

March 31 (Easter Sunday)

“FACING OUR DISBELIEF”

When Everything Went ~~Wrong~~. Right!



Viewing Holy Week Through the Eyes of Peter

“Facing Our Disbelief”

Luke 24:1-12

But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Special Music:

“He’s Alive”

Don Francisco

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIndrry40Ks>

Luke 24:1-12

- 1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.**
- 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,**
- 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.**
- 4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.**
- 5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”**
- 6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:**

7 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'"

8 Then they remembered his words.

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.

10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.

11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

AN AUTUMN MIRACLE

Katie Callaway knew she had to get out of the big city after her divorce. There were just too many memories and bad times haunting her. Besides, her daughters Jackie (10) and Brenda (8) were not doing well in school. Katie's ex had made it abundantly clear that he was starting a new family with his latest live-in and wanted nothing to do with Katie and the girls. Both of the girls were adopted since Katie had been unable to have children of her own. Her ex, Banyon, had never really fully bought into the whole adoption thing, although he went along with it to keep the peace, but Katie knew that he wanted children of his own. He had finally decided he was getting too old and needed a new plan. Out with the old and in with the new, as devastating as it was for Katie and the girls.

So, she had taken everything that she had received in the divorce and set out to start over. She bought a small farm on the outskirts of Parable, TX. The house wasn't much to look at and needed work, but it had a good roof, and there was a decent barn and a chicken coop. The previous owner had grown okra and corn, with a few acres set aside for wheat as well, mostly for feeding animals. She didn't know how she was going to make it all work, but it was a chance to put the bitterness behind them and start building something new.

They moved into the house in February while it was still quite chilly and immediately went to work. Katie had grown up on a farm in east Texas, so she had a good idea about how to get things up and running. She had the well and

septic system serviced. At Belinda's used cars, Belinda herself worked with Katie as she traded in her Lincoln for a good used pickup. She and the girls put fresh paint on what they could, and then Katie got the girls enrolled in school. So much to do. How would she ever get it all done? Especially without much help. Jackie and Brenda could do some of the work, but the enormity of what needed to be done was daunting. At the local feed store, she bought some chickens so that they would have fresh eggs and the occasional fresh chicken. Her dad had taught her how to plow, so she knew how to handle a tractor. Once the girls were settled in school, she planned out what she needed to do to start growing some crops. She bought a used tractor that another local farmer was selling. That wasn't going to be enough though, so she also took a job as the secretary at New Harvest Church, which meant she had a little cash coming in to pay bills.

Katie decided that she would stick with the crops of the previous owner, okra and corn with some wheat for feed, hoping to pick up a few goats and cows for milk and meat. Things were coming together. It wasn't easy and the days were long, but she felt she had made the right decision.

Everyone in town was supportive and went out of their way to help her out. The people at New Harvest Church threw a Welcome to Parable party for her and the girls. It felt good to be part of a close-knit community.

In the early spring, she plowed the fields and planted her crops. Then came the wait for the spring rains. And when they came, they came with a vengeance. The rain didn't stop for days which made it difficult to get things done. There were a couple of times she had to pull the truck out of the muck with

the tractor. But the rain did offer a good start for her crops, and it wasn't long before green shoots were coming up from the ground. As Spring came into summer, she could see her fields getting stronger and things were looking much better for her and her girls.

Then the girls were out of school and could help more around the farm. But something else happened as well. The rain had stopped early in the Spring. For over five months, not a drop fell from the sky. The city reservoir was starting to dry up as the local farmers tried more irrigation to keep their crops from collapsing, including Katie. But there came a point where the local water management board was forced to initiate limits so that people could still have decent drinking water. The ground dried up and cracked as crops started to yellow and die.

People panicked. Some even moved away. But Katie was all-in. She had sunk everything into the farm. She and the girls cut back on everything to buy a little more time. The temperature was miserably hot. Although they could still get water from the well, it was obvious from the sediment in it that things were going from bad to worse. And still, no rain.

Katie met regularly with the prayer group at church and together they pleaded with God to end the drought. More people moved away. It got difficult to have enough water for the animals, much less the residents. And as the crops withered, feed became hard to get as well. Some crops were harvested early just to have enough to keep going, but that meant there might not be enough feed to

last through the winter. Katie began regretting her decision to move to Parable. But she didn't have a choice but to try and stick it out.

