in my faith. I want to recommit to you.

The first part of John 20:8 says that John believed after he went into the empty tomb.

1. Some Respond Immediately/Intuitively to the GOOD NEWS

John...Jesus’ disciple (who wrote this gospel) went into the tomb. All he saw were the strips of linen lying there as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head.

He didn’t see Christ – at least he hadn’t yet. He would. But it says in scripture “He saw (just the linens) and immediately believed”

Then it says he still did not understand the scripture that said that Jesus would rise from the dead..

Have you ever known anyone who just intuitively knew that Christ was alive, was with them?

They might not know all the answers

They might not have a perfect theology

But they just know, and have always known Gods presence

I heard a man tell me once that since he had been a little boy he had sensed the presence of Jesus. His parents weren’t even Christian.

No one ever really talked about God in his home. But when he was six years old he announced to his parents one Sunday morning that he was going to church. And so he walked down the block to the church on the corner, and he faithfully attended all by himself all through his growing up years. When he grew up, he became a professor of theology, and a pastor, and influenced many who were going into the ministry. He just always knew that God was with him and that Jesus was alive.

Some people respond to the good news of the living Christ with them immediately/intuitively...they just know

BUT NOT EVERYONE!

2. Others Respond to The Good News of the Resurrection Because of a personal encounter with God

Many folks tell me about these personal encounters with God – (afraid to tell anybody but a pastor) -

Someone just told me on Maundy Thursday that going through the labyrinth that we have set up every Easter weekend last year – she had such a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit coming upon her that she couldn't even put it into words. I felt him all through me, she said. It was an amazing experience. And I just want to thank you for that labyrinth prayer walk. Its opened my eyes in a new way.

This is what happened to Mary Magdaline. Jesus calls her by name, and suddenly what hadn't made any sense - all becomes relevant.

It all becomes clear.

Jesus tells her "Mary...I am ascending to my father and your father...to my God and your God."

What a generous statement that is/no ownership of his own divinity/never trying to keep anything for himself

Mary, the relationship that I have with the Lord, my father, is now a relationship that you can have with him too...because I've taken your sins on the cross, conquered death, and you can know him intimately too...just like me

And she responds by running to tell the other disciples! Its relevant and wonderful news.

A similar experience was shared with me by someone in our congregation – a woman who knew that God had called her name..

When I was 19 years old I changed my name to Judy Leigh Graebe because I HATED my name. My nickname was always Cyn (sin). I had a minister talk to me about my birth name and asked me about taking it back. I said there was ABSOLUTELY NO WAY I would ever do that. It wasn't until exactly 20 years later when I was 40 and on my first mission trip to the Philippines that God called me by name. I was sitting in a church service looking at the cross and asking God to explain to me the meaning of the Cross. All of a sudden I hear these words, "I love you Cynthia, I love you Cynthia". I burst into sobs and ended up on the floor face down crying and worshiping God. At that moment I took back my birth name Cynthia Noel Graebe. Cynthia - Reflector of Light, Noel - Good News, Graebe - my fathers name. Hearing my name called out by God was a turning point in my life .

Some people shout out HE IS RISEN with conviction because of a personal experience like that.

BUT NOT EVERYONE!

3. Still others respond to the news that Christ is risen because of the witness of the church.

When Jesus appears to his disciples and declares “Peace be with you” that was a greeting that the early church had – they’d always say that to one another when they gathered.

When Jesus breathes on them and says “Receive the Holy Spirit”, that was part of the baptism ceremony of the early church as well. People not only were put under water, but they were breathed upon as a symbol or action signifying the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

And then he eats with them, signifying the Lords Supper and encourages them that he is alive indeed. This is not some kind of a hallucination

This appearance of the risen Christ is a picture of how the early church operated – with both baptism and the Lords Supper included in this appearance.

Some people recognize Jesus as alive through the witness of the church...

I know a woman who was not a believer but went to a church regularly because she liked her arts and crafts group and some of the other programming.
She was a staunch atheist.

The people in that church loved on her and kept loving her. They knew that she didn't believe anything but it didn't matter.

