

**John 20:19-23, 30-31            April 16, 2016**  
**Luke 24: 36-43                The Death of Fear**  
**Hebrews 7:23-28**

The hour was late and the night was dark... the disciples of Jesus were huddled together behind doors that were locked. Their leader was gone, their hopes were dashed their lives were in danger. Their Lord had been crucified and they were afraid that they, too, would be found out and put to death. The Bible says they were in fear. Have you ever been there... in fear ... or maybe just apprehensive ... those “butterflies” in your stomach?

Then something quite unexpected happened ... actually quite astounding: Jesus appeared among them. He was alive ... back from the grave ... in His body ... up close, physical, and personal. He was powerful and in command! Now the natural reaction to something like this, something unexpected, unknown ... the presence of divine glory ... the natural reaction is fear. Jesus says, *Peace, do not fear*. His message to them was the same as what the angels had said to those shepherds on the night of Jesus’ birth. Do not be afraid for a Savior has come to you.

Fear has a way of gripping us. But we can’t let it paralyze us. Last week I spoke about how Christ broke the power of death when He rose from the grave. He also broke the power of fear.

The message of Easter, then and now, is this: be not afraid Jesus Christ is risen! On this beautiful morning I want you to know that the resurrection of Jesus gives us three vital and enduring reasons why we need not live in fear.

**1. No fear: your life has meaning and purpose.** Maybe what most distinguishes human beings from other creatures is our ability to ask “Why?” And, in particular, to ask: “Why am I here?” This question often becomes overpowering in mid-life, after we have done all that the world has told us we need to do to be happy and fulfilled.

That’s when we start asking: What’s it all for? What does it mean? Has my life mattered? Not everyone asks these questions consciously – maybe they ask them through their behavior; the “mid-life crisis,” change of careers, various forms of risk-taking, disillusion leading to depression. Likely you can think of other things. Even when we’re young, most of us experience a yearning for our lives to count, to do something great, to make a mark. The truth is: people never seem so lost as when they have no purpose to live for. And they never seem so alive as when they do.

Where does this need for significance come from? Is it an evolutionary accident? I love Sir John Templeton’s comment: “Would it not be strange if a universe without purpose accidentally created human beings who are so obsessed with purpose?” Is it a cruel cosmic hoax of an empty universe, itself

devoid of purpose and meaning? Or is that desire for meaning and purpose put in our hearts by our Creator, as the Bible says? *He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end, Ecclesiastes 3:11.*

The resurrection of Jesus tells us that the heavens are not empty; that we are not alone in the cosmos. The resurrection of Jesus tells us that at the heart of the universe there is a Heart that cares. At the center of reality there is a personal God who intentionally brought you into being.

God created you for a purpose; a purpose that success and wealth and possessions just can't fulfill. As large as the world is, it is still too small to fill the longings of the human heart, because God has written eternity into the fabric of your being.

Easter shouts to us that the universe is full of meaning, every star declaring the glory of God, every sunrise a gracious gift, every human being important, and every choice we make significant. The resurrection of Jesus tells you that your life was meant to say something important. Your life was intended to bring something unique and beautiful and good into the lives of others. Who you are and how you live matters, because you matter to God.

Do not be afraid, Easter tells us. You are not forgotten. Your life counts! Discover what matters to God, live for what is most true and most real, and your life will be filled with meaning and purpose more than you ever imagined. The second thing the resurrection of Jesus tells us:

## 2. No fear: your problems can be overcome.

Being a pastor is sometimes very hard, and sometimes a marvelous gift. It allows you to experience the lives of people when they experience their greatest joys and also when they are going through the most difficult times of their lives. I know that some of you come to church on Sunday and you smile on the outside, but on the inside, you are broken and hurting. Sometimes I come to church on Sunday like that too. Some of your stories might well bring tears to our eyes. Life is hard on people. It's unfair and callous and even brutal. Life was hard on Jesus. He understands what you're going through. The resurrection of Jesus tells you this: Do not be afraid. Your problems need not destroy you. You are not alone and Jesus can see you through.

Have you ever been betrayed by someone you loved? You are not alone. Jesus has been there. Have your motives been misunderstood and maligned? Have your best efforts been misconstrued and attacked? You are not alone. Jesus has been there. Have you given your life to others only to see them walk away or walk all over you? Have you felt the warm tears of grief fall on your cheeks because you stand by the grave of a loved one? You are not alone, read the story of Jesus and Lazarus (John 11:35-44). You'll find that Jesus has been there.

Shortly before his death, Jesus told His disciples: *In me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world,* John 16:33. Life is full of pain and suffering. It was for Jesus. He told His disciples that it would be for them. But then He said, be encouraged, I have overcome the world. How does that make any sense? ... It doesn't without the resurrection.

If Jesus was a teacher and nothing more; if Jesus was an encourager and a motivator who believed in people and nothing more; if Jesus was a beautiful life that shined for a magnificent moment but was extinguished forever on the cross, His words would make no sense at all.

But if on the third day, He was raised from the dead; if He lives even today, and if we can receive Him into our lives through faith, then it makes perfect sense. Because it means that when He comes into our lives, the same power that kept Him from hatred, bitterness, self-pity and even despair, can live in us. It means that with Him, we can overcome whatever problems life throws at us. If only we could see beyond the visible. Just because we can't see something doesn't mean it isn't there. There is so much more to this universe than meets the eye.

