

Journey to the Cross: The Resurrection

Luke 24:13-34

4.16.17



Reflection questions... [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

*“When is the last time that you lost track of Jesus in the midst of a chaotic and dramatic life- circumstance?”
Perhaps you’re so overwhelmed with disappointment about the way your life has developed that you are unable to hear something else?”*

“We had hoped he was the one...” What do you do when what you are hoping in fails? Can you share a time in your life when something you placed your confidence in disappointed you? Were you more prone to disappointment or did you actually use it as an opportunity to re-evaluate what/who you were trusting?”

“What do you think was the importance of Jesus’ attempt to fix their faith in the Story? (OT and prophets)

“Does Paul’s admonition that ‘our efforts/labors are not in vain’ make you more optimistic about your participation in God’s restorative work in the world? How does it make our lives more meaningful?”

Teaching Notes...

“Christ is Risen!” *Easter. Resurrection Sunday.* It’s the one day of the year when people like me have permission to sound unpolished and foolish. I get to make really radical statements that I can neither prove nor fully explain. I get to savor it.

Our present reality almost demands the resurrection story. Real life makes it hard for fantasy/fiction to keep up! I get to announce news that is so good, yet sounds so ridiculous, that you desperately hope that it is true. I simply get to respond, **“I know, right?!”**

A couple of observations: the resurrection was not something that the early church considered in some special, *“annual”* celebration. It was a reality in which they were walking and working everything out, accordingly.

We do a great disservice to anyone being exposed to this message if it is simply offered as the *‘feel-good’* story of the year. After all, they tried to kill him in infancy, his parents were refugees, after a somewhat obscure, blue-collar career, he was hailed as the Jewish “Messiah”, he was rejected, by friends and enemies, alike, and finally crucified to put this whole, tragic delusion to rest.

In order to sit before this story today with any real hope of grasping its relevance, we must be willing to concede that...

... this kind of stuff only happens in a ‘God-story’.

Human logic and reason, alone, cannot account for what happened to Jesus.

... although not all of Jesus' activities were "scripted", they were "storied".

Jesus' actions were not forced nor prescribed, but they were "fulfilling".

... what we are witnessing is not some brutal display of senseless violence, but the most unreasonable act of love the world has ever seen.

The biographers of Jesus, though they are prone to offer us his life from their unique relationship to him, had (2) things upon which they could all agree: **first**, he was **dead**. Not metaphorically dead, not 'figure of speech' kind of dead ("You're so dead to me, Jesus"): clinically, biologically dead. (3)-days dead. Stinking dead. **Second**, *none of them saw it coming!*

Our entire faith--- the Story which upon which we depend to answer the really significant life-questions and which informs all of our responses--- **is launched from a place of impossibility.**

We are immediately stripped of our capacity to believe, based on our own constructs. **Why?** Because we would never have written this story. Our story would never have included human inadequacy and frailty. We would never have spoken in terms of "death and denial" to self. We would have, instead, capitalized on our collective ingenuities and powers to reason.

If you were a first century Jew, you divided life (understood life) into (2) specific epochs: "**present age**" and the "**age to come**".

Present age: marked by injustice, and spiritual apathy, and brokenness, and moral decline, and an ache for God to return to set things right.

Age to come: connected somehow to Messiah's coming and his intention of carrying out the will and desires of God and establishing that (peace) as normative. It would involve a judgment (a final 'no' to sin and ruin and dysfunctionality, and a decisive 'yes' to peace) and a resurrection from the dead for those who had put their hope in God.

The setting: post-crucifixion journey home to Emmaus. **The cast of characters:** Cleopas, a friend (possible wife) and an uninvited, annoying, road mate.

This story is **so** what we have come to expect from Jesus: willing to leave the masses and find those whose hearts are broken and desperate for a reason to hope; willing to patiently offer himself to us until we are able to recognize him.

He doesn't try to offer any explanations; he doesn't try to lighten the mood. He just journeys with them, asking questions, but most listening.