They embraced her as a friend and they met her right where she was. It was through the love of that church that she came to Jesus Christ. "I know now that Jesus lives for me," she shared with me once with tears in her eyes. "He is so real to me now. But if it hadn't been for this church, I never would have come to faith."

Some people shout out with conviction HE IS RISEN because of the witness of the church.

BUT NOT EVERYONE!

There's one more category that I think is illustrated in this passage of scripture, and that's the category of the cynic, and the skeptic.

4. Some people respond to the news that Christ is risen only after they have examined all the facts and are intellectually convinced.

This is Thomas, the skeptic.

He says, "Unless I see...unless I touch...unless I am absolutely sure...I will not believe..."

Resistant, cynical...doubting

Ever hear or say a prayer like that? That's Thomas' statement: Unless you come down, and unless I see this happen or that happen, I won't believe in you.

And the gracious thing about our two year old demands for God our infinite Creator to show up in the exact way that we in our mortal limited mindset want, is often – not always – but often answered, as it was with Thomas.

Jesus comes to Thomas in the exact way that he asked for.
Hi Thomas. Just as you demanded, here I am. Here are my
wounds...put your hands here...feel them...see them...know
that this is real...not a fantasy
And Thomas responds...**My Lord and My God!!**

God embraces the skeptic, and meets the cynic with open
arms
If you consider yourself a skeptic today
Or you aren't sure what you believe, I am so glad you are
here. You aren't here by accident.

And its okay right now to ask God to show up for you in a
way that you can respond to and receive...and see as
relevant for you...
God values honesty and integrity in our prayers

You might want to pray something like this...
*I am resistant God...I'll be honest about that...
Things have happened to me in my life that have made me
doubt
Or wonder what it is that I actually believe
But if you are there, come to me in a way that I can get.
Show yourself to me in a way so that given who I am, I can
receive the news of your resurrection, get that its relevant for
me and respond to you
Cause I'm willing to do that if you show yourself to me*

Again and again God offers the skeptic what they need to
believe in him.
So often it is the skeptic that God heals most readily, and
easily – because of their honesty
He showed up for Thomas...he'll show up for you

We've got a document in the pews called **The Resurrection Of Jesus Christ From An Accademic Perspective**. We put it out every year for those of you who are asking the hard academic questions, but its great reading for anyone.

And one thing I love about being a Presbyterian Christian is that we don't check our brains at the door...we ask the hard questions...we value education...and we want to be thoughtful people, not stupid people. We believe that God gave us brains and we were meant to use them.

You will find in this document statements from people who have great minds, and who believe 100% in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Many of them started out skeptical...but because they were honest and open and cared enough about the issues to truly examine the evidence...they are now believers.

I want to close with the vignette at the end of this document by the well known C.S. Lewis who started out atheist but found Jesus very real in his quest.

As you can read in the document he was former professor of Medieval and Renaissance literature at Cambridge University and when writing about his conversion to Christianity indicated that he believed Christians "to be wrong". Someone called him **C.S. Lewis was "the hardest boiled of all atheists he ever knew."**

The last thing Lewis wanted to do was to embrace Christianity. But he couldn't deny the evidence – "It almost looks as if all of this actually happened." he told a friend.

And after evaluating the basis and evidence, Lewis concluded that in other religions there was "no such

historical claim as in Christianity”. Here’s the quote I just love...from Lewis...when he finally accepted Christ into his heart...

“You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. I finally gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed; perhaps that night the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.”

God pursues the skeptic, and reveals his truth to the most resistant.

If that’s you, or if you are just having doubts, tell God to show up for you in a way that you can receive.

He will be faithful to you

His love is everlasting, and his pursuit of humanity unrelenting

Today, the Lord of life – not death – has risen indeed

For you

He comes with joy and triumph to lift your burdens

To forgive your sins

And to grant you life everlasting

May our gracious God who went through the cross for us, and who rose victorious from the grave, - grant you all the ability to respond to him with your whole heart, soul, strength and mind – and be filled with joy this Easter season. AMEN
AND AMEN