And then it happened. One hot, dry, miserable afternoon in August, it started to rain. It was impossible. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. But rain it did. It only lasted for 30 minutes, but it provided hope and relief. 30 minutes of glorious rain. It wasn't enough to turn things around, but still, it was rain. No one could understand how it happened. And to make things even stranger, the same thing happened the next day. And the next. Just like clockwork, every day around three in the afternoon, it rained for about 30 minutes. After a couple of weeks of this, the crops started to perk back up. Still, no one could explain it. No clouds, but still the rain came.

Everyone called it a fluke. Something that couldn't happen. Something impossible. But rain it did. And by mid-September, it looked like there would be a harvest after all. It would be a little late, but it was a definite possibility. Everyone was incredulous with their disbelief. Even the people who had been praying so fervently couldn't believe what was happening and weren't quite sure how to deal with it and didn't even try to explain the miracle. Weather forecasters from around the state gave various explanations for the anomaly, but even they weren't sure about how this was happening.

The good people of Parable could only say, "Look at the crops! We're going to be okay!" They weren't so concerned about the how or why, as much as the fact that the crops were turning green, and the water table was rising. Katie's well water cleared up and the restrictions were lifted.

With the shortened harvest season, the local farmers met together, including Katie, and they decided that the best way they could handle the short harvest season would be to systematically help each other bring in their crops before the first frost. Working together, they gathered their brigade of tractors and cleared one field after another, all across the county. Those who were not farmers helped out as well by gathering up the harvested crops and getting them either to market, or into barns for the winter to come. There were even teams of vendors that were constantly visiting the workers with food and drink so that they didn't have to stop until the job was done. They all worked from first light to last light, and every night they gathered together to have a community meal as they planned for the next day.

Katie couldn't even think about something like this happening in the city where they came from. So many had just called it quits and left. Others were ready to take their losses and hope for a better future. Farming can be like that.

The night after her fields were harvested, the chores completed, and with the full understanding of a better tomorrow, Katie pulled Jackie and Brenda into the front yard to look up at the stars. She hugged them both tightly. In all the turmoil and chaos, she had forgotten what it was like to spend time just looking up at the night sky. "Look there, girls, a falling star!" Katie said as she pointed to a meteorite winding its way through the sky. Yes, the future was full of possibilities for all of them.

That's kind of a different story for Easter Sunday. But you know something, Easter is all about undeserved and merciful blessings. It's about not letting our disbelief get the better of us and pull us down. It's about thinking one thing and then realizing that we were totally wrong, that we gave up too soon, and that we made a judgment call before we had all the information. It's about understanding that we had all the information that we needed all along and still, we worried about the outcome, even though there was nothing we could have done about it. Easter is about things being out of our control, thinking about how wrong things are. Only to be blind-sided by how things are actually the way they are supposed to be. Choosing to live in darkness even when we are surrounded by light.

How do we deal with our unbelief? Don't try to pretend that it never happens, because it happens to all of us more often than we care to admit. We look at the chaos whirling around us and believe we got it all wrong. Maybe there isn't a God after all, and maybe we are just fooling ourselves. Maybe Jesus was just a good man who lived 2000 years ago and taught good things to people and healed the sick. Maybe he did die on a cross. Maybe he didn't. Maybe someone really did steal his body from the grave. Maybe we have all been tricked and we are just the result of an impossible set of circumstances that physics has a difficult time explaining. What do we do with the empty tomb? What is the big difference between a believer and a non-believer? Does being a believer mean that we never, ever have doubts about our belief?

Everything we are as believers or non-believers boils down to this one morning in history. Even non-believers can accept that the tomb was empty when Mary and her friends showed up on Easter morning. What separates us all, is how that tomb got to be empty. Were the events of that morning directed by God or by humans? And that is a hard, hard question. But we fail in our faith if we take a default answer without really drawing a conclusion in with own souls. It isn't about what our preacher believes. It isn't about what our parents told us. It isn't about what our Sunday School teachers may have taught us. It is about what We actually believe. Faith is based on first-hand knowledge. We ask ourselves honestly, "Do I believe that Jesus was dead for three days and was then resurrected? Do I believe that there is a God, and that God has a plan for me? Do I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins and rose again on the third day, so that I could be welcomed into the presence of God? Do I believe in the Easter event? Can I say in all truth that He is risen! He is risen indeed?" Or do I believe it solely because a preacher, the Bible, or some other human authority tells me that is the way it is? Do I have a first hand relationship with my Creator that provides me with the inside scoop on truth?

If we have ever struggled with this, welcome to being human. Welcome to an existence where we insist on believing what our eyes see, our ears hear, our nose smells, our fingers feel, our tongue tastes. And also welcome to part of our humanness that can see beyond our five senses and find the ability to step in belief, the acceptance that we have a soul. And that God finds that soul so

precious that he was willing to die so that the soul could be joined with his. Or not.

