

Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church
By Burt L. Burleson
“Just in Case You Were Wondering”
Luke 24: 1-2
April 8, 2007

Do you ever wonder? ... about the resurrection, I mean? If you and I sat down somewhere and it was just the two of us and I promised not to tell... what would you share with me about the resurrection and all you have wondered? Or all you have questioned? Or all you have doubted?

You'd have something to tell me, I bet. Something about how you've thought some or maybe a lot about whether or not it happened literally. Or you'd tell me about a season in your life where you punted on the whole idea. Or maybe you'd say, **“You know, even now... as much faith as I have, sometimes... maybe in dark times... I think, is it all true?”**

I know we don't tend to say these things in church, at least not out loud... but sometimes we think them or we've thought them We wonder.

It just seems par for the course of humanity. And not just because we're descendants of modernity... That way of thinking that caused us all to start saying, **“You're going to have to prove that one to me”** ... that legacy of suspicion that we inherited and doubt that seems now to be in our DNA can't be all to blame for our wondering.

Because those ancient first followers wondered, too. Even those who'd seen Lazarus hop right out of his tomb just a few weeks before... they wondered. Even those who heard Jesus speak of a resurrection wondered. Read the Easter story in any gospel and there's plenty of wondering going on... just in case you were wondering. You aren't alone in your wondering.

In the resurrection narratives... all the ladies wonder when they don't find a body. **“HMMMMM???”** No one says, **“Hey, he arose just like he said. How 'bout that.”**

In Mark, even after they see a young man dressed in white ... they're so confused, Mark says, they go home and don't tell a soul. That's how he ends the whole story. **“They're scared. The End.”**

In Luke, as we heard earlier, the women are convinced and go tell the others and the others say, **“What a bunch of baloney. That's a bunch of nonsense.”** But later on Peter thinks... **“I'll go take a look,” and when he sees that the tomb is empty... he wonders about it.**

Sure he does... because dead people generally stayed dead, even back in those days. And folks didn't walk through walls... even back in those days. So... even back in those days, there's all sorts of wondering going on... There's not a single appearance or post-resurrection story that doesn't imply some ambivalence.

They don't recognize him... They think he's a ghost... They don't believe what their eyes or their best friends tell them.

So... just in case you were wondering... you aren't alone in your wondering. From the beginning and since that first Easter, everybody has been wondering. I've wondered plenty.

But just in case you're wondering about what I believe... I believe that on that morning... Jesus, who had been crucified and was dead and buried, ... was walking around... and talking... and touching... even ate some fish on Sunday night.

Someone has wondered, **“If there had been a video camera there that first day, what would it have recorded?....”** Well I've wondered... but I believe that you'd see Jesus, body and soul.... You'd see Jesus of Nazareth with his body, transformed though. It was somehow filled up with more of something... a different, finer energy. You know how it is when you feel something beyond you flows into you. You feel lighter. That might be just a taste of what Jesus knew completely on the first Easter.

As cynical as I can be and as much as I've wondered ... I believe in the resurrection.

And not as some mirror of normal processes of biological life or some reflection of springtime. I believe Jesus came to life and not simply in some existential way in their hearts or where he "lived on in the memories of those who loved him." They saw the Lord. That was their testimony. **"We've seen the Lord."**

In case you're wondering about the resurrection... I believe it... and I hope it helps. That's part of why anyone comes to believe, huh. Someone tells them what they know. Paul, within 15-20 years, is saying to folks... **"Look, this whole resurrection thing is hard but it's central to our faith and if you're wondering (and lots of them were), go ask some of those who saw Jesus; they're still alive. Maybe that'll help."**

I've come to believe it, in part, because someone else did. My parents told me it was true. And my Sunday School teacher, Leo Lance, told me it was true. And Carl Duck, the pastor who baptized me, told me it was true.

And so did my mentors... Bill Nichols and Eddie Ally and George Gaston, which really helped me when I was wondering plenty as a young person, to know they believed it.

C.S. Lewis said it was true. And Karl Barth. And so did plenty of other geniuses ... who helped me when I was wondering. For all the wondering humanity has done, it's also done a lot of believing and it's sure helped me to know that.

Hope it helps you some... but I'd understand if you're wondering remains. Hearing it from another isn't always enough. It wasn't enough for Thomas, remember. In John's story of the resurrection he hears it from his best friends and he sure wanted it to be true... but he says, **"That's not quite enough... I'll have to see for myself."** So, like Thomas, ... lots of folks, having heard, still wonder... and need to see it.

And if you're there... in a Thomas kind of place... take heart in the part of the story where Jesus shows up just for him. He says, **"I'll need to see."** And Jesus shows up for him and says, **"Look here... touch here... believe!"**

There's a spiritual reality operating. The way Jesus said it was: **"Ask and you'll receive. Seek and you'll find. If you'll knock, you'll find that the doors start opening."**

So, take heart Thomas... keep wondering, do keep wondering... keep asking and looking...

God is more interested in your faith and in your becoming than you are. Keep searching for what is true. Simone Weil once said that **"though a person may run as fast as he can away from Christ, if it is toward what he considers true, he runs in fact, straight in to the arms of Christ."**

So, in case you were wondering, your wondering is taking you someplace. Keep wondering... ask, seek, and knock... I promise you the answers will find you.

