

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Love of the Cross and the Power of the Empty Tomb!
Pastor Dave Scherrer - Resurrection Sunday - March 31, 2013

I love Easter. I love what it means in all kinds of ways. Usually Easter is associated with springtime. I love springtime. I'm not a big fan of cold and snow so Easter to me is the unofficial start of spring. I love the changing color of the lawns and the longer days.

I love that tomorrow is opening day! Go Rockies! I'm an optimist. I love the tulips and the light green color of new growth. I like the first time you mow the lawn.

I love that at Easter time we get to have this wonderful day where all the children dress in powder blue and pink and yellow and look like little colored Easter eggs and families get together for dinner.

I love the malted milk Robin eggs that come out at Easter time and only Easter time which is a good thing because I eat the whole bag of those things!

And I do love the children. There is a sense of wonder and life with children and Easter time. Easter egg hunts and chocolate rabbits. All that stuff is fine with me. Especially the baseball part.

But of course the most amazing thing about the Easter season is Easter. Today. Resurrection Sunday. I love to read and I love a good mystery. I'm a huge Sherlock Holmes fan. And few events are as mysterious as the empty tomb. I find the whole account amazing, how he predicted beforehand that on the third day after his murder he would rise from the dead. Everyone who heard these statements couldn't really understand what he was saying and what he meant. Of course it wouldn't have made any sense beforehand. It barely makes sense afterwards! Who could have followed that train of thought? But then he died and rose again. That whole amazing mysterious morning must have been something! The ladies go to the tomb to anoint the body with oils according to Jewish custom, forgetting that the rock that closes the tomb is huge! But they get there early in the morning and the rock is moved and the tomb is empty. They run back to the disciples who are back in the city hiding out, still in shock that their rabbi has been killed and the ladies breathlessly say, "The tomb is empty. He's not there. We were told by an angel that he is raised from the dead." And the disciples are all "Wait? What?" For me no other holiday or season can match it for mystery and passion and celebration.

It is the ultimate culmination of Jesus' work on earth as God in the flesh.

Easter weekend represents the end of the start and ushers in the start of the end.

The Resurrection was the moment when time and timelessness touch and eternity triumphs.

The Resurrection is when Love and Justice dance to the music of the rock rolling away. And the dance is still going on!

Now this whole past week is called 'Holy Week' - not because every other week in the life of Christ isn't holy but because, as I have been saying, this week 2000 years ago was the week that Christ marched purposely toward the cross. This is the week that Christ has lived His life to reach. The week He gave His life to save the world.

It began last Sunday on a high note with the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and the people celebrating him as the Messiah King waving palm branches and shouting 'Hosanna.' They call it Palm Sunday!

Jesus then spent Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday teaching and generally making the religious power brokers angry.

Thursday Jesus celebrated the Passover feast with the disciples and had his last supper, sharing with them his final words. Late that night, Jesus knowing the end was near went into a garden late at night to pray and there one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, betrayed Jesus into the hands of the Pharisees and the Roman military. All night he went from palace to courtyard to military barrack where he was beaten and mocked, tortured and falsely accused until early in the morning on Friday, the Roman governor Pilate condemned Jesus to die on a cross, the most hideous and cruel forms of death the Romans could devise.

We call that day Good Friday because that death on the cross served as the ransom, the substitute sacrifice that paid for our death. ***The most expensive free gift ever given.*** I want to come back to that point in a moment. First I want to chat a bit about the amazing love of that Cross.

Even today if we set about the business of keeping our eyes peeled for them we can see images of the cross all over the place.

If we think of the cross as a historical relic we might see it this way



If we see it as a nice benign symbol of love we might wear it as jewelry



We see it in our architecture



Some maybe wear it to make a fashion statement



Some see it as a symbol of the ultimate sacrifice



Some want to take the cross with them everywhere



No matter what we make of the cross today, it was love that held Christ on the cross until the debt was paid. What makes me sad is that all these images tend to trivialize the cross. And what that Friday death meant for humankind. These images must give way to the real cross. You see . . .

Jesus reminds us that we can't have the celebration of the empty tomb on Sunday without the broken body of Christ nailed to the cross on Friday.

Jesus said, "Yes, I am King of a magnificent Kingdom" - I am the Messiah. But the path to claiming his throne is directly over Golgotha.

Let's read these words of Christ as he is making his way to the cross during Holy Week:

John 12:23-26

And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor.

This is a crazy thing. Jesus is about to die for all of us, even those who hate him. And he is saying I want you to imitate me.

