

The Resurrection Speaks

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Acts 1:12-14

There are some events that just speak to us. Some events impact us. They change our perspective, and if we will listen, shape the way we think, and speak, and live. These can be small events that speak to us individually. Here's an event (wedding slide) from December 23, 1989 back when I had hair. That event spoke to me, and what it said was "You pulled it off!" "You did it! You found a beautiful girl. You tricked her. You married way up, and now she can't get away!"

Here's another event. This one wasn't personal. It was national (911 Slide). I don't even have to tell you what that event is. You recognize it, right? How many of you remember where you were at when that event happened? I can remember exactly where I was and what I was doing when that happened. That event spoke in a different way: It said "You may be powerful, but you're vulnerable." It has changed our lives.

Here's a happier event (Passion Slide). This is one that most of you have probably never heard of. It's from 2013. It's a conference called "Passion" where 60,000 people, mostly college students gathered for the simple purpose of worshipping Jesus. This event spoke to me. I had no idea what to expect, but when I walked into the Georgia Dome, they were reading Scripture and I heard 60,000 Christians roar in praise every time they read the name of Jesus. It said this to me: "We win." We win. There will be a time when all this strife and brokenness is over and we will all gather in unity and joy to give our Savior the praise that is due him. The battle is going to be over, and we win. Events can speak to us.

Today is resurrection Sunday. He is Risen. The resurrection of Jesus is an event that like no other event ever speaks. It spoke powerfully to the original followers of Jesus. It has spoken to millions and millions of Christians through the centuries. I would argue that it is the single most important event in human history. The resurrection has something to say, if we will listen, to each and every one of us that are gathered here today. No matter who you are or why you are here today, the resurrection of Jesus Christ speaks to you. If you are a committed Christian who faithfully worships and serves here at Perry Creek, the resurrection has something to say to you today. If you are maybe less committed, maybe you've kind of drifted away from church or from Christ, maybe it's been a while but you're here for Easter to see if God has something for you today, if that's you, the resurrection has something to say to you. Or maybe you're here and, to be honest, you're kind of skeptical. Maybe you're mostly here out of curiosity or to get your Mom off your back and say you went to church. The resurrection has something to say to you too! The resurrection has something to say to every one of us today, if we will listen. The resurrection speaks. And today we are going to hear what it has to say.

We are going to do that by looking at the most unusual Easter passage that I have ever preached! Turn in your Bibles, if you have them, to Acts 1:12-14.

This is an unusual Easter passage, because this passage isn't the story of the resurrection from one of the gospels. It's not the Apostle Paul talking about the theology of the resurrection. It's not Peter preaching about the resurrection. In fact, it's not a story or discourse at all. Rather this passage is nothing more than a list, a list of people who had gathered after the Resurrection to pray.

This list is very significant, because this is the first recorded time after Jesus' resurrection that all his key followers were gathered together. In the very next chapter, the Holy Spirit is going to come on these very people. He's going to fill them with fire and courage, and they will be the ones that Jesus uses to start his church. But for now, they are gathered after the resurrection to pray. Who these people are and where they are gathered tell us a great deal about the kind of people Jesus used to build his church, the kind of people the resurrection was for. Each one of these had seen the resurrected Christ, and the resurrection had spoken to each of them in a different way.

What we are going to do today is this: We are going to read this list in Acts 1:12-14, and we are going to look at three people on this list: three people that represent the three types of people that are gathered here today for Resurrection Sunday. We're going to see who each of the people represent, what their story is, and what the resurrection said to each of them. We'll talk about what this has to do with you and me as well.

So let's just read Acts 1:12-14. Luke, the writer of the gospel of Luke, is telling this story. At this point in the story, the Resurrection has occurred (about 40 days earlier). Jesus has met his disciples in Galilee in the Northern part of Israel. He told them to return to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. Now Luke tells us this:

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.
- Acts 1:12-14

Today we are going to look at three different types of people that the Resurrection speaks to, represented by three different individuals on this list that Luke has given us. There may be a couple dozen people mentioned in this list, but we are just going to look at three specific types of people and how the Resurrection spoke to them. The first is this:

1. The Faithful

In other words, faithful followers of Jesus Christ: Those who have stuck with him over time through thick and thin. Those who have persevered, the faithful. They are represented by someone in verse 14. Look at what Luke says there:

*They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and (here is our faithful one)
Mary the mother of Jesus,
- Acts 1:12-14*

Mary represents the faithful followers. If ever there was a faithful follower of Jesus, it was Mary. She is the picture of loyalty.

