

“The Heart of the Story”

Sermon 6: The Resurrection (ch 27)

April 5, 2015 (Easter)

(Mk 16.1-3) On Friday they crucified him, but because of the Passover holiday they couldn't prepare the body for burial. So on Saturday evening these ladies go out and buy some burial spices to spread over Jesus, because they expect his body to stink. And really early Sunday morning these ladies head for the tomb. Now his body is supposed to be in a small cave, with this huge stone rolled in front of the opening. So the ladies are concerned about how they'll get the stone moved.

(Mk 16.4-6) But when they get there it had already been moved by somebody, or something. That was weird. And when they step into the tomb they see this strange young man, but no body, no Jesus. The young man scares the bejeegers out of them. So he says, “It's okay (angels had to say that a lot), I know you are looking for Jesus. This isn't his address any more. He left earlier.” Would that blow your mind? And then Jesus starts appearing – to the women, to the disciples, to others. Now guys, if that's a true story ... then it's really good that you're here this morning.

What a difference a week makes. If you were here last week we started out by looking at the “triumphal entry.” One week earlier, the Sunday before, Jesus gets on a donkey and makes this grand entrance into Jerusalem. The crowds are excited, Jesus' followers are excited – and Jesus is crying. It's weird. (Lk 19.42) His heart is broken. And he says, “How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. If you only knew what peace really means. If you only knew what real peace will cost. But it's not what you think it is, and it's not where you think it is. So right now, peace is hidden from your eyes.” So his followers are cheering, and Jesus is weeping. It's a weird scene.

But what a difference a week makes. On this Sunday, Easter Sunday, his followers are crying, and Jesus is stoked. Now I think we tend to make Easter a little too somber, too solemn. I read one guy who calculated that the first Easter was on April the 1st. I don't know – but it's kind of a cool idea. Because the resurrection has to be the best April fools ever! “I'm back!” (I think the picture would have been better had they put a pair of sunglasses on Jesus.) It's not April fools because they thought Jesus was

dead, and he really wasn't; it was April fools because they thought death was a real problem; and it isn't.

Did you hear that the guy who wrote the Hokey Pokey died? It was awful. They were trying to get him in his coffin. They put his left leg in ... and that's when all the trouble started. Well that ... really happened with Jesus. They put his body in, and 3 days later all the trouble started. He wouldn't stay dead! Guys we make it too somber, too solemn. There had to be a grin on his face when he'd show up, and their eyes would bug out, and their jaws would drop, and a few of them would have to go change their shorts.

Did you know that hundreds of years ago they celebrated "Holy Humor Week"? On Easter Monday, we'd all get together and tell jokes, because when God raised Jesus from the dead, he had the last laugh. So we Jesus followers would get together and play practical jokes on each other, and tell jokes, and dance, and laugh. I kind of like that. So ... Did you hear about the kid who was curious why they would always use lilies on Easter? After all, Christ "a rose"? Okay, that one wasn't too good. But I found a few Easter cartoons I thought were pretty good.

- Here are the guards at the tomb: "What do you mean that wasn't you?! Who just said 'Good Morning?'" Sorry about the resolution on that one. It was the best I could find.
- Or this when, when the ladies find the tomb empty. And one of them says, "Well I certainly hope you kept the receipt for these burial spices." Every church has a few of those ladies around.
- Then there is Thomas, the doubter. He says, "Listen, No one is getting resurrected! Don't buy into that nonsense! (That was edited for church.) I, Thomas, guarantee that ... He's standing right behind me, isn't he?" That's pretty funny!
- This one is not quite Easter, I just thought it was funny. There is Jesus at a poker game, and he says, "I raise you, Lazarus." You've got to admit, that's funny.
- Of course, here's how most people treat Easter today. This guy is reading the paper. The headline: "Jesus is back!" His response, "Oh this is just great ... I was gonna go golfing today!" I'll bet something like that crossed several of your minds this morning!

You ever wonder why Jesus left the stone rolled away from tomb? Was he born in a barn? You've got to admit, that's a little funny! And this humor fits Easter, doesn't it? This is a great day! Let me tell you why: The cross of Jesus proves God's love; the empty tomb proves God's power. The cross of Jesus says, "Greater love has no man, than to lay down his life for his friends." You cannot look at the cross without being convinced of the incredible, the incomparable love of our God. And you can't look at the empty tomb without admitting that when Jesus said, "I am the only way, I am the only truth, and I am the only life" ... well ... he has a pretty convincing case.

