**Easter – 03/31/24**

**The Gift of Easter**

**Introduction:**

The Gift of Easter

Intro:

* Happy Easter

Prayer

We did observe Good Friday on Friday night – tried putting myself in the position of one of the disciples

* But do you ever think about Saturday?
  + The silence of Saturday – after the crucifixion of Jesus has to be one of the most hopeless and confusing times for his disciples
    - How could God let this happen?
    - Why did a good man have to go through so much pain?
    - They might have even wondered, “did we waste our time following this man”?
      * And Saturday came
        + And there were no answers

No angelic appearances

Just… silence

Which more than likely led them to think ‘it’ was over

* + - * + But God…

God was at work the entire time

And the silence of Saturday erupted into a celebration on Sunday

* + - * Here’s something I can promise because I’ve seen it in scriptures
        + And I’ve seen it in so many of our lives and experiences

“Don’t let go when God is ‘silent’

When He’s just setting the stage for a celebration that is immeasurably more than all we could ever ask or imagine

***Just because God is silent doesn’t mean God is absent!***

* + - * Easter is a gift

Talking about the gift of Easter

* Before you go and think that “Gifts are for Christmas, not Easter”
  + Hear me out
    - Gifts are for Christmas – and for Easter
  + You might say, “Don’t we think about sacrifice at Easter?”
    - Jesus sacrificing his life on the cross and rising again on Easter
      * Hebrews 12:2 – enduring the cross, despising the shame
  + And don’t we give up something we love for Lent?
* But my goal is to show you today that we can think of God’s gifts when we think of Easter
  + Christmas truly is a gift – the baby in the manger
    - But to see the story holistically, we need to include Easter as part of that gift
      * Without Easter, the baby in the manger is incomplete
      * And without the baby in the manger, there would be no Easter
        + We really can’t consider one without the other

Not either/or but both/and

Besides, I’m an ‘and’ kind of guy

* I don’t like to think ‘or’ – I like to think ‘and’
  + After all, who wants peanut butter or jelly?
  + Who wants mac or cheese?
  + Rock or roll?
  + Ben or Jerry?
  + Netflix and chill? (