Now don't get me wrong, I am ok with imitating Jesus in His life. He was a very good man and an amazing teacher. Kind to children and loving to the left behind and left out. I would love to be known for that. But what he is saying in this passage written to all of us on his way to the cross takes me back a step. The surprising thing is that he wants us to imitate Him not only in how he lives His life but in also how He goes to His death. He is saying I am about to love you in a way that no one could ever imagine. And I am inviting you to love others in the same way, by dying!

It was his love that held Him to the cross. It was His love that enabled him to do four very hard things and he invites us to do those same four hard things.

Four Hard Things

- Jesus calls us to die to ourselves - "Unless the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die . . ."
- Jesus calls us to hate our lives in this world - "He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world . . ."
- Jesus calls us to follow him on his Calvary road, leading to death - "If anyone serves me let him follow me . . ."
- Jesus calls us to serve him. "If anyone serves me . . ."

That's what it means to be a Christian, a disciple of Jesus. Jesus knew it would be hard. That's why he said in Matthew 7:14, "The gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few." It's hard to die. It's hard to hate your life in this world. It's hard to follow Jesus on the road that leads to the cross. It's hard to take the role of a servant in a world of power.

But here is the amazing thing. Easter weekend doesn't end at the cross. So don't miss this. This is the Power of the Empty Tomb! When Jesus did the hard work of the cross and asked us to join Him, he promised to us that the same power that has drawn us all here this Sunday morning – Resurrection Power – would be unleashed for us too. Let's look at those verses again

Vs. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, **it bears much fruit.**

"It bears much fruit" - Jesus is telling us "Life is not in vain." In fact even more important "Death is not in vain!" You have been promised that if you give up living for yourself and die to living to be the God of your life, you can exchange the hopeless striving and senselessness of life and exchange it for a life purpose that will give you hope and direction every day of your life – Die to self and instead dare to live a life that really matters!

Vs. 25 Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world **will keep it for eternal life.**

You see this life is not all there is. That is the hope and the power of the empty tomb. There are no bones! I am convinced that there is more - much more. Jesus has proved it. And eternal life doesn't start when I die, Jesus said, "I came to give you life abundant" right here right now! Life without the limits of fear and guilt.

Vs. 26 If anyone serves me, he must follow me; **and where I am, there will my servant be also**

"And where I am, there shall my servant be" - We will never be separated from Him. Jesus said another time when speaking of this moment, "I go to prepare a place for you that where I am there you may be also." If we follow him to Calvary, we will be with him in glory.

"If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him." Can you imagine? God doesn't desire to judge and condemn us. He doesn't want to make us feel shamed and guilty. He wants to honor us. When we honor His Son, then The Father showers us with the same honor and glory. What a mystery!

So don't miss the glory and the overflowing joy in this hard life of being a Christian.

- We die to ourselves and in exchange we get the fruit of a life that eternally matters!
- We hate our lives in this world to keep our lives in a world that has no end.
- We follow Jesus on the Calvary road and we join Jesus where he is in glory forever.
- We become humble servants like Christ and the Father honors us like Christ.

That's the way I want to live the few remaining years I have left in this world. And that's the way I want to spend eternity. It won't be easy, but it will be significant. It will be eternal. That's true for your life too.

Let's look at the mystery one last time:

Luke 24:1-6

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. ⁵ And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but has risen.

Of all the great things that Easter means, it also means this: it is a mighty "I meant it!" His resurrection is a shout of love for my people. Charles Spurgeon said, "Our guilt has rolled off our shoulders into the tomb

of Christ.” (Charles Spurgeon) So, the meaning of the empty tomb is *forgiveness*. Saying “The tomb is empty,” is another way of saying, “Life is full.”

Come see the place where the Lord lay.

Go to a cemetery. Look around...see all those graves? Every grave of every Christian contains the bones of loved ones who were buried in hope of the resurrection. These hopes exist because the tomb of Jesus is empty!

What a difference three days makes!

So much *ended* at this tomb and so many things *began*.

Remember it was the empty tomb transformed the disciples from cowards to warriors. At the tomb...

- The terrified become fearless,
- The fearful are made bold and courageous,
- The weak are made strong,
- The weary can be filled with vigor,
- The foolish are made wise,
- The uncertain become confident,
- The anxious are filled with peace.

Men and women are changed at the empty tomb of Christ every day. Is this your day? May we all be transformed by what happened when a man called Jesus was murdered, placed in a rich man's tomb on a long ago Friday and walked out of it on Sunday proving He is God of all!

Oh to see my name written in His wounds
For through your suffering I am free,
Death is crushed to death, life is mine to live
Won through your selfless love
This the power of the Cross and the Empty Tomb

He is Risen!