

Have you ever seen one of those old timey movies
Where it's *abundantly* clear who the bad guy is?
They're always wearing all black or striped clothes like prison garb
And sneaking around with a little mask on
Like the Hamburglar from the old McDonalds commercials
[Hamburglar IMAGE]

The directors always go way over the top in making clear
That whenever the sneaky guy in black appears
You know that some sinister plot is afoot
So be on your guard!

This morning I want to say that when Christians think about DOUBT
We often typecast DOUBT like it's one of those bad guys in an old movie
We treat it like a threat, something dangerous, something out to get us
Our internal sirens start going off— warning, warning, warning
I think these tendencies are well intentioned, but ultimately misguided

Because what can happen—when we typecast doubt in this way—
Is that those in our midst who have the courage to express their doubts
Can feel alienated, or treated as if they are a problem to be fixed
And like Thomas—as Pastor Tom pointed out last week—
Feel like there's not room for them in the community of faith
So, when others who have doubts see that those who express it
End up isolated and leave the community
They conceal their doubts in some back corner of their minds
Terrified by what'd happen if they were to let it out (that's no way to live)

What if, instead of typecasting DOUBT as a threat or a menace or a bad guy
We thought of DOUBT as an investigator, a detective, an explorer
Someone who is on a quest for truth **[Indiana Jones IMAGE]**

If we re-cast doubt as an EXPLORER rather than a VILLAIN
We will open ourselves up to all kind of new possibilities
For growth and understanding of Truth
If all truth is God's truth, do you think God is threatened by our curiosity?

A Catholic theologian named Frank Sheed once said:

“It would be a strange God who could be loved more by being known less.”

It's in this spirit of inquiry that we're sharing this series *Room for Doubt*

We all have doubts/questions and we need a safe place to explore them

The church should be the safest place in the world to ask questions

My life changed as a 17 year old when three men modeled for me

A beautiful curiosity about God's word and God's world

Joe Mooberry, Jimmy Doyle and Jason Jackson (now on our staff)

Demonstrated to me that God could handle our questions—

And that safety to ask questions liberated me in my walk w/Christ

And led me down a road toward greater understanding;

A road that I'm still walking down in the company of the Church

This morning we are talking about Doubt and the Resurrection

There are three specific questions I'd invite us to explore together:

***What* do Christians believe about the resurrection?**

***Why* is it reasonable to believe in the resurrection?**

***What difference* does it make?**

Please open your Bibles to Luke 24

This morning I'm reading from the 2011 NIV

Our text will be on the screen

In reverence for the words of Scripture

Would you please stand as we read this aloud together:

Luke 24:36-49

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He 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! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. He said to them, “This is

what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

In the preceding context of this passage in Luke

A group of women go to the tomb, only to find it empty
Peter, hearing rumors of an empty tomb, rushes to the scene
And confirms their report, but does not see Jesus

Then, we have that wonderful road to Emmaus passage

Where the Resurrected Christ walks down the road incognito
In the company of two dejected and down-hearted disciples
Who explained to him—as if he didn’t know—what had happened
To this man named Jesus of Nazareth, whom they thought to be the Messiah

And the text says, “Beginning with Moses and the prophets” (our OT)

Jesus explains to the men that suffering, death and resurrection
Were always the plan for the Messiah

But it wasn’t until Jesus sat down at the table with the men

And took break, gave thanks and broke it
That their eyes perceived who they’d been speaking to
Their hearts were burning within them and they realized it was Jesus
And in that moment, he disappeared from their sight
Those disciples rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the 11 what had happened

And finally, after the unsettling news from the women about the empty tomb

And this unbelievable experience the two unnamed disciples
Had on the Emmaus Road
The text we just read tells us Jesus suddenly stood among them

Several observations about what we just read together:

1. Luke makes it abundantly clear in his description:

This was not a hallucination; no narcotics were involved; this was not a ghost
Jesus had not undergone some kind of spiritual resurrection
Jesus was dead and was—in front of them—now very much alive

He's walking, talking, breathing, eating, touchable, real and in living color, Jesus
Truly alive in every sense

2. The disciples did not see this coming

No matter how many times Jesus warned them this would happen
They didn't have categories in their mind to make sense of this
This was a wholly unanticipated event for them
Jesus "Why do doubts rise in your minds?" Well, Jesus, this doesn't happen!