More than that – the empty tomb proves that he has the power to change us. I am going to show you a verse that we're going to unpack this morning. (2C 5.17) The Bible says, "If anyone is in Christ he becomes a new person altogether -- the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new." And guys, that's what it's all about. That's the heart of the story. "If anyone is "in Christ" he becomes brand new -- the past is finished and gone (do you believe that?), everything becomes fresh and new."

What if that were true? Let's make it personal. Let's read it together, but insert your name in the blank – because you are part of that "anyone." Ready? "If _____ is in Christ he becomes a new person altogether -- the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new." What if that were true? You see, the coolest thing about Easter is not that God can forgive your sins – which he does; it's that you get a do-over, every day. That's why it's kind of fitting that Easter is always near the beginning of Spring – a time when life kind of starts all over again.

You see, too many people stop at the cross. We want to be loved ... by God. But we're not sure we want to be changed ... by God. Listen guys: Jesus didn't just come here to tell you that God loves you – which he does. He didn't just come here to be a great teacher, and to show you how to live a better kind of life – which he was, and he did. He certainly didn't come here to start a new religion. He came here to give us ... peace ... which comes when he makes us brand new – the past is finished and gone, everything becomes fresh and new ... in Christ, every day.

Now, let me explain the mirror. I'm really not fond of mirrors. When I was young, I was really, really skinny, and when I looked in the mirror the skin and bones were annoying. Now that I'm kind of old, my problem is the opposite. And when I look in a mirror now, the extra here and there is really annoying. Now, I can still do okay if I prepare myself. If I stick my chest out and pull my stomach in and look at the mirror straight on, it's not bad. But every once in a while I'll catch a glimpse of myself when I'm not ready. Chest in, stomach out, side on – it's embarrassing. Mirrors are not my friends.

Do you ever really study yourself in a mirror? I don't find it fun. My face is a lot more wrinkled than it used to be. My hands too – it's kind of weird. I do have a chest now – a bit too much, but my chest is not so noticeable because of the oversized stomach underneath it. My arms and my legs are not as toned as they used to be, and there are scars and divots in quite a few places. About the only thing perfect on this body is the hair. You ever study yourself in a mirror? What do you see? Are there things you would like to change? If you are normal, you have a pretty long list.

Well, what if this mirror didn't reflect your body as much as it reflected your heart, and your soul? What if you could see into you? What would you see? You could see the bad stuff you have done. You could see the bad stuff you have thought. You could see the shame that you feel, and the confusion, and the disappointment in yourself, and the brokenness, and the hurt, and the loneliness. Do you look any better on the inside than you do on the outside? Would you like a mirror that reflected your heart?

I'm telling you guys, every one of us would see a lot of embarrassing stuff – every one of us. A few weeks ago we baptized 14 people right over there one Sunday morning. Every person we baptized had some sins that needed forgiving. In fact, a couple of them we had to hold under the water for a long time. But here's the deal, every person who was doing the baptizing had a whole lot of sins that require forgiving too. We don't get to wear shirts with "sin-free" across the chest. We are never sin free ... just "forgiven."

Let me use a pretty famous list to unpack this. Have you ever heard of the 7 deadly sins? There are pretty big, incredibly seductive, and extremely corruptive. (LUST) Let's start with lust? Anyone here have a problem with

lust? What if we throw in all the sexual sins, including porn? Remember, Jesus said, even if you “just” lust and don’t act on it, it’s still like you’re doing it with God. Any of you struggle with this one? Now, if 95% of you are not admitting to this one, then 95% of you are liars.

(GLUTTONY) How about this one – gluttony? Now it’s kind of mean to mention gluttony during Easter, isn’t it? Think chocolate eggs, and peeps, and jelly beans, and those Easter feasts some of us are going to enjoy this afternoon. Some of you are thinking, “You’re one to be talking about gluttony!” Hey guys, this is my list too.

(GREED) Here’s a big one, just about every American gets tangled in greed, badly. I mean, we are taught discontent. We are absolutely obsessed with newer and better, even when the old one still works. I mean, how much do you really need to live well? We’re out of control!