She was loyal to Jesus from the beginning, actually before the beginning. If you know the story, when the angel Gabriel comes to her and tells her she is going to conceive the Son of the Most High out of wedlock and at great cost to herself, she says "May it be to me as you have said I am the Lord's servant." That is faithfulness. She never ever departed. Mary was there for Jesus' birth (as all mothers are!). She was there for his first miracle, when he turned the water into wine at Cana. She was there during his ministry. And she was there when he was crucified.

Did you notice that when Kelley read the story? Isn't that a touching, intimate, human moment? There's Mary in a dangerous place, where only one of the twelve disciples would even dare to go. She's clearly weeping, doubtless confused, but she's steadfast and unmoving. Jesus sees her and also sees his disciple John and says "Woman, behold your son .Son, behold your mother." Jesus is saying "Take care, John, of my original disciple, my most faithful follower." Mary was a faithful follower to the death.

But as we all know, death wasn't the end. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead and rolled up his grave clothes. The angel rolled the stone away, terrified the guards, and sat on the stone like it was a bar-stool while he waited for the women to get there. That angel had a simple message for them: He is Risen.

Yeah, he's risen! When Jesus appeared to Mary, his Mom, in the resurrection, that resurrection spoke to her. It gave her a message to proclaim. I don't know how you say this in Mary's native tongue, but I'm pretty sure the message Mary got from the Resurrection was these four words: "I Told You So!"

"I told you he was the Son of God. I told you his birth was miraculous. I told you my Son was everything he claimed to be. I told you the cross couldn't be the end!" I stuck with him, and I told you so! Drop the mic, Mary! Actually, I don't know if Mary would have said all that, but she was a Jewish Mom, so maybe.

But seriously, "I told you so." I don't mean that in a sassy way. I just mean her faith was confirmed. Her loyalty to stick with Jesus, when almost no one else would, was verified, was authenticated

and bolstered by the Resurrection. She had to receive that news with such joy! The resurrection spoke to her. It told her to rejoice, because she had been a faithful follower!

My good friend, Uys VanDerwestuizen, was like Mary, a faithful follower. Uys was an elder in our church in Zimbabwe. He was one of those people who came to Christ at an early age and seem always to be faithful. He loved the Lord. He wanted to reach our district with the gospel. To my knowledge, he never drifted. He stuck with Jesus through thick and thin, even when it cost him. Even when other people were paying bribes and doing underhanded things to survive, Uys tried to do what was right. The last few years were especially hard on Uys, with political violence and financial pressure. I had hoped to see him when we went to Zimbabwe a couple of months ago to encourage him. But the day after we arrived, someone radioed us to say that Uys had just passed away from a heart attack.

From an earthly standpoint, it was a tragedy. He was only 52 years old. He had a family to support. He had much of his life ahead of him. So we might look at Uys' death from an earthly standpoint and say "What a tragedy! What a waste! It's not fair!" But I don't think that's the way Uys sees it at all! Because if I know anything about the promises of this book, Uys is now in the presence of his Savior in a place that the Bible calls better a place it says is so glorious that it makes the sufferings of this world too trivial to mention! I'm pretty sure that, like Mary, what Uys is saying up there is "I told you so!" I knew it was real! I'm so glad I invested my life in Jesus! I'm so glad that I was a faithful follower!

Maybe you're a faithful follower today. Maybe you are someone who came to Jesus years ago, and although you've been through difficult times and times that challenged your faith, you've never really wavered. You've stayed in it. You've stayed in your Bible. You've been faithful in your church attendance. You've walked with God through thick and thin. If that's you, the Resurrection of Jesus calls you to rejoice today! Jesus was the first person who was raised from the dead, never to die again. The resurrection was God's testimony that his promises really are true, even in the darkest of times, that Jesus was innocent and that life is truly found in his Son.

If you are faithful, the resurrection invites you to rejoice today and to say "I told you so" even if it's just on the inside. To the faithful, the resurrection says "I told you so". Now, the second group we want to look at is:

The Returning

Those who have known Jesus but, for whatever reason have drifted away, those who have not lived ideal, faithful religious lives, Jesus also uses them to build his church. Mary represents the faithful. The representative of the Returning is found in verse 13. Look at what Luke says there:

When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James

- Acts 1:13

These are the names of Jesus' original twelve disciple, minus Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus and hanged himself. The representative of the returning, those who have drifted away from Jesus, is right at the front of the list. In fact, it's the very first name Luke gives, Peter.