We all wonder... and really... we should all remain there. **"Peter saw the empty tomb and wondered what had happened."** And I think, later that evening, he saw and talked to the risen Christ and believed and... continued to wonder what had happened.

What else can we do in light of this reality but as the hymn writer has said so well... **"Be lost in wonder."**

Lost in it... because every explanation and every doctrine and every apology and any attempt to know this and nail it and hold this is going to come up short. So, just in case you're wondering this morning... your wonder, your absolute and astounded wonder is the only right response.

On Friday, Jesus dies and dead is dead. He is not play-acting. He is not resting.

The Son of God... the Son of Man... is dead. The Holy One, the Incarnate One, totally and completely identified with the human condition... had a pulse, a beating heart, brain waves, and then he didn't.

And the truth we wonder at today is that something changed when Life itself died. Our faith is that, in this story and this act, Christ enters into suffering, into darkness, into death... and by suffering, through darkness, and by death... defeats and transforms them. They are raised up with him.

Human suffering isn't removed... mine hasn't been... has yours? No... but what we proclaim, especially this day, is that it has been transformed. He assumed it... and so He redeemed it.

Defeat is the victory...

And that end is now a beginning.... And that curse is now a path

To true healing. (*Alexander Schmemmann, For the Life of the World 103*)

Can you wonder about that?

“Be of good cheer,” he said, **“I’ve overcome the world.”** The worst thing is now the best thing... it’s full of meaning. It’s foolishness, I know, it has always seemed so... like nonsense. Victory begins in death. He has filled up death with himself... Can you wonder about that? In Him, death itself has become an act of life... He has filled it with himself and with love and light eternal.

You aren't going to “get that”... but you can be lost in wonder before it. That death... this enemy, has been defeated by death and a new day has been ushered in by resurrection... and again, from a garden.

Have you ever noticed that? Creation begins in a garden both times. In the beginning... it’s in a garden that human kind is blessed with a world literally haunted with God’s presence and it is a gift to us and we were to stand at the center of that gift and bless it and offer it back to God (A.S.18)

But you know the sad story and we wound up somewhere East of Eden frustrated with the world... weeping just outside of meaning, where death, of any kind, only hurts... and only steals. And there we are lost... the lump in the throat you’ve known at the sight of great meaning is bearing witness to something eternal you sense somewhere beneath your knowing.

And every longing you’ve ever had and every hunger you’ve ever known... is just a hint of your one true longing and hunger to have again life in its fullness back in the garden.

On the first Easter, in another garden, a new creation happens. God joined us out there East of Eden and his end was our beginning... his death became our life and everything was transformed... what God assumed... God transformed. And there is so very much to wonder about.

And you aren't going to get it with your thinking... though it’s sort of fun to try and we should... think. God gave us intellects to work on just such beautiful things... that death has been conquered by death. You should think on that some... That we join him in his death, that we may join him in his life... think on that some...

But mostly, you should just move deeper in wonder and into love. Our journey begins and ends in wonder and love.

Did you know that the New Testament never presents Christianity as a new religion? Did you know that? It was never about new rites, rituals and such. First century folks even called Christians atheists. **“You guys aren’t doing it right.”** (A.S. 19)

It was because Jesus didn't come to inaugurate a new religion. He came to inaugurate a new creation... new life (A.S. 19-20). He did not say, **“The things you believe about me give you new life...”** what he said was, **“I am the way, the truth, the life... I am the resurrection.”**

You can think on Christ, but mostly you need to love him and be in awe that **“in Christ, life in its fullness is returned.”** (A.S. 20) What we lost in one garden we got back in another.

I suspect... I know, really... that some of you are thinking something like, **“I know this... I believe it happened... but what I’m wondering about is why I don’t seem to be able to live in it? And why the world can’t????”** You’re wondering.

Well... I guess as it was in the beginning, is now until the end. There is cooperative work for us to do. There are yeses for us to offer. We must make that journey to that garden. We can go to that garden where a new creation has begun...

We can see that heavy rock... that impossible rock, with it's impossible downward pull... moved. It is no more.

We can open our ears and begin to listen for angels bearing good news. We can ask, seek, and knock.

We can open our eyes and begin to look for the presence of a Living Lord who does come to us and who will bless us and who will fill us. Christ is not just in the world ... alive, and in the church... alive He is in you ... alive. Christ is in you... and you can lose yourself in wonder over that.

THE WORD ETERNAL The One who was ... in the beginning ... is in you. Our task is to marvel ... to be lost in *wonder, love, and praise*.

Just let yourself fall into wonder... Fall into gratitude... ... into love.

How did Paul put it? **“All our prophecies and teachings and all that... they'll all fail,”** he said. **“But love will never fail.”**

Love will not fail you. Love wins... that is the message of Easter. And so, what happened on that first Easter Sunday morning has everything to do with what can happen for you tomorrow. Nothing need be the same... Nothing is the same.

Christ is risen... He is risen indeed. And because of that, all things, including you, are being made new... Just in case you were wondering.

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