

**Date: April 15, 2018**

**Scripture: Luke 24:35-48**

**Title: FAITH CLAIMING OUTRAGEOUS LOVE**

It was the power of the living God, that brought Jesus from the tomb, that first Easter two thousand years ago. But, as we talked about last week, it was almost more than Jesus' disciples, and others who loved him, could process. The disciples thought their journey with the Master was over. They had seen him crucified and laid in a borrowed tomb.

But on the Sunday after his burial, the disciples began hearing reports that he was alive. That morning some of the women had taken spices to his tomb to anoint his body. Strangely, they found the stone rolled away from his tomb. And when they entered the tomb, they didn't find Christ's body. While they were standing there wondering about this, suddenly two men in shining white garments stood beside them. The frightened 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? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" They remembered his words, but it was still quite incredible.

When they came back from the tomb, the women told the disciples and those who were with them what they had seen and heard. And Luke reports, "But they didn't believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense."

Was it a hoax? They were certainly not immune to superstition. Perhaps it was some kind of ghost. Then suddenly it happened. Jesus himself stood among them. The disciples were startled and frightened. Jesus said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself . . ."

The response of the disciples is a sermon in itself. Luke tells us that "they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement . . ." In other words, it was simply too wonderful to be true. He was alive and he was with them, right there in their midst.

It was an event that had never happened in human history. No wonder they had difficulty believing. Some persons still have that problem today. Many desperately want to believe but something holds them back. "Look at my hands and my feet," says Christ. "It is I myself . . ." Why do you suppose some people have a problem believing that Christ has risen from the grave?

**Do you suppose that some have difficulty believing that God really loves us that much, that God sent His Son to suffer and die and then be resurrected in our behalf?** Some of us are more comfortable with an impersonal God who is the Source of life and power, but not a personal God. The idea of a God with nail prints in His hands and feet, because of His great love for us, is an idea many aren't ready for.

The divine Creator of all that lives and moves and has its being, came down to earth and suffered and died, saying to us, that no one on this earth is beyond His love and concern. No religion in the ancient world made this claim, that human beings are loved by God. God was to be feared, God was to be obeyed, God was to be approached with trembling and awe. To think that God could be more loving than one's own loving parent, was beyond their understanding. But that's the outrageous claim of our faith.

In trying to deal with the meaning of the cross on which Christ died, the early church came to understand that those nail prints in the hands and feet of the Master, should have been in our hands and feet. But God so loved the world that he sent his Son to bear the burden, brought about by the iniquity of all. Can you believe that God really cares about us that much?

Bishop William Willimon tells of once visiting a man with only a couple of days left to live. He asked the man whether he was fearful. To Willimon's surprise the man replied, "Fear? No! I'm not fearful, because of my faith in Jesus."

The man continued, "I look back over my life, all the mistakes I've made, all the times I've turned away from Jesus, gone my own way, strayed and gotten lost. And time and time again, he found a way to get to me, looked for me when I wasn't looking for him. I don't think he will let something like my dying defeat his love for me."

There's a man who knew how much God loved him. Can you believe God loves you that much? That's one reason some people have difficulty believing in the resurrection: they have a problem believing that God really loves them that much.

**There are others who have difficulty believing that life really goes on beyond the tomb.** I like the way the Rev. Dennis Marquardt explains it. He says, "Most people have a hard time believing in a resurrection, because it just seems too incredible! But, only a couple hundred years ago if you had told your great, great, great, great grandfather that you could fly from New York City to Los Angeles in a little over 5 hours on a vehicle that weighed hundreds of thousands of pounds with over 300 people on board 5 miles high in sky, he would have laughed in your face; he couldn't believe this because it had never been done! If you told that same relative from a couple hundred years ago that men would walk on the moon, or that messages could be flashed to England or China in less than a second, or that a machine called a computer could do a billion math calculations in a matter of seconds or milliseconds, he wouldn't believe it! We easily believe it, because we take it for granted, having witnessed and even experienced these things over and over again . . ."