(LAZINESS) How about this one – laziness. These sins kind of bite, don’t they? And during March Madness this one is extra hard. I mean, a lot of us struggle with laziness anyway, and when we get an excuse, like March Madness, well there’s a whole lot of things we should be doing that we don’t do because Hampton is playing Manhattan, or North Florida is playing Robert Morris. Guys, TV is really good at seducing laziness, isn’t it? Unless it’s The Walking Dead, occasionally we just need to let it go.

(ANGER) Here’s another big one – Anger. You got any of that inside you. And when you are angry, “If I’m not happy, nobody’s happy.” That’s the way it works when you struggle with this one.

(ENVY) Then there is envy. Any of you struggle with envy, just this morning, walking through our parking lot? And you saw that new Ridgeline or Tundra, or maybe for you it was that Escalade, or BMW, or Vette – I don’t know what fires you up. Bottom line, we want what others have, that we don’t have.

Now, there may be some of you who are deluded, and you are thinking, “I think I’m doing okay! I don’t struggle much with those sins on your mirror. I think I look pretty good inside.” Well, if that’s what you are thinking – here’s yours ... PRIDE. Which is a real biggie; in fact maybe the biggest. It’s what got Satan kicked out of heaven.

Truth is, we could make the list a whole lot longer.

- There is BITTERNESS. Some of us carry around a lot of hurt. And sometimes, in fact a lot of times, that hurt morphs into bitterness. Did you know that bitterness is a sin against God?
- And there is LYING, and GOSSIP. There are a boatload of sins of the tongue. Any of you guys have some lies inside? Any of you ever engage in gossip? Did you know that's a sin?
- Just for full disclosure, I decided to throw SPEEDING in. Any of you guys ever sin while you're driving? I'm told I do ... a lot.

Bottom line guys: looking into a spiritual mirror is way tougher than looking into a physical mirror. We've all got serious flaws inside. In fact, most of us are pretty good at all these sins. We have a real problem, a problem we can't fix. We need some help.

**** Biker's Testimony #1 ****

Now that's pretty honest, isn't it? "I don't know if I'm okay." And if you are going to be honest, if Christ is NOT in you, you ought to be saying the same thing: "I don't know if I'm okay." Your sins may not be as spicy as the sins of those two guys, but to be perfectly honest, they are in no worse shape than any of the rest of us – on our own, before God. And if that's where you are, you're not experiencing much peace – at least the kind of peace that really matters.

So last Sunday Jesus was on this donkey, making this dramatic entry into Jerusalem. You see, the prophets had told them that that was the way the messiah would make his entrance, on a donkey, go figure. And they are expecting messiah Jesus to make ... peace ... to bring shalom. Which in their eyes meant freedom from the Romans; and prosperity again, for Israel; and safety from their enemies. Basically they expected their messiah to bring them life without trouble – that kind of peace. Which is still the kind of peace most people are looking for: some prosperity (at least enough to live well); and good health (God fix me and mine when we're broken); and some protection from our enemies. In other words, we expect our God to make our lives a bit more trouble-free. And Jesus still says, "How I wish that you would understand the way to peace. If you only knew what peace really means. If you only knew what real peace costs.

But it's not what you think it is, and it's not where you think it is. So right now, real peace is hidden from your eyes."

So ... we try to make our own ... peace.

- (START CLEANING MIRROR) Sometimes we look at this junk inside us, and we just try to numb the pain. Some anesthesia with pills, or alcohol, or sex, or anything else that makes us forget who we really are inside. And that will work, kind of, for a while. Until you sober up, or you hit bottom, and you realize you really didn't fix anything at all.
- (KEEP CLEANING) Sometimes we just try to keep so busy that we don't think about the junk inside us. Just stay busy: pour yourself into your job; or into your kids; or into some hobby like golf, or fishing, or whatever... Guys, it doesn't work. It doesn't really fix anything. Just smudges it over.
- (KEEP CLEANING) Sometimes we try to pretend the junk really isn't there. Just go read a bunch of self-help books. "You're really okay. In fact, you are really great. Those "sins" don't really amount to much" ... we lie, to ourselves. But occasionally we forget our self-delusion, and see that the junk is still there.
- (KEEP CLEANING) And sometimes we try to fix the mess ourselves. "I will conquer my lust – I'll never do go to that website again!" "I will stop being greedy; I will stop my gluttony, my laziness, my anger." We tell ourselves, "I can kick this; I can clean myself up. I can do it, on my own, if I try harder." And we try, and we try, and we ... can't.
- And sometimes we just try to make up for it. (RELIGION) "Maybe if I go to church enough." "Maybe if I do more good than bad, that will be enough." "I'm a good person." How many times have you heard that at a funeral? "He was a good person; she was a good person." "I'm going to try to do what Jesus wants me to do more often. Do more church. Do more good to people. Maybe I can make up for my sins; maybe I can earn the peace. Religion is all about the DO, do more, to make up for the junk inside."

