

SLIDE 1. EASTER SUNDAY 2024

Teaching: A Lot Can Happen in 7 Days

Sunday March 31, 2024

Last Sunday – we began talking about what I was calling *the most important week in history* – the week that leads to this most significant day – Easter Sunday.

It began on Palm Sunday – more than 2000 years ago – that day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey – when the crowd chanted, “Hosanna” – “Lord save us” – and lay down palm branches symbolizing goodness and victory.

On Monday – Jesus cursed a fig tree and restored the temple to a place of worship – from the marketplace it had become.

On Tuesday – Jesus avoided the religious traps of the religious leaders of His day – warned His disciples about them, predicted the destruction of Herod’s temple, and told the disciples about things to come – incl His own return – one day.

Wednesday was a day of rest for Jesus – even if it wasn’t for the High Priests and Judas – who – on what some call “Spy Wednesday” - spent the day plotting Jesus’ arrest and disposal.

Thursday was busy! Jesus celebrated a last Passover Meal with His disciples and gave that meal new meaning – with Him being the true and final Passover Lamb who would shed His blood to save – not just His Jewish contemporaries from Roman subjugation – but humanity from its subjugation to sin and death.

We remember this meal and celebrate it today as the “Lord’s Supper” or “Communion.”

Jesus told His disciples many things that night around that table – that He and the Father were one-and-the-same, that He was returning to the Father, that He was the only way by which *we* could be reconciled to the Father, and that He would send the Holy Spirit to help us and guide us.

Jesus then prayed to the Father – in agony – in the Garden of Gethsemane – about a Plan B. There wasn’t a Plan B. So – out of obedience to God and love for us – Jesus stuck to Plan A: to absorb the sins of all humanity for all time on the cross for our forgiveness.

Judas arrived with the arresting mob. The disciples fled.

On Friday – Jesus was falsely arrested, accused, and tried by the High Priests and before Pilate. The crowd yelled, “Crucify Him!” He was flogged and sentenced to be crucified. He was nailed to a cross and died on a public hill called Golgatha.

His body lay in a tomb that Saturday. But...

A lot can change in a week!

From heralded would-be Savior – to tried and tested by the religious elite – to being betrayed by one of His disciples – to the crowd turning on Him – to being pinned to a tree – to suffer and to die – *to being raised from the dead!*

SLIDE 2. From an empty cross to an empty tomb!

Death did not keep Jesus down! Death did not win! Death did not have the final word! Jesus did!

He was the One who Isaiah spoke of (Isa. 53).

Jesus was alive and spoke to 3 women early that Sunday morning. They hurried away from the empty tomb, afraid and yet filled with joy, and ran to tell the other disciples.

SLIDE 3. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me" (Mt. 28:9-10).

Jesus was alive and spoke to 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus – at midday.

They were talking about Him (ironically) and then to Him - as if He didn't know what had happened in Jerusalem. So, Jesus explained to them all the Scriptures that talked about Him. He stayed with them until dinner when he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them.

SLIDE 4. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Lk. 24:30-32).

Jesus was alive and spoke to the 10 disciples in the upper room that same evening. The doors were locked because they were afraid of the Jews.

SLIDE 5. Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After He had said this, He showed them His hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord (Jn. 20:19-20).

Jesus was alive and spoke to the 11 disciples in the upper room – a week later. Thomas was with them. Again, though the doors were locked – Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

SLIDE 6. 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." Thomas said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn. 20:27-28).

Jesus was alive and spoke to 7 disciples fishing on the Sea of Galilee some time later at daybreak.

Jesus asked them how it was going. Not well – they answered. Like a biped fish finder – He told them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat. They did – and they could not haul in the catch.

John put it together, “That’s Jesus.” Peter jumped in the water. The others followed in the boat. Jesus had lit a fire on shore and asked them to bring Him some of the fish they had just caught. “Come and have breakfast,” He said to them.

SLIDE 7. *They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to His disciples after He was raised from the dead* (Jn. 21:13-14).

Jesus was alive and spoke to more than 500 others over the next 40 days – according to what the apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the church of Corinth.

Speaking of the resurrection of Jesus – Paul summarized that what he received he passed on to them as of first importance – that Jesus died for our sins, that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day – all according to the Scriptures...

SLIDE 8. *And that He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time... then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born* (1 Cor. 15:5-8).

Jesus was alive and spoke to a gathering of His disciples on the Mount of Olives – 40 days after His resurrection – and just before He ascended to His Father.

Like Jesus did for those 2 travelers on the road to Emmaus – Jesus opened their minds by explaining the OT Scriptures to them and how they pointed to Him.

SLIDE 9. *He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things..."* (Lk. 24:46-48).

Jesus was alive and spoke.

Perhaps the most convincing proof of His resurrection was the miraculous transformation of His disciples.

They fled. They hid in fear. They were jumpy cowards. Then they weren't! What happened?! Jesus rose from the dead! *Jesus was alive and spoke* to them! It all came together just as Jesus said it would! They were paying attention – and then they were PAYING ATTENTION. So – they witnessed. They were alive and spoke about *Him!*

Now, it's our turn. Because Jesus is alive and speaks!

