

Sermon for April 12, 2009

Boscobel & Mt. Zion UMCs

Text: Matthew 28:1-7, I Peter 1:3-6

Title: “Wonderful Expectation”

Before we start, let me invite you to take the insert out of your program. On one side you will find our Scriptures for today and on the other you will find an outline with some fill-in-the-blanks. Please take out a pen and take time to fill these in and write whatever other notes you would like to that may help you grow in your faith. What you write down today may come in handy if you are encouraging someone else in their faith journey.

(9am) For those of you listening online, you can download the program and the sermon notes.

PRAY!

Introduction: And the two “Mary’s” (Magdalene and the mother of Jesus) stood at the foot of the cross as Jesus hung there. John was the only disciple with them according to our Scriptures. The other 10 disciples (Judas is already dead according to Matthew) are probably standing at a distance because they are still scared for their own lives.

The Roman crucifixion was a long, drawn out death that was meant to be an example to others not to mess with the Roman Empire. Those hung on crosses were hung out in public, on busy street corners. It’s believed that Jesus was hung on a cross at a major intersection of highway where so many traveled through Jerusalem ... it was a crossroads for the known world in the 1st century. The terrible thing about the Roman crucifixion was two-fold: there was a lot of pain involved with the stakes through the wrists and ankles, but that didn’t usually kill the person. The second terrible part was that one did not die of the wounds, but of asphyxiation. One would literally suffocate or drown in ones own fluids. It usually took 6-8 hours or more for a victim to die. That was plenty of time for people to see that they didn’t want to die in that manner.

Jesus hung on the cross for 6 hours (9am-3pm) according to our Bibles. In his last moments Mary his mother, Mary Magdalene and others who were close could hear Jesus last words as he gathered strength to hold up his head and speak. They heard him say, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” And finally, Jesus said, “It is finished.”

In that moment, it was over. All the hopes and dreams of the disciples, his mother, his hundreds and thousands of followers all disappeared. All that they thought might be ... never would be.

Imagine being one of the disciples. Three years earlier, they left their jobs, careers and lives to follow Jesus. Over the three years of ministry they saw Jesus heal people, feed people, teach people and make people’s lives better. They watched him walk on water and calm storms on the Sea of Galilee. They heard Jesus as he taught and then they agreed with all of the people that they had never heard anyone like him before. They listened as he put the present Church leaders in their place ... numerous times! Their expectation grew as they went toward Jerusalem and realized that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus was the one that the Israelites had waited for to become

King and defeat all of their enemies so they could live in peace again. This King was supposed to end the Roman Empire's reign over their Promised Land.

And there he was, hanging on a cross. And Jesus said, "It is finished!" they took him down off of the cross and hastily cleaned him up and placed him in a borrowed tomb with the plan to come back after the Sabbath and finish preserving his body.

The Disciples went into hiding there in Jerusalem. Locking the doors and hoping that the religious leaders didn't come after them to be tortured or crucified for following Jesus. That Friday night and Saturday must have been so hard ... scared and in mourning for their friend and Lord. Jesus was gone. I'm sure they were having a hard time wrapping their minds around it. Just a few days ago they were part of a huge parade into Jerusalem and Jesus was the honored guest. People from all over the world shouting for Jesus! He was very much alive ... but now, Jesus was dead.

That was it. I'm sure the disciples had conversations about what to do now. "Let's stay in hiding until the dust settles a little bit and then we'll leave town when the Passover crowds leave after the Sabbath ... we'll head back to Galilee and get our old jobs back."

Can you imagine the anguish that Jesus' mother was going through with the other women who had supported Jesus' ministry? These women had set aside their lives to follow Jesus too. I'm pretty sure they didn't sleep much between Friday and Sunday morning. I'm sure it seemed like forever, but it finally happened...

READ MATTHEW 28:1-7 NOW!

I. It Didn't Happen

A. The Women at the Tomb

1. So, the women (Mary Magdalene and Mary Mother of Jesus) went out to the tomb to visit early in the morning on the day after the Sabbath (Sunday). In other places in Scripture it says they went out to finish preparing the body for burial ... I'm sure they were hoping someone would be there to roll the stone back for them.
2. They hear from the angel that Jesus is alive, just as he said he would (why weren't they listening!?) and that they are to go and tell the disciples what they've just heard.
3. The women run back into Jerusalem where the disciples are in hiding ... maybe wake them up (why weren't they listening?!)... And they tell the disciples that Jesus is alive ... he has come back to life!
4. Disciples response = No Way! We saw him hang on a cross and die. We watched as his body was taken down and put into a grave. "It didn't happen. Dead people don't come to life again. People do not walk out of their graves..."

