

Sunday April 9

Lesson 6: Resurrection Turns Everything Upside Down

Scripture: Matthew 28: 1-15

Context:

Today we continue our spring curriculum, “The Life of Faith.” In this second unit, “Wisdom and Doubt,” we are examining how faith helps us to bloom and grow. We may have doubts at times, and yet wisdom helps us to see a bigger picture of what God is doing in our lives. We continue to focus on the gospel of Matthew, and we end by looking at the resurrection narrative. Today’s lesson wonders at how the resurrection of Jesus has altered our lives.

The scripture today recounts the story of Jesus’ resurrection with natural events, angels with a message, and Jesus appearing to those who seek him. This resurrection narrative also attempts to explain how others tried to explain away the events and the significance of Jesus rising from the dead. Between these two sections, we have God showing the incredible power only God possesses and the salvation history God has for the world.

In many ways, the Easter resurrection account defies normal and scientific trained beliefs. How can a rising from the dead take place? It does not make biological sense. Thus, there is the introduction of the “hostile witnesses” with the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb and then spreading the rumor of the disciples stealing the corpse.¹ Matthew includes their account to give an answer unto those in the Christian community wondering how they should address the rumors going around them.

For years, there have been those who have tried to “prove” the resurrection. Or in some cases, argue the case the Roman soldiers provided of saying the disciples stole the corpse and then came up with a narrative to dismiss the story. Yet the fact of the matter is the case is not to be brought to a jury as the resurrection story is about faith.² God’s activity is not to be limited to the litmus tests we as humans devise. God will be God and will do things which defy what we know and can understand.

For us to appreciate the magnitude of the Easter story, we are invited to see against the backdrop of the entire Passion and death of Jesus. On Good Friday, the Messiah was brutally killed on a cross as an example to the world. God has the final say though: Jesus’ cry of dereliction from the cross is answered and his obedience to the uttermost is honored by his Father.³ God has made both the cross and the empty tomb, a symbol of God’s prevailing power and grandeur.

The message repeated by Jesus and the angel is good news: “Don’t be afraid.” The resurrection of Jesus changes the world because it reminds the disciples God is faithful and God is capable of incredible acts. As Jesus appears to his disciples in latter narrative, he tells them of their new mission and how they will be a part of his story. God will continue to be faithful.

¹Hare, Douglas R.A. “Matthew.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 328.

² Ibid.

³ 328-329.

Application

I love the title for today: “Resurrection turns everything upside down.” I cannot think of a better way to describe or talk about what happens on Easter Sunday as we celebrate Jesus being raised from the dead. The natural order of things is subverted, and death no longer has the final say. God shows up and salvation history is given a new twist and God turns the whole world upside down.

For any of us who like order, reason, and logic, the resurrection of Jesus rocks our world as we realize God cannot be contained in a neat, rational box. God is always full of surprises and God likes to throw a wrench in our thinking and understanding of what God can do in the world. God likes to turn our world upside down and resurrection certainly turns our lives upside down.

As the focus of the lesson is on how the resurrection has altered our lives, I invite you to think about the first time you heard about the resurrection of Jesus or the symbols which helped you realize the story and its power. I will never forget sitting outside as a child in Hope Hull after an Easter egg hunt, opening the various eggs which helped tell the story of Jesus. As we sucked on lollipops and popped chocolate into our mouths, we learned about the weird eggs which didn't have candy. They had things like a nail, which pierced Jesus' side. There were dice which showed how they had cast lots for the clothing of Jesus.

And then there was the empty egg, the one where there was nothing in it. It was the color of grey, like that of the stones and tombs in Israel. When we opened it and saw nothing, we all were puzzled and honestly a little disappointed. Yet we were told the empty egg represented an empty tomb, how Jesus was risen from the grave and he was all around. Something clicked. Jesus was everywhere! Death had not held him down. He was everywhere including the places in our heart where he lives and reigns forever.

Ever since that moment as a child, I have loved looking at all the different symbols we use to tell the story of Jesus' resurrection. There is the butterfly, which when released shows us the new life we have in Jesus. We have the flowers on the cross to remind us of how dead trees can receive new life. And of course, we have the transformation of the Alleluia box, where we unbury the Alleluias and we celebrate how Jesus has been raised from the dead, released into the world.

I think for most of us, even when we have our moments of doubts and despair, we read of Jesus' resurrection, and we are given hope. We do not have to explain the resurrection. We do not have to have charts and tables. God gives us the faith to know it happened because we feel alive just thinking about it and the revelation of God's deep love for us.

I will never forget of the time where Jesus' resurrection altered my life and a state I was in. A few months after my father's unexpected death, I felt numb to the world. I was able to say the Apostles' Creed and sing songs lightly. I could go through the functions of everyday living and make it through fine, completing assignments at school and performing my duties at church. I was blessed to have both a supportive school and church community, who understood the times when I wanted to withdraw and be silent in my grief.

Yet one time as I sat with a Teaching Assistant helping us prepare for an exam, he expressed his sympathy and asked what I was doing for Easter. I explained to him of how I would go home to be with my family and to be with my mother and sister. With a twinkle in his eye, he said, “Resurrection becomes such a sweet sound when you have lost someone you loved. Watch for it this Easter and know I will be praying for you.” Something within me clicked and I felt the Holy Spirit reminding me of how death never has the final say. God indeed turns everything upside down and reminds us of how God will not leave us alone to sickness,

loneliness, or death. Our God walks there with us and proves to us how nothing will stop Jesus from giving us new life.

What is your favorite part of the resurrection story? How does the resurrection of Jesus change life and death for us? Do you have a favorite symbol for Easter and the resurrection of Jesus? Why do you think God likes to turn our worlds upside down? What Easter tradition will you celebrate today?

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