The bible tells us that Jesus is currently seated at the right hand of God-the-Father – the position of power - where He holds all Creation together (Col. 1:16-17) and where He intercedes for us (Ro. 8:34) – before God as our forgiver and against Satan as our accuser – Jesus as the constant healing agent between us and God – and who – with God-the-Father - sent God-the-Spirit.

SLIDE 10. How does this triune God speak to us these days?

a. Through the Bible.

b. Through circumstances.

c. Through community.

Through the Bible.

The Bible is a collection of 66 books written by 40 different Spirit-inspired authors in 3 different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), representing a # of different occupations (incl. kings, poor people, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, historians, doctors) using 4 different literary styles (incl. history, poetry, prophecy, letters) over a period of more than 1500 years.

And yet this library of books contains one unifying message: That the God who loves you and created you also died for you and saved you.

And though the Bible has been systematically persecuted over centuries – it remains – and more – it has been the best seller as long as we've had books.

I love how Nicky Gumble put it in the ALPHA Course: "The Bible claims to be the word of God, seems to be the word of God, and then it proves to be the word of God."

And by that I think he means this: that the bible describes itself as breathed into existence by God – that it was 100% written by human authors AND 100% inspired by God; that the Bible has got a ring of truth to it - that it aligns with reality; that the Bible – put into practice – leads to a life of flourishing – that it goes well when I take God at His word and that it goes poorly when I don't.

So, is the Bible inspired or just a bunch of books written by a bunch of men? Does the Bible ring true or is it off the mark? Does the Bible prove itself reliable when we press it into action? Your call.

I choose to believe that the Bible is exactly what it says it is: the word of God – because I think it's a miracle for how it came together and remains – because it does seem to align with reality – that when I do this I get this and when I don't this I get the other – and because I've noticed – for instance – that it is better to give than it is to receive – that it is better to forgive than it is to begrudge – that it is better to love my enemy than it is to hate him – that following the Bible leads to a better life.

I know the difference when I do – and I know the difference when I don't.

Through circumstances.

I think God also speaks to us through our circumstances – particularly through loss and pain.

I think it is as C.S. Lewis said: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world...."

I think when we are suffering – we are faced with a choice: to move away from God because we think He is the source of our pain OR to move towards God because we think He is the source of our peace.

To illustrate the point – I will again borrow from the ALPHA course where Nicky talks about how God spoke to him/comforted him when his father passed away.

Nicky wasn't sure if his dad had faith. And so he prayed to God to show him something. As it turned out - his reading that day included Ro. 10:13 – which says: *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

Nicky felt like the Holy Spirit was saying to him, "Your father called on the name of the Lord, and he is saved."

At that moment, his wife Pippa came into the room and said, "I've been reading the book of Acts, and I think I've got this verse for your father." She said, "It's Acts 2:21 – *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

That verse only comes twice in the NT. I'd read it in one passage; she read it in the other.

3 days later – they went to a small group where they were studying a passage. Want to guess which one? Ro. 10 – and in particular – v. 13 - *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

And as if that were not enough – Nicky (days later) emerged from the subway and looked up to see a great big billboard which said - *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

He told his friend this story, what had happened.

His friend responded, "Do you think the Lord may be trying to speak to you?"

I believe He does. I believe that God speaks to me through His word – as I think and act upon it. I believe that God speaks to me through His word through my circumstances – as someone who shares my happiness and joy, as someone who tweaks my conscience when I have chosen apart from His word, and as someone who reaches out to me in my pain to assure me that He sees my pain, that He grieves with me, that He will be with me in it, and that He will redeem it.

Through community.

I think God also speaks to us through community.

I think the word of God – read on its own – *can* capture people's minds and hearts and souls – all on its own. It even says so itself.

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return empty, but it will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Isa. 55:10-11).

This said – I think it's best to read the word of God in community.

It keeps us from reaching false conclusions on our own – which is much easier to do when we don't have anyone challenging our thinking.

It keeps us in a people space where the Bible is valued – even when we don't agree on everything – and then when we don't – we have a chance to prove the Bible true by being gentle and kind and patient with one another (which is life-giving) – rather than being harsh and judgmental and impatient with one another (which is life-sucking).

It keeps us focused on the main things: That God loves us, that when we don't understand God or His ways – they are embodied in Jesus, that His virgin birth and the miracles He performed are proof of His deity, that Jesus lived a life aligned with God's best (though often not easy), that He died a death that forgives us and gives us life, and that He is coming again (who knows when) to make all things new.

So, let me ask you...

Have you heard God speak to you through the Bible? Read a story or a passage or a verse at just the right time – for you to hear what you needed to hear?

Have you heard God speak to you through your circumstances? Through another person, a song, a video... a billboard?

Have you heard God speak to you through community? Through a sermon or through the music or through a prayer or in a medium sized or small group time?

Maybe you have. Maybe you haven't.

But I think we can say this by faith: Jesus *was* alive and *spoke*. And Jesus *is* alive and *speaks*.

We just need to pay attention.

And then – be witnesses – *speak* about Him.