3. Twice (on the road to Emmaus and now) Jesus points to his activities in
relationship to the Old Testament

He wants to underscore for the disciples that his death/resurrection
Is the fulfilment of God's plans and promises to Israel

So, all this sets up our answer to the first question:

What do Christians believe about the resurrection?

1. We believe that Jesus actually rose from the dead in a physical, bodily form.

When we say "resurrection," we do NOT mean 'he went to heaven'
We don't mean 'He's alive in our hearts' or "in memory of all who love him"
We mean that on the 3rd day, there was a warm-blooded body
Standing in front of the disciples

He had a physical body—it was definitely him:

He had wounds in his hands and feet and side
He was eating, drinking, able to be touched by disciples
[Increase tone] His body was definitely changed—
You'd think that after being whipped, beat up and crucified
He'd be weak; but here he is, strong, present, in control
His body was somehow transformed, freed from limitations

He was walking through walls, disappearing in a split-second

[Decrease tone] Jesus was resurrected in a transformed *physical* body

We're going to see more about this in another passage in just a second

2. We believe that Jesus' resurrection is a sneak-peek of what's to come for us

When we say in the Creed "I believe in the resurrection of the body"

We are saying that those who are dead when he returns

Will, like him, be raised from the dead

And those of us who are alive will experience a transformation

In our physical bodies

Paul says this explicitly in 1 Corinthians 15:51-55

1 Corinthians 15:51-55

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

Paul underscores this point:

When Jesus returns, dead folks are coming back to life

This means good news for graveyards

[Story of JD Walt's sons skateboarding through cemetery on Easter]

To summarize what we just said, what do Christians believe about resurrection?

1. We believe that Jesus rose from the dead in a trans. physical body.

2. We believe that, upon his return, the dead will rise & we'll be changed.

This is all good and wonderful

But if it's not true, then why abuse ourselves with hope?

Proverb: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick"

Leads to our 2nd question: **Why is it reasonable to believe in the resurrection?**

Well, quite frankly, it's not.

Even the disciples didn't believe, though Jesus told them what'd happen

And yet, those 11 grieving disciples went from saying

"We *thought* Jesus was going to be the one to save the world..."

To saying "He **IS** the one who has come..." & believed to point of death

Scholars call this shift in language/belief a *mutation*

A mutation is when you think about something in a particular way

And then you change quickly

If a friend tells you, "My boss is the worst" every day for years

And then one day tells you "I just love my boss so much"

You've witnessed a mutation—and mutations require explanations

So, the 11 disciples experienced a mutation in their understanding of Jesus

But the broader community—100s and 1000s of people—

Also experienced a mutation in the way they were talking/thinking

Both about Jesus *and* their understanding of resurrection/life after death

That requires a significant explanation

I want to quickly bullet out 6 of these mutations (Wright)—*hang with me*

These mutations are not *only* seen in NT (though they are)

More than anything, we see these mutations carried on

As the church grew & developed over the centuries (this is history!)

I'm only spending a minute here—just enough to make us ask the question

How on earth do we explain these mutations?

1. "Resurrection" moved from being a peripheral/fringe belief to a central one.