On August 15, 1934, famed explorer William Beebe climbed into a bathysphere, a miniature submarine, and descended to a depth that no human being had ever reached. His bathysphere was made of extremely thick layers of steel, able to withstand the crushing pressure of the ocean depths. In the darkest ocean depths he discovered amazing creatures - black shrimp, transparent eels, and bizarre fish never before seen. Amazingly these creatures exist at great depths but do not have thick, outer skins. In fact, their bodies are quite flexible and they move about easily. Their secret is that they compensate for the outside pressure with an equal and opposite pressure inside themselves. There is, in a sense, a power within them that is as strong as the pressures upon them.

How we handle the problems of life is very often the way a bathysphere compensates for the pressures of the deep. We create thick, hard walls so nothing can get to us; sealing ourselves off from the problems and the pressures that surround us. But there is another way. That is to be filled with a power on the inside that can withstand the challenges that come from the outside. The Word of God inside us allows us to handle whatever is outside us.

Jesus Christ is the living Word of God and the promise of Easter is this: The resurrected Christ will enter your life with the power that caused Him to overcome the world and its death. All the unfairness and its cruelty, He will enable you to overcome. You need only receive Him as your savior and director and you too will say, *I can do all things in Christ who gives me strength,* Philippians 4:13. Have you received Him as your Savior?

**Some of you are facing this first, or another, Easter without a loved one and it hurts. Some of you are so worried about your children or grandchildren, who seem misguided, maybe even in trouble that could destroy them, and you seem unable to help them. Some of you have a marriage that is struggling or a spouse who has been unfaithful. Some of you, from your early years have been told that you are un-loveable and that you are unworthy of anyone's time and care, and you carry that with you wherever you go. Some of you are just facing health problems or maybe just plugging along.**

**Please hear this: The resurrected Jesus knows all this ... and He is with you. He is the power that will hold you, He is the power that will heal you, He is the power that will help you rise up and overcome all that comes against you. You will find that power is alive in Jesus when you find Jesus alive in you. Finally, Easter tells us this:**

**3. No fear: our sins can be forgiven. Death is inevitable, we know that, but we don't like to look at it too closely. [I think it was Woody Allen who said: "I'm not afraid to die; I just don't want to be there when it happens."] It's not so much death that we're afraid of, but not knowing what's on the other side.**

**In my 40 years as a Pastor I have conducted hundreds of funeral services – even for close relatives and friends. Each time I am reminded that the one so recently walking among us, leaves us and passes into death alone. And then they will stand before God. I suppose because I am getting older, I think about my own death now and then. If life is good to me, I will be able to pass away peacefully surrounded by family and loved ones. Then I will stand alone before God. He will see all my sins and He will judge my life. Friends, that hour will come for you one day. You will stand before God and He will see your sins, and your life will be judged.**

**Maybe you've heard this story before: 76 years ago, April 1947, Jackie Robinson became the first black man to play major league baseball. He was chosen by Brooklyn Dodgers Manager Branch Ricky (a Christian) to help integrate baseball. He was chosen not only because he was a fine player, but because he had already shown himself to be a man of great character and inner strength.**

**Traveling with the Brooklyn Dodgers, Robinson was insulted and jeered in every ballpark he played in. One day in Cincinnati he committed an error, and the crowd began to boo him and ridicule him with every low-life, racist expression you can imagine.**

**They cried out: He doesn't belong here, get rid of him, send him back where he came from. Humiliated, Robinson stood at second base... all alone. Then he felt a presence beside him. It was a teammate, shortstop Pee Wee Reese, team captain, all-star, and a future hall of famer. He placed an arm around Jackie's shoulder, and stared up into the stands, and waited until the shouting stopped**

and the crowd became silent. Jackie Robinson would later say that arm around his shoulder saved his career.

One day I will stand before God alone. And so will you. Our sins will cry out: he doesn't belong here, throw him out, send him away. And honestly, our sins will be right. Not one of us can stand before the holy God, righteous in ourselves and deserving of heaven. All have sinned, just as the Bible says; all have fallen short of the glory of God, all deserve judgment.

Your only hope, my only hope, is that when we stand there alone before God, Jesus will come beside us, put an arm around our shoulder, lift up a nail-scarred hand and say, "He belongs to us Father, I died for him, he has trusted me to save him from his sins, and he is ours."

I'm remembering a beautiful verse in the Bible, from Hebrews. Referring to Jesus it says, *Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them*, Hebrews 7:25. Regardless of how encompassing are my sins (and they go clear to the bone), He is able save me completely. He is able save you completely.

The cross is God's way of telling you that He cares and He'd sacrifice His life for you. And Easter? Easter is His promise that He will care for you in this world, and will love you right into the world to come! *But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol*, Psalm 49:15.

You do not have to be afraid of that moment. The Bible says Jesus is able, now and always, to save those who come to God through Him because He lives forever to plead with God for them.

So here's what Easter tells us: Your life has significance and meaning. Your problems can be overcome. Your sins can be forgiven. So, open your locked doors and receive the Risen One, and you will never stand alone again.

Now I don't want to mislead you. This Easter gift of Jesus must be received. To live with courage, power, and hope we must receive Jesus into our lives - more than just pay Him lip service. A lot of folks do that, of course ... just pay Him lip service ... maybe too proud, or too angry, or whatever to surrender themselves to Him. *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name...* John 1:12. That's what it takes. Again, I ask, have you received Him? If not, take a moment now and pray, "Lord Jesus, come into my life ... I give my life to You."

This could be your resurrection day too! There's never been a better day than today. There's never been a better time than now to receive Him. Just do it.