"We had hoped that he was the one who would redeem Israel..."

The cross was, effectively, the end of hope for them. Not once do we hear any of Jesus' followers saying, "*No worries. He'll be up and about in no time!*" Crucifixion meant that Jesus was 'not' the Messiah, the Kingdom 'had not' come, and they had backed the wrong candidate. We've seen this all before.

We all construct our lives in such a way as to envision the best possible ending, but often, that story collapses and the '*sadness is written all over our faces*': our marriage ends, our position is eliminated, our 401K tanks; "*At least you've got your health...*" until we get the diagnosis.

“Beginning with Moses and all the prophets...”

Luke is demonstrating that the story only makes sense as it is told as the great finale to the story being told by Moses and the prophets: how the Creator God was going about restoring the world through Israel, with that action focused on Jesus as Israel’s and the world’s true representative.

“They were prevented from recognizing him...”

They can “see”, but they can’t see. They can “hear”, but they can’t hear. This has been the prophetic condition of humanity, almost since its inception.

Resurrection is what makes crucifixion memorable.

“If Christ has not been raised, then all of our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless”.

1 Corinthians 15:12-14

That’s sounds unequivocal; painfully clear. If Jesus is still dead, none of this matters. It completely invalidates everything he said and did. I am to be ‘pitied’, Paul says, because I have spent the last, almost, (28) years of my life peddling a placebo. **But**, if Jesus is alive, I have to re-think everything: God, the world, my world, my marriage, my friends, my enemies, my vocation, my finances, my suffering, my sickness, my frailty... death.

“How did the early followers of Jesus go from the abject failure and abandonment to movement-makers? People who were lit on fire, fed to large animals, tortured, imprisoned, martyred?”

Something undeniable, something inexplicable, would be necessary to transform them from fear to courageous followers. Not an apparition. Not a vision. A visible, touchable Jesus (we have Thomas to thank for that). It is, for me, one of the strongest evidences of the reality of the resurrection.

The central Christian conviction and hope is that what the Creator-God did for Jesus at the resurrection, he intends to do for the whole world.

Paul uses the imagery of the *“first-fruits”* (1 Corinthians 15:20-) to demonstrate his understanding. At Passover, the first of the grain crop (barley) was offered to God. Presenting the initial crop represented your trust in a much larger harvest which was yet to come.

Resurrection is the total defeat of death and its leveraging power to keep you in fear for your life... of your life.

In order for God’s restorative work to be complete, it would have to address death. Paul calls death, *“The last enemy to be defeated...”* (1 Corinthians 15:26).

Death, in the biblical narrative, is never romanticized. It is always portrayed as the ‘great enemy’ of life. All throughout the story, “sin” and “death” are contrasted. Death, not as some arbitrary punishment from God, but as the natural consequence of cutting yourself off from God--- from life. Death as the antithesis of all of God’s good purposes for his world.

I’ve experienced my share of death [age 2 to 102]. I’ve watched too many people die. I’ve tried to resuscitate them and then be called up to do their memorial service. It’s never romantic.

“Be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is useless.” (1 Cor.15:58)

What you do now counts: creating beauty (painting, writing songs), teaching elementary students, working in hospitals, digging wells for clean drinking water, doing your job ‘justly’, caring for those in need... it will all carry over into God’s future.

Resurrection is something that you can only experience after you die. Resurrection life is something available only after you have considered yourself dead to everything else.

The good news of Jesus provides hope to no one until they accept it as true (belief). You don't have to be able to prove it or fully comprehend it ("spinning heads and heartburn!") You have to trust it. You have to start living as if it's true.

The message of the resurrection is: make sure that you're alive before you die; it's the only legitimate evidence of life after death.

The cross is not simply a senseless tragedy, but the revealing of God's posture toward us. We killed God and he still loves us. We tried, as best we could, to distance ourselves from him, but he keeps coming back to us.

"And this is the very message that we preach: If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is LORD, and believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved" (Romans 10:9-10).