

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Easter Sunday - He is Risen!!

Hearts on Fire

(Luke 24)

Introduction: Fire...

Through the years, I've had the tremendous privilege of officiating at a few weddings.

At each of these weddings I have noticed a consistent energy about the couples that I marry, on the day of their wedding - and that is amazing.

It's amazing because if there are any two people who could more reasonably be exhausted, spent, out of gas – it is the bride and groom on the day of their wedding.

With all of the planning, preparation, details, lists, invitations, set-up, parties and more in the weeks leading up to a wedding, it is inevitable that the bride and groom will be exhausted. In fact, it is a system tailor-made to ensure exhaustion.

But, regardless of the activity level leading up to the wedding, not once have I ever had to wake up a bride or groom just prior to the ceremony to tell them it is time to begin.

Not once, has a bride or groom told me, in the hours before the ceremony, *"I'm just so tired."*

There is a dynamic at work in the heart of a man and woman about to be married that trumps what would be understandable exhaustion.

They are energized with the passion of hearts on fire.

Fire doesn't just happen. Something begins to burn with the right combination of heat, fuel and oxygen.

And hearts on fire are not spontaneous combustion events, either. The hearts of a bride and groom are ignited at the conjunction of love for each other, a launch into an unknown but exciting future, and a defining moment (the wedding).

This morning, we are going to watch a fire begin to burn in the hearts of two of Jesus' first disciples. As we watch their hearts ignite, see if your heart is not also set on fire by the same truth that ignited theirs.

Before we get there, though, let's take a step back from Easter Sunday morning into the scene we left on Friday evening.

Backtracking -

- Jesus died on Friday

Friday was the day of Jesus' crucifixion. He was nailed to the cross in the morning. He hung there until the middle of the afternoon. Around three o'clock, a spear pierced His side. The rush of blood and water out of the wound proved that He was dead.

The story of His burial is recorded at the end of Luke 23.

- Jesus was buried in the borrowed tomb of Joseph of Arimathea

Joseph of Arimathea asked for the Lord's broken body. Joseph was actually a member of the Jewish High Court (the Sanhedrin) that had convicted Jesus of blasphemy, which led to Him being taken to Pontius Pilate, who condemned Him to be crucified. It turns out that Joseph was a believer, only (as John tells us) a secret one.

Joseph laid Jesus' body in his own tomb, which was a cave hewn out of the rock.

Some women (not named here) watched where Jesus was buried late on Friday, and then hurried home to observe the Sabbath.

- The women prepared to embalm Jesus' body

On Friday evening and probably well into Saturday, these women occupied themselves preparing spices to embalm Jesus' body. By law, the actual work of embalming could not take place on a Sabbath, so it had to be put off until the first day of the week - Sunday.

Try to imagine the emotions of Jesus' friends during the hours after His death. The Bible doesn't give us much of a window into what they were feeling. But if you've ever lost a loved one, you know.

There is sorrow, low energy, grief. You feel numb. That's the way we feel after the loss of someone we have loved. That's no doubt how the female and male followers of Jesus felt.

Friday was awful. Friday evening they would have been inconsolable. Saturday was interminable, the longest day of their lives.

The only thing keeping the women going was the knowledge that they had this job to do. They had one last thing to do for Jesus. They would go to the tomb first thing Sunday morning and they would anoint His body.

It's funny.

There are exceptions to the rule, of course, but for the most part, following death, people fade off the public radar. Michael Jackson and Elvis Presley are still as much in the news as they were when alive. But, generally speaking, death ends the stories.

After he or she dies, someone writes a biography. And the biography always ends with a period, never with a comma.

The only exception to that rule is Jesus. His story wasn't finished at the conclusion of Friday afternoon's execution. As we turn to Luke 24 we enter the *continuing story* of Jesus.

Those grief-struck women¹ who had been watching the burial have come back to Joseph's tomb to perform the task they had given themselves.

¹ Before we walk any further through the passage together, we will notice who the main characters of this scene are. If you'll jump down to verse 10, you'll see that

It's Sunday morning, now, probably just before daybreak when they arrive at the tomb.²

The Wonderful, Old Story (Luke 24:1-12)

News that Proves (vv. 1-8)

A job to do (v. 1)

[1] But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared.

The purpose of their trip couldn't be clearer. They have come to anoint the dead with spices, perfumes, and special oils. It's a plan hatched by love, but they clearly came expecting to find a dead Jesus.

Imagine their shock at what they find when they arrive.

The women's discovery (vv. 2-3)

[2] And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb³, [3] but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus⁴.