2. The expectations for what resurrected bodies will be like is sharpened.

Previously, didn't have clear/universal ways of talking about it

Then suddenly, language about resurrected bodies gets precise & uniform

3. Previously, there was lots of diversity in opinions/guesses about life after death

Suddenly, those expectations become uniform

4. The understanding of resurrection split into a 2-part event: 1st Jesus, then us.

- For those Jews who DID believe in resurrection, they hoped for ALL @once
But suddenly, in writing/worship/etc., they talk about it in 2 stages
5. Jews used resurrection as a metaphor for the end of exile, political freedom
That kind of language disappears
Now, resurrection refers only to raising up of bodies
 6. No one expected a Messiah to be raised from the dead (b/c no one expected Messiah to die)
Suddenly, a resurrected Messiah becomes central to Xian theology
And the resurrection becomes the thing that PROVES who the Messiah is

Here's the bottom line about all of this:

In the first century, we see DRAMATIC shifts
In the way a well-developed, articulate, diverse community
Wrote and spoke and thought about God and life after death

Whole communities of people don't just change the way they talk/think
Unless there is a clear, life-altering, precipitating cause

Any clear thinking person in the 1st century would have rejected these mutations
Had nothing happened
“Yeah, well, resurrection sounds great. But you know he's still dead, right?”

How on earth do we account for these 6 mutations within 1st century Judaism?

Well, the Christian community for 2000 years has said

That it's because what the disciples said happened, actually happened.
That there really was an empty tomb
That Jesus really did appear to his disciples and to 500 others
That they really did touch his wounded hands and side
And that all of this—as unreasonable as it sounds—
Is God's honest truth.

This is not an open and shut case.

Many kind & gracious people disagree w/my conclusion
But they do have to find a way to deal w/the facts of history
I'm trying to demonstrate that it's not crazy to believe in the resurrection

That there are significant historical shifts that require an explanation
And the resurrection is the most obvious & sensible answer

It's still a leap of faith; but it's not a blind leap. [PAUSE]

It may be reasonable to believe, but that doesn't make it any less radical.

And that leaves us w/our third question: **What difference does it make?**

At the Children's Museum, here in Tulsa, there's this foam set of building blocks
You set them up on 2 platforms—an even number on 1 side & then the other
And at the very top is the center piece, connecting both sides
And when you put it in place, it forms a perfect archway
That centerpiece holds together everything before it & everything after it

The resurrection of Jesus is that centerpiece—holding together God's past/future
When we come to believe and understand its truth
We see that the resurrection of Jesus retroactively VALIDATES
Everything God had done and revealed of himself leading to that moment
Remember what the scripture said: "Beginning w/Moses & the prophets..."
Jesus explained concerning himself... the story had ALWAYS been leading
To its climax in Jesus
Because of the resurrection, we know the truth of our story, our origins
But the resurrection of Jesus also holds together everything that comes after
So we see—held together in X—God's persistent love toward all he made

Because of the resurrection we believe:

That our world is the loving creation of a good and sovereign God
Whose intentions toward what he made are good;
That the state of our world is the result of our rebellion against God
And since the rebellion broke out, God's been at work to rescue/redeem us
To heal our world

Because of the resurrection we believe that God has not given up on us

That God has not aborted his mission
That in Jesus, God has begun the work of transforming the creation
That as a result of sin is given to death and decay

Because of the resurrection, we believe that no matter
How chaotic and disorderly and sinful and terrifying and hopeless
Our world can be
That we have a hope and a future
That death will be subverted, the dead in Christ will rise
That these bodies will one day be clothed with immortality

Because of the resurrection:

We reject fatalism, frenzy, fear and panic about the state of our world.
We grieve, but we grieve with hope
We are sober/serious about the state of our world, but we are not hardened
We are being renewed by the work of God's Spirit
We are counting ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ

And because of the resurrection:

We keep taking step after step
To do our best to obey the commission of Jesus
To share the good news, to believe the good news ourselves
To till the soil and plant the seeds
That all may know and submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ
Who is the earth's true king
And to whom one day all knees in heaven/earth will bow

To those who have not yet taken the leap and believed:

Romans 10:9- "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

To the church, I want to encourage you with these words from Paul – at the end of his most important and exhaustive writing about resurrection:

1 Corinthians 15:58- My dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

We don't lose heart. We stand firm. We give ourselves fully to God's work.

Why? Because the resurrection proves Jesus is the earth's true King.

Because death is not the end.

And because hell can't conquer people who won't stay dead.

Let's pray.