Our belief or disbelief does not change facts. When it rained in Parable, the truth that there were no clouds in the sky doesn't change the fact of the downpour. The truth that we can't see air does not change the fact of its existence. Are we able to step into the truth of Christ's resurrection even if we don't quite understand it? Even if it doesn't fit into the logic of our limited experience?

But remember, we have spent this Holy season trying to see these events through the eyes of Peter. Through a limited human experience where things are not quite what they seem and there appears to be events that fall outside of what we are capable of comprehending. That doesn't make them untrue. It just plays into our own system of disbelief.

Luke 24:9-12 speaks to us this way:

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.

10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.

11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Peter, along with the others, did not believe what Mary and her friends were telling the disciples. He didn't run to the tomb to find his risen Lord. He ran to the tomb because he didn't know what had happened and was looking for an explanation. Resurrection was not on his mind. Even after entering the tomb and touching the rags that Jesus had been wrapped in,

he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

This was not an "Aha!" moment for Peter. From the very beginning of this series, I have told you that Peter is so much like an 'every man.' Just like each of us, he doesn't know what to do with his disbelief. Jesus had told him what was going to happen. And then it happened. And then the women told him that it had happened. And just like us, he still has trouble with his disbelief. How is he any different from any of us? He had actually entered the tomb and touched the wrappings that had bound his teacher and friend in death. Still, he was cemented in disbelief. If Peter struggled so much even with this evidence in his hands, how are we expected to deal with it? How do we wrestle with this and still fall on the side of belief? How can God expect this of us? How can rain fall from a cloudless sky? How can we see the air? How can we step into the presence of God, sinful creatures that we are? How can God love us when our good deeds are like filthy rags? How can Jesus die for us? How can the universe exist? Why does God even care about us? Why does God even care about me? And how

can God, creator of all things, allow me to question his very existence? Precious Lord, help me in my disbelief!

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

John 20:26-29

Jesus knows how hard this is. But how hard it is to believe has nothing to do with the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The facts are not changed by our belief or disbelief of the events. The truth is, humans have a tendency to fall on the side of the fence where they feel the most comfortable. And we are often more comfortable in our disbelief than our belief. Being a believer is hard work as we fight against our basic nature. There are great moments in history that we know of only through the writings of others. Yet, we believe they happened. Why is this so very difficult for us? Is it because it defies logic or our senses? Why do we forget that our knowledge of the universe is limited by what we are capable of experiencing ourselves? Our bodies and minds exist and find comfort in a three dimensional universe that follows specific laws. But our spirits

pull at us seeking freedom from those laws. Even when presented with plausible answers, we are quick to fall back on tradition and refuse to believe.

In John 17, Jesus is praying for his disciples and says this:

13 “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.

14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.

15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Focus in on that 16th verse.

16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

Our biggest problem with our belief system is that we have our feet firmly planted in this world. But Jesus is telling us we are not of this world, just as he isn't of this world. We spend most of our lives trying to drag God into our world, instead of allowing him to pull us toward him. We limit his existence, put him in a box of our own making when he isn't even a part of this world to begin with. Not

only is this world not Jesus' home, but it's also not ours either. We are so fixated on our experiences through our bodies that we forget that it is our spirits that matter to God, and our spirits are not bound by this world.

No wonder we struggle so much in our disbelief. We attempt to rationalize our presence in a world that isn't even our home. In John 15:18-19, Jesus tells us this:

18 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

Do we really believe that the world loves us? Do we believe that the world is willing to die for us? Do we believe that this world holds any real promise for us? Do we believe that death still has the ultimate control of our existence? Jesus certainly didn't think so, and he died to prove it to us. And he rose again on that third day so that we can know once and for all that we are not fixed elements in this world, and that we have a home with him that has nothing to do with this world.

Here we gather together on this Easter morning, celebrating the resurrection of our Lord. Here we gather together to embrace the understanding that, like Jesus, we are not of this world and that he has made a way for us when there was no way. Let us stop trying to fit him into a world where he doesn't belong, and instead, look forward to joining him in the place that he has prepared

for us. Let us look into the tomb, touch the rags that bound him, and come away with the full understanding that God, our Creator, has answers for us that are not bound by the gravity of our physical presence. That our home lies elsewhere. The resurrection of our Lord guarantees that.

Hallelujah! He is risen! He is risen indeed!

God bless you all!

AMEN

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