First of all, the massive stone in front of the tomb had been rolled away. That was a shock! And then, they entered the tomb and instantly saw that their spices and oils were pointless. Jesus' body was gone!

there were several women involved in this narrative: Mary Magdalene - (the first to see the risen Lord) cf. 8:2 - seven demons had been cast out of her; Joanna - the wife of Chuza; Mary, the mother of James; other women also were with them, although we don't actually know who these "others" might have been.

² I would mention that "***three days and three nights***" was a term in Jewish usage that referred to any part of three successive 24 hour periods. Seventy two hours are not required between Jesus' death and resurrection to fulfill the prophecy.

³ A cave, hollowed out from the side of a cliff, with an opening large enough to climb through, but only while ducking down. We don't know how large the interior may have been.

⁴ Notice that He is described as the "Lord Jesus." This is the first time He is ever given His official title (significantly, post-resurrection), but He is referred to by this title over a hundred times in the rest of the New Testament.

Have you ever been so surprised at a turn of events that you didn't have a clue as to what to do next? You just sort of stood there, open-mouthed. What has happened was not what you expected to happen, and it's taking some time to process things.

THAT, I'm sure, is where these women were at. Mid-gawk, things get really interesting. Two angels show up. All of a sudden the tomb gets crowded (How's that for a scary thought?).

The angels' announcement (vv. 4-7)

[4] While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; [5] and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground...

We're not surprised when we read that the women were terrified! For most of us, standing in a tomb would be quite unnerving enough, without having a couple of glowing strangers show up, unannounced.

The women did not speak to the angels. But the angels did speak to them.

(roughly) *"What in the world are you doing here, in a tomb of all places, looking for The Living One? Sure, ladies, Jesus was dead for a brief time - but He is not dead now!"*⁵

The angels continued speaking while the women were silent, taking it all in. They reminded the women of some of Jesus' last words to them.

[6] "He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, [7] saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men (check...), and be crucified (check....), and the third day rise again (check!!!)."⁶ (Luke 9:22; 17:25; 18:32f)⁷

⁵ [5]...the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead?"

⁶ By "risen," the angels certainly didn't mean that Jesus was, in some way, still alive "spiritually." They meant that His physical body had been resurrected, never to taste death, again.

⁷ "And it happened that while they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling apparel; and as the women were terrified

Now light bulbs go on in the women's minds - and fireworks go off in their spirits! - as **[8] they remembered His words.**⁸

These women could have saved themselves a long walk to the tomb on Easter Sunday morning if only they had remembered!

But their forgetfulness brought them the honor of *hearing* the news of the resurrection first AND the honor of getting to *announce* the resurrection first to others!

They ran back into the city with hearts bursting, this time, not with sorrow, but with joy!

"Too Good To Be True" News! (vv. 9-11)

The women bring good news!

We picture their breathlessness, their eagerness, their enthusiasm. They reported what had just happened to them at the tomb **"to the eleven and to all the rest."**⁹

So now, just like that, there are over a dozen believers!

Among the believing we now count several women and the eleven remaining apostles, because, unlike the women, who didn't remember Jesus' words, the apostles did remember and were fully anticipating a resurrection.

Not so fast...

Unbelievably, their response is UNbelieving!

and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, 'Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.' (vv. 4-7)

⁸ When He was with them, Jesus would sometimes speak figuratively. Maybe that is how they had been taking His words about resurrection. Now they saw that He had meant to be taken completely literally!

⁹ We know the apostles (minus Judas Iscariot). Then, there would have been Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and no doubt others, too.

The apostles self-protectively dismiss the women's report (v. 11)

[11] And these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they WOULD NOT believe¹⁰ them.¹¹

Now you and I hear things we don't believe pretty regularly. Lots of news stories that come our way are patently unbelievable.

But that is not what is at work here. The Bible is spot on when it says that the men WOULD NOT believe.

And what is prompting their unbelief here is not the unbelievableness of the event, but self-protection. You can almost hear their thoughts: *"I put my trust in Jesus once - I'm not about to do it again. I may get burned once, but not twice."*

Most of us are familiar with the mechanism of self-protection. It can kick in after a failure of almost any variety, from business to romance.

Our hearts get broken once, or twice - or more times. It hurts, and at some point we refuse to try again, to risk again.

We wall off our hearts and by so doing guarantee that we will never again get hurt. Of course, we also guarantee that we will never know the joy of intimacy or the thrill of discovery.

Joy is always going to be out of reach unless we are willing to risk and to be vulnerable, in other words, to trust.

And on this Easter Sunday morning, most of the disciples chose the safer route of not believing - and thereby shut themselves off from joy. They WOULD NOT believe.