Peter's story is quite different from Mary's. On the one hand, like Mary, Peter was there from the beginning. He's one of those disciples that we can probably all name: "Peter, James, John - hmm Paul George Ringo." It's tough, but we all know Peter. He wrote two of the books of the New Testament, 1 and 2 Peter. He's the main spokesman for the Apostles in the early church. If you're Catholic, you think of him as the first Pope. Peter was a big deal.

But Peter wasn't always a faithful follower, like Mary. Not at all. Did you know that? Peter had deserted Jesus. He had been the first disciple to recognize Jesus for who he truly was. He was the first disciple to swear that he would die rather than deny Jesus. He was the only disciple to fight back when they came to arrest Jesus. He had more certainty more fight, more resolve, than any of the other disciples.

But as the night of Jesus' arrest wore on, Peter's certainty withered, his fight took flight, and his resolve crumbled. He realized this just wasn't going to go down the way he thought it would. There wasn't going to be any big resistance. There wasn't going to be a miracle of deliverance. Jesus wasn't going to ascend to the throne. What there was going to be was slow, painful death on a cross with Jesus' adversaries abusing him and ridiculing him. What there was going to be was watching the blood flow and the life ebb away in what seemed like the most disappointing display of powerlessness ever. Jesus wasn't going to work a miracle. He wasn't going to resist. He wasn't even going to speak up!

So Peter did. He spoke up. He knew that anyone associated with Jesus was likely to receive the same punishment that Jesus got, especially someone who had fought back when they arrested him. So Peter was lured away from his confession by the prospect of safety.

He spoke up denying his association with Jesus, not once but three times, and each time his denial was more insistent than the last. So that the last time, he called down curses on himself taking the Lord's name in vain and swearing in the name of God that he was not with Jesus. That is who Peter

was. He wasn't a faithful follower. He was a denier, a deserter. He saw that Jesus was going to die, so he dissociated himself from him. Then Jesus rose from the dead. The resurrection happened.

And unlike Mary, the resurrection didn't speak words of rejoicing and encouragement to Peter. It didn't make him want to say "I told you so." Rather, the resurrection seemed to speak doom. It seemed to speak words like "I am a failure. How could I have been so blind? I should have known better." Peter must have assumed he was done for. Jesus had said that "If anyone denies me before men, I will deny him before my Father in heaven" and Peter had just clearly repeatedly vehemently denied Jesus. He probably felt that he was beyond God's mercy.

But the message of the resurrection wasn't "You're a failure." The message of the resurrection for Peter, the denier, the deserter, was this: "There is Hope." Make no mistake what Peter had done was bad. He knew Jesus like almost no one else knew him, and he had deserted him in his hour of need. But Jesus wanted Peter to know that there was still hope. There was love. There was forgiveness. There was a place for him at Jesus' side.

So Jesus specifically reached out to Peter. Did you catch that when Kelley read the story of the empty tomb? After that night of denial, scripture tells us that Peter wept bitterly. But the first thing Jesus does when he's raised is send a message of hope directly to Peter. He sends the angel to say "He is not here; He has risen, just as he said. Go quickly and tell his disciples and Peter. That he's going to meet them in Galilee."

Jesus is clearly, personally inviting Peter back for the reunion. There is hope! John's gospel tells us that Jesus personally pulled Peter aside, brought him back to the moment of failure and had Peter affirm his love for Jesus three times. In the end, Peter went on to become the leader of the Apostles, the first one to confess Jesus amidst persecution and one who held his confession of Jesus, as Lord, even when he received exactly the same punishment as Jesus and died on a cross for his faith.

For the wanderer, the returner, the Resurrection has a simple message: "There is hope." There is hope because Jesus is risen. God has accepted his sacrifice. His blood is the New Covenant. There is forgiveness and grace and restoration and purpose at Jesus' side. I believe God wrote this passage and put Peter's name at the top of this list and moved me to speak these words so that you would know that this morning. There's Hope.

Maybe you're here today and you know that you have stepped away from Jesus. Maybe it was a temptation a specific thing that you knew was wrong, but you wanted the lifestyle or the experience, so you did it anyway and now you feel like a spiritual failure. Maybe it was an assault on your faith. Maybe you followed Jesus as a kid, but you entered college or the workforce and your faith was just beat down. It was a laughingstock. And so you stopped identifying as a Christian, stopped praying, stopped going to church. And maybe right now, God's Spirit is speaking to you, telling you that you are far from him. Maybe it was something you saw in the church hypocrisy or unkindness or rules that just didn't make sense to you, so you walked away. And now you know in

the quiet hours of the night you know on days like today that you need God in your life. And you are asking yourself how that can happen.