B. The Two on the Road

1. Later that day, two of Jesus' followers were walking to a neighboring town and a stranger joined them and asked about what they were talking about. Of course they were talking

about Jesus, the great teacher, being hung on a cross and dying.

2. Jesus teaches the two about all that was prophesied in the Old Testament about the Messiah dying before He comes into His glory. He stops at their house and blesses the bread for supper. That's when the two recognized Jesus!
3. They ran back to Jerusalem and told the Disciples that the women were not lying, they had seen Jesus alive!
4. The Disciple's response? "It didn't happen. We watched Jesus die on a cross. Dead people don't come to life again. People do not walk out of their graves..."

C. The Disciples

1. As this conversation is going on, Jesus appears among the Disciples even though all the doors are locked. They think it's a ghost!
2. Jesus says no! Touch me, I'm real. Give me something to eat, ghosts cannot eat!
3. The Disciples believed and they couldn't wait to tell the one Disciple that we know must have been on a grocery run or something ... Thomas.

D. The Disciples and Thomas

1. When they see Thomas they tell him, "Thomas, we have seen Jesus! We touched His hands and watched him eat some bread right here in this room!"
2. Thomas reply? "It didn't happen. We watched Jesus die on a cross. Dead people don't come to life again. People do not walk out of their graves..."
3. Later that week, Jesus showed up again while Thomas was there. When Thomas touched Jesus' hands and side, he believed and Jesus said, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

E. Does It Still Happen?

1. This story is very hard for us to grasp. We tell it every year, don't we?!? But, it's hard for us to believe. If we have any semblance of critical thinking in our heads, this story about Jesus is hard for us to consider true.
2. Why? Because we didn't see it with our own two eyes! Because "dead people don't come to life again. People do not walk out of their graves."
3. But what about the stories? This past week on Facebook, I sent out a question asking if anyone had experienced or heard of others who had seen people alive after they were dead.
4. Along with a couple of "I saw Elvis once" answers, I actually got some response. One woman said that she saw her grandfather when she visited his condo after he was dead. She also said that her mom saw their former neighbor pretty

clearly. Some said they heard voices of the deceased so clearly that they knew they were back.

II. What Does It Mean to Us?

A. What if It Hadn't Happened?

1. And so we wonder what this Easter story means to us... Let's start by looking at it from the other direction. "What if Jesus hadn't come back from the dead?"
2. What if Jesus had been a great teacher and even healed a few people and some claimed that he had walked on water, but he said that he would come back to life in three days and then didn't do it? I'll tell you what ... you and I wouldn't be sitting here right now. Do you know why?
3. Because if Jesus didn't come back from the dead and show himself to his disciples and Paul, I don't think they would have kept the Church going. Jesus would have been a liar and it's really hard to build a following for someone who did not predict the future very well...
4. Remember that when Jesus was crucified that the Disciples were scared for their own lives and stayed in hiding ... they were scared that they would be recognized as followers of Jesus and be crucified themselves. If they had not seen Jesus, I doubt that would have changed. **BUT IT DID!**
5. After the Spirit of God came, the Disciples became bold and went out into the streets of Jerusalem and told people (including the Pharisees and Church leaders who had Jesus killed) that Jesus had risen from the dead and that He was the Messiah promised by God!
6. Most of the Disciples were martyred for their faith. They died because they believed so strongly in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the only path we have to be right with God!
7. Peter, one of the Disciples that ran away when Jesus was arrested and the one who denied Jesus three times while Jesus was on trial in the High Priest's house, had this to say about Jesus death and life:

READ I PETER 1:3-6 NOW!

B. New Birth

1. I have had conversations with people who have been through very difficult situations in their lives. They have been through cancer or an accident where they very well could have died. Once they have been through those experiences, they look at life a little differently. It's like they have experienced a **NEW BIRTH!**
2. Most have a feeling of, "It's not so bad..." Whatever they are going through today, in comparison with what they've been through, "It's not so bad..."