¹⁰ The Greek word describing their unbelief is *"apisteuo"* - same word used as in 24:11!

¹¹ As has been noticed so many times through the centuries, these men were not on the brink of belief and needing only the shadow of an excuse before launching forth into a proclamation of resurrection. They were utterly skeptical. Clearly irrefutable evidence was needed to convince these skeptics.

Today, don't allow yourself to be caged in by self-protection. Dare to believe. Dare to imitate the lone exception among the apostles. Dare to be a Simon Peter!

News That Changes Lives! (24:12)

Peter heard the women's report, and opened himself up to hope. He cast off self-protection. As Scripture says,

[12] But Peter arose and ran to the tomb...

Enough of this "walk by faith" stuff. Peter didn't walk. He RAN by faith!

When he arrived at the tomb, he stooped down, looked in, and saw a scene that amazed him. The body definitely was NOT there - but it clearly wasn't the work of grave robbers.

Peter took in the scene, took a short leap of faith, and jumped to a resurrection conclusion. Luke tells us that ***"he went back to his home marveling at that which had happened."***

Now, let's look at what Peter was not privileged to see.

- He didn't see a heavenly vision.
- He didn't see an angel.
- He didn't see Jesus.

But Peter believed. He believed on the basis of the word of Jesus, the testimony of the witnesses, and the strength of the cold, hard evidence.

Today, you and I stand in Peter's shoes.

If we were in Jerusalem right now, we could see an empty tomb. We can read the testimony of the women right here in Luke 24. We can turn to the New Testament and read Jesus' promise that He would rise from the dead.

And, like Peter, we can go home marveling at what has happened!

That's a great scene. Peter's willingness to risk believing is inspiring. And his faith was thoroughly validated. Jesus really was raised from the dead

But we're going to move away from that scene and move on to another somewhat less familiar scene. It is a story that only Luke, of all the Gospels, records.

I'm eager for us to look at this narrative together because I think it speaks very directly to where many of us find ourselves from time to time - maybe even this morning.

Luke continues the story of what happened on that Sunday. And he brings us into the narrative of two of Jesus' not very famous disciples. They were walking from Jerusalem to a place called Emmaus.

A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To Emmaus..... (vv. 13-35)

Two Disciples Take a Hike (vv. 13-14)

[13] And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem.

These two guys left Jerusalem at some point on Sunday morning. And there is a lot about this episode we don't know.

One of them was named Cleopas, but he's not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. His friend is not even named here. We don't even know exactly where "Emmaus" was located, just that it was about seven miles outside of Jerusalem.¹²

As we catch up to them, they are deep in discussion.

[14] And they were conversing with each other about all these things which had taken place.

¹² The name means "warm springs" and could have been one of several places. One of the best guesses is that this Emmaus was about seven miles northwest of Jerusalem on the road to Lydda which was near the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

By "these things" they were almost certainly referring to Jesus' last days, His trials, His crucifixion, His burial. These two men would have been still reeling from the horrors of Friday's crucifixion.

As they walked and talked, they were joined by Another.

The Two are Joined by a Third (vv. 15-24)

Jesus, incognito, walks up (vv. 15-16)

[15] And it came about that while they were conversing and discussing, Jesus Himself approached, and began traveling with them. [16] But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him.

WE know (because Luke tells us) that this Other was Jesus. But, Cleopas and his friend didn't know. By some means, He was veiled to them. They saw Him only as a stranger on the road coming out of Jerusalem.¹³

Walking faster than they were, He had caught up with them and began walking with them. The Stranger spoke.

Jesus questions them (v. 17)

[17] And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad.

Did you catch their mood? They look sad. They are depressed. They take a moment to collect themselves, and then speak.

The two explain "the things" that have been happening (vv. 18-24)

Surprise (v. 18)

[18] And one of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Have you been living in a cave?"

¹³ Perhaps His glorified body was not immediately recognizable. Or maybe they didn't recognize Him because He didn't want them to recognize Him!

Not really. What he really said was, [18b] *“Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?”*

The Stranger played along, *“What things are you talking about?”* So, the two gave their report.

Synopsis (vv. 19-21)

[19]...“The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, [20] and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. [21] But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened.”

Notice that they called Jesus a prophet. They weren't being disrespectful. It's an honorable thing to be called a prophet. But, we learn something when we hear them refer to Jesus as a prophet.

They don't call Him “Messiah.” They don't believe He is the Messiah, at least not anymore. Not since what happened on Friday.