Maybe it was a combination of all those things. If that's you can I just tell you something: This church is full of people who would say "That's my story. I'm not perfect. I'm not your typical Christian. I'm a returner." I've found God in my life again. I've found joy and restoration in Jesus." They would agree with the resurrection in saying to you: "There is hope."

The faithful get to say "I told you so," but the returners get to say something even better: "There is hope." There is hope in the resurrection. Now, there's one more group addressed in this passage, and it's this:

The Skeptical

Those who honestly have questions about Jesus. Those who have questions about whether all these claims about Jesus can actually be real. Skeptics. If you are a skeptic today, did you know that the resurrection also speaks to you? It has something to say, and it speaks through the most unexpected of people, through a group of people who, before the resurrection, were very skeptical about Jesus. Let me show you what I mean. They are found at the very end of Luke's list in verse 14. Look at how he closes the passage:

They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and here are our skeptics here are the least likely people to be at this gathering of Jesus' followers and with his brothers.

- Acts 1:14

Jesus' brothers were there to start the church. Now at first that might not seem like a big deal to us at all. If you're like I was, you probably just assume "Of course, they were there. They're his brothers! If anyone would follow Jesus, it would be the people who watched him while he was growing up!" I mean we probably picture Jesus doing all kinds of miracles around the house, right? Fixing broken dishes for Mary. We think of one his brothers coming to him and saying "Jesus, my bicycle tire is flat. Could you just do that thing you do?" Isn't that the way we picture Jesus?

But that's not the way it was at all. John's gospel tells us that Jesus didn't do any miracles until he was at a Wedding in Cana when he was 30 years old. His childhood would have seemed a lot more normal than we imagine.

John tells us something else. He tells us Jesus' brothers didn't believe in him. In John 7:1-2, John tells us about a time when Jesus was trying to decide whether or not to go to Jerusalem for a feast and his brothers say "Of course, you should go if you're the real thing." Then John says in verse 3 "For his brothers did not believe in him."

Jesus' brothers were skeptics. I don't think they were bad guys. They were raised by the same parents Jesus had. They seem to be honest, plain-spoken people. But they were skeptical. They were saying "Can this really all be true? Can he really have done all those miracles? Is he really divine? Is he really all that?"

It reminds me of one of the kids in SS last week. My daughter was teaching. She said something about Jesus rising from the dead, and one of the little guys there just said "Yeah, that doesn't happen." So then, she tried to explain that this was Jesus. He thought about it and said "Yeah, it still just doesn't happen."

They were skeptical! Maybe that's you today. Maybe you're just honestly a little skeptical about all these claims about Jesus. Can he really be all that? Well, if that's you I would invite you to think about what the resurrection said to Jesus' brothers. What it said was simple: "Jesus is Real." Jesus

is real. He really is who he said he is. His claims are real. His teachings are true, because he said he was going to be killed and rise from the dead, and he did it!

I want you to notice how powerfully the resurrection spoke. Look who's there to start the church. Not one or two disciples who cooked this hoax up. Every one of the twelve, the women who followed Jesus, Mary his mother and his brothers that did not believe in him before he died. They're all here. Every one of them. Look where they are at. They are meeting in Jerusalem, the place where Jesus was arrested by the religious leaders and crucified. The most dangerous place on earth for a follower of Jesus to be - that's where they're at. Look at the depth of their commitment. Most of the people on this list, including Jesus' brothers, would suffer greatly for Jesus. Many would die violent deaths for insisting that Jesus was Lord. And none, not one of these people, was recorded as falling away from their faith. In fact, the more they suffered the stronger their faith became.

My point is just this: The resurrection speaks! It says "Jesus is real!" He welcomes the skeptic, like he welcomed his brothers. If you are a skeptic, by all means investigate the resurrection. Please! Read the accounts. Look at the facts. See what they have to say. Our faith stands or falls on the truth of the resurrection. Investigate! Because if you do that with an open heart, I think you are going to join a long list of very committed believers who first came to faith in Jesus Christ by trying to debunk the idea that he rose from the dead. I think you'll find that Jesus is real. And if he's real, that changes everything.

Guys, what I'm saying today is this: The resurrection speaks. It has something to say to each and every one of us. For some, it may confirm your faith. For some it may give you hope. And for some, the Resurrection may convince you of the truth that Jesus is real. That's why we celebrate today. What is the resurrection saying to you?