So many reliable witnesses have reported what they saw on that Easter Sunday and for weeks after that. It's simply too wonderful to believe, that there's a world beyond this one, another existence. An existence where, that which dies here, is resurrected to new life, there. Yet, that conviction is at the heart of our faith.

Sometimes you and I can be like the twin boys, who were conceived in the same womb. Weeks passed, as the twins developed. As their awareness grew, they laughed for joy: “Isn’t it great that we were conceived? Isn’t it great to be alive?” Together, the twins explored their world. When they found their mother’s cord which gave them life, they sang for joy: “How great is our mother’s love, that she shares her own life with us.”

As the weeks stretched into months, the twins noticed how much each was changing. “What does it mean?” asked the one. “It means that our stay in this world is drawing to an end,” said the other. “But I don’t want to go,” said the one. “I want to stay here always.” “We have no choice,” said the other. “But maybe there is life after birth!”

“But how can there be?” responded the one. “We will shed our life cord, and how is life possible without it? Besides, we have seen evidence that others were here before us, and none of them have returned to tell us that there is life after birth. No, this is the end.” And so the one fell into deep despair, saying, “If conception ends in birth, what is the purpose of life in the womb? It’s meaningless! Maybe there is no mother after all!” “But there has to be,” protested the other. “How else did we get here? How do we remain alive?” “Have you ever seen our mother?” said the one. “Maybe she lives only in our minds. Maybe we made her up, because the idea made us feel good!”

And so the last days in the womb were filled with deep questioning and fear. Finally the moment of birth arrived. When the twins had passed from their world, they opened their eyes and cried for joy. For what they saw exceeded their fondest dreams.

What a beautiful analogy of what awaits us when we pass to a better world with Christ. Some people have difficulty accepting that God loves us that much. Others have difficulty accepting the reality that life goes on beyond the grave.

**But even more significantly, many people don’t want to deal with the implications of two truths.** What does it mean if there really is a God who loves us without reservation? What does it mean for our lives, if life goes on beyond the grave?

Respected theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg once put it this way, “The evidence for Jesus’ resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it’s a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live.” Did you hear that? “If you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live.” That happened in the lives of those first disciples. Their lives were changed in a matter of days or a few weeks after their encounter with the risen Christ. From frightened and uncertain men marked by doubt and envy, they became apostles of great courage and self-giving. How about you? What difference has been made in your life, seeing the hands and feet of the risen Christ?

As a teenager, Joni Eareckson Tada enjoyed riding horses, hiking, tennis, and swimming. However, on July 30, 1967, she dove into Chesapeake Bay after misjudging the shallowness of the water. She suffered a fracture between the fourth and fifth cervical levels and became a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the shoulders down.

During her two years of rehabilitation, according to her autobiography, she experienced anger, depression, suicidal thoughts, and religious doubts. Then, one day she experienced the presence of the risen Christ. But even then, there were times she caught herself envying people who could do things she couldn't, like kneeling to pray. And then a glorious thought occurred to her. In heaven she will receive a new body including new legs. And the first thing she will do with her new legs is drop to her new glorified knees and worship Jesus. As many of you know, this experience with Christ, turned Joni Eareckson Tada into a radiant witness to God's mercy and grace.

Have you encountered the risen Christ in your life experience? Has it caused you to take more seriously your walk with the Man from Galilee? Has it had some effect on the goals you have set for your life? After all, if life is indeed eternal, some of our goals are going to seem awfully short-sighted and self-serving!

Those who have seen the hands and feet of the risen Christ and live their lives in the light of eternity, never run out of a purpose for life. God really does love us that much. Life really does go on beyond the tomb.

That wonderful British author Leslie Weatherhead once wrote: "For the Christian, the enheartening truth is that Christ defeated man's last enemy and still lives, the conqueror over pain and sin and death. This leads the Christian to believe that evil does not have the last word for him either, and that he will find unspeakable joy at the end of his journey with all that seems hostile to love, woven into a plan greater than his present power to perceive."

God really does love us that much. Life really does go on beyond the grave. Has it changed your life to know that Jesus is alive? Maybe you haven't yet opened your heart to God's love and the good news of the Easter season. Christ is alive. Hallelujah. Trust, Believe, and have an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.