Did you catch it? *“We ’were hoping.’ We’re not hoping anymore.”*

But, then, they do admit to being confused. There are some strings left dangling and they don't quite know how to tie them up nice and neat.

Confusion (vv. 22-24)

[Luke 24:22] “But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, [23] and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. [24] Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see.”

“So, you see, Stranger, we’re just not sure what to make of it all.”

At this, the Stranger spoke. He was still Jesus *incognito*. They still don't know who it really was who was speaking to them.

And His first words to them don't exactly pass the *“How to win friends and influence people”* test!

Opening the Scriptures - and Finding Jesus! (vv. 25-27)

[25] And He said to them, ‘O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! [26] Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?’ [27] And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

How long does it take you to walk seven miles? Walking at a pretty good clip, it probably takes you a couple of hours. If you're low on energy - like Cleopas and his friend were - it can take a good bit longer.

So let's assume that Jesus has well over two hours to explain what we today call “The Old Testament” to these two disciples.

Wouldn't you have loved to have been there!

Surely Jesus would have mentioned the scene in the Garden of Eden where God promised a coming redeemer after Adam and Eve fell into sin. I've got to believe He would have told them the story about the *almost* sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham's son, which pictured the *actual* sacrifice of God's Son, the Messiah.

Surely He would have explained the sacrificial system as foreshadowing the Messiah's sacrificial death.

Luke tells us that Jesus spoke from ALL the prophets.

It is too much to think that Jesus found references to Himself in Isaiah AND Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi!?

Of course - all the prophets foretold of Him!¹⁴

¹⁴ And surely He would have spoken from the great prophecy of Isaiah 53, where Isaiah describes the sacrifice and victory of the Servant of the Lord.

Jesus talked and talked and talked about the Messiah while they all walked and walked and walked together. I'm betting that by the time they arrived at Emmaus, these two disciples were convinced that God's Word is really all about Messiah!

They were probably also beginning to see that the life of Jesus fit pretty perfectly everything that was foretold about the Messiah...

Well, all good things must end, and the three have now reached Emmaus. Watch what happens next.

Hearts Aflame! (vv. 28-34)

One journey ends (vv. 28-29)

[28] And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther. [29] But they urged Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." So He went in to stay with them.

The two disciples had so enjoyed this Stranger's company that they invited Him to stay with them, which He agreed to do.

They had finished a long walk. The day was nearly over and it was time for the evening meal. The three men sat down to eat late in the afternoon when Cleopas and his friend had one of those "eye-opening moments."

Another "journey" begins (vv. 30-31)

[30] And it came about that when He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them.

You can almost picture them looking back and forth at each other and then at Jesus.

"Hey, wait a minute! That sure looked familiar. Cleopas, do you remember back in Galilee when Jesus fed the 5,000? He took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it out the same way. Hey, Stranger, you remind me of Someone..."

And with that - Jesus was gone. He vanished right before their eyes.¹⁵

Now, listen to what they say in His absence.

Hearts fan into flame (v. 32)

[32] "Were not our hearts burning within us - were not our hearts on fire!? - while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"

And with that, they arose (meal uneaten?) and returned to Jerusalem, covering the seven miles like it was a competitive 10K!¹⁶ They found the rest of the disciples, the eleven plus others, some of whom believed and some of whom didn't.

Energized!! (vv. 33-34)

They burst into the room and announced, ***[34] "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon!"***

Keep in mind that it is now late in the evening. These two guys began the day depressed, defeated, downcast, and sad. They have walked fourteen miles on dusty roads. Now, they are energized! What happened?

The same sort of thing happened to them that happens to brides and grooms on the day of their wedding.

Exhaustion is overcome by events. Something is going on that is so fiery that it consumes tiredness.

¹⁵ ***[31] Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.***

¹⁶ ***[33] And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them,***

The hearts of these two disciples were set on fire by the reality of the resurrection, the spark of hope that was now burning in their hearts, and the gasoline of the life-changing words of Jesus.

Their hearts were set on fire by truth - the words and the Person who said, "***I AM THE TRUTH!***"

Conclusion:

God's plan was that His Son, Jesus, would take center stage in the drama of our redemption. He would die for our sins as a sacrifice and then He would defeat death through a glorious resurrection!

This day, the living Jesus invites you to embrace the truth of God's love, poured out on you through His cross. Embrace the uncertain but exciting future God has for you.

Allow these truths to perform the same energizing work in your heart that they did in the hearts of the disciples who walked the Emmaus Road.

May this morning be your defining moment! Let the glorious news of Jesus' resurrection set your heart on fire!

HE IS RISEN!

HE IS RISEN, INDEED!!