Doesn't work. As much as we do to try to clean ourselves up, the junk is still down there. And – if we're smart – we have this nagging feeling that whatever we're doing just isn't working. Which is why religious people are often so dumb. We try to hide the mess underneath. We try to clean it up,

best we can – but it really won't clean. It's still there, just smudged up, kind of. But we all know the junk is still in there.

It's kind of ironic, isn't it, that Jesus called the "religious" people of his day "whitewashed tombs." (Mt 23.27-28) They looked to Jesus kind of like this mirror. Jesus says, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees (you religious people), you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness." That's this mirror, isn't it? That could describe a lot of us... If you only knew what real peace is, and how to get it!

One time Jesus told them a parable. (Lk 18.10) He says, "Two guys go to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee (the most religious person there was), and the other a despised tax collector (kind of the bottom of the barrel, spiritually). (Lk 11.11-12) So the Pharisee stands up, by himself (because he was better than you are), and he says, to God: "Thank you God, that I'm better than everyone else – thieves, crooks, adulterers, scumbags like that tax collector. I do it right! I do church, a lot; I fast twice a week; I give God 10% of everything. I am really, really good ... at religion."

(Lk 11.13) And then there's the tax collector. He's off by himself ... not because he's snooty, but because he's unworthy to be near the others. Jesus says, "He doesn't even dare to look up towards heaven. And he starts beating his chest – his heart, where all this junk is. And he says, "Oh God, be merciful to me, please. For I'm a sinner, and I can't fix me. So mercy is all I've got." (Lk 18.14a) Guess which guy found peace, the kind of peace that matters? If you only knew what real peace is, and how to get it.

Guys, you can go to church every day of the week, you can listen to endless sermons, and you pray till you're hoarse. You can read your Bible every day. You can try to do way more good than bad... But YOU can't fix what's broken inside. None of us can. Listen, remember? (2C 5.17) "If anyone is IN CHRIST he becomes a new person altogether—the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new." YOU can't fix the mess in the mirror, no matter what you try to do. But HE can, which is

why Jesus came here, and went to a cross, and was raised from the dead by the Father. "If anyone is in Christ" ... It doesn't say if anyone is in church, or in a Bible study, or in all these good works – which is all good stuff! It says, "If anyone is - in Christ - he becomes a new person altogether – the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new. Because only he can really fix what's broken. He's got the love, and he's got the power – the cross, and the resurrection.

(START PREPPING) You see, guys, that's what it's all about. That's the heart of the story. That's what Jesus came for. Not just to die for your sins – which he did. He came to make you brand new. So that the OLD IS GONE (** SHATTER THE MIRROR **) and the NEW HAS COME – Christ in you. When you are in Christ, then Christ is in you.

And now what do you see, when you look in the mirror? Do you see a new improved me? No! Now when I look in the mirror – metaphorically – I see Christ in me ... and guys, that's enough. And now when God looks at me what does he see? Does he see all that junk? Believe it or not, No; he sees Christ in me. And that's enough. That's called ... grace. And that's what it's all about. It's not about what I can do to fix me; it's about what God has done, and will do to fix me, if I let him.

I still try to do all that religion stuff. I do church, I do good stuff, I try to love people more, and I try to live a different kind of life. But now I don't do that stuff to make up for my sin; now I do that stuff because I'm grateful for what Jesus has done in me. (STEP ON THE GLASS) I'm still going to battle all this stuff, all this junk. But you can't write my sins up on that glass anymore. And what's really cool is this: having Christ in me gives me the grace and the strength to start winning a few more victories over all the messes. I'm still a sinner, in fact I'm a pretty big one. But I don't have to worry about fixing my sin, or making up for my sin. I can wake up every day, look in the mirror, and say "Thank you." "I get a do-over; I am a new creation; every single day I am a new creation." (2 C 5.17) "If anyone is in Christ he becomes a new person altogether -- the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new." Is that not cool?! Guys, that is real peace!

** Biker Testimony #2 **