3. It's like getting a new life! One's attitude changes and they live life a new way! They take more risks and really experience what this life has to offer.

C. Live with a Wonderful/ Great Expectation

1. For those 1st Disciples, they went from scared and hiding to Fearless and Bold about their faith in Jesus Christ! They lived life with a GREAT/WONDERFUL EXPECTATION! They had HOPE for the future, in this life or in the next!
2. Those Disciples had seen that the next life is REAL and they lived like it here on this earth.
3. I wonder if we live the same way. Are we living this life, like people who know that they will live again?
4. If we believe what happened on that 1st Easter, it will change our lives drastically! I DO NOT MEAN "HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF IT"; I MEAN "BELIEVE IT!" We've heard this story a hundred times ... it's in our heads.
5. My Question is: "Do we believe it in our hearts as if we have seen Jesus alive ourselves?"
6. If we truly believe in Jesus Resurrection, we will live like it for THREE GOOD REASONS!

III. Living Hope

A. Forgiveness of Sins

1. We will have a "Living Hope" because we know what the CROSS was all about. Jesus took all of the sins of history on Himself, took them to the cross and died for them!
2. The wages of sin is death. Jesus did the dying. We just have to accept Jesus as our substitute.
3. There is the hard part ... Some of us think our stuff is too bad for Jesus to handle on the cross!

B. God of Hopeless Causes

1. When those Disciples saw Jesus on that cross and heard Him say, "It is finished", they lost hope. They thought "It Was Finished!" They thought that Jesus was dead, but Jesus was saying that his purpose had been fulfilled ... the sins of the world were paid for!
2. Patients in hospital = give up hope ... dead. Couples without hope = divorce.
3. What Jesus did on that first Easter morning gives us hope ... Wonderful Expectation!
4. I had a friend of mine from youth group who was a couple of years older than me and I looked up to him. He was a bit of a rebel, a drummer and a skater. He was pretty wild ... dated every girl in our youth group at least once. When he got older, he married and had a couple of kids ... found out he had an incurable disease. I remember the last time I talked to Doug ... he said to me that if he hadn't been involved in our

youth group, he wouldn't have attended worship as an adult. And if he hadn't attended worship as an adult, he wouldn't have given his life to Jesus Christ. He said that his faith was now all that he had to hold onto. The doctors couldn't do anything else ... his case was hopeless! But, Doug said that he knew that he had hope either here or in the life to come...

5. If Jesus doesn't come back to life, I don't have a Wonderful / Great expectation to play music with Doug again.

C. Eternal Life

1. We talked about this a couple of weeks ago... God offers us, through Jesus dying for our sins, ETERNAL LIFE in Paradise!
2. John 14 = "I am the resurrection and the life. No one goes to the Father except by me." Jesus says that he will go and prepare a place for us and come and take us there ... no worries! He's done the life-to-death-to-life thing already!
3. Why do we live with Great Expectation? Because this life isn't it!

IV. Now What?

A. Dodging the Grim Reaper

1. Isn't it strange that from the day that we are born, we spend our lives fighting the inevitable ... our natural instincts as babies is to eat and sleep and get bigger and stronger.
2. When we get older, we are taught to eat and sleep properly to stay healthy ... exercise.
3. As we get older still, we exercise, go see the doctor regularly, take vitamins, eat right, etc. Why? All this to stay alive, even though we know that each and every one of us is going to eventually die!
4. Not one of us in this room can get out of it. AND, we have no idea when that is going to be.
5. What we celebrate today ... Jesus back to life ... gives us hope and causes us to live a life of Wonderful Expectation!

B. How can we live with Wonderful Expectation?

1. Maybe today, you don't believe this stuff. "Dead people don't come to life again. People do not walk out of their graves." What a scam this church thing is!
2. Maybe today you think that what you've done could not be forgiven ... even if Jesus says that you can be forgiven by Him killing off those sins on the cross.
3. Maybe you are one who just needs a kick in the pants, because you already know all of this, but you are not living with Great Expectations.
4. Whichever one you are, I invite you to pray with me...

Let's Pray ... doubt, forgiveness, apathy, lethargy ... help us to say, "Holy Cow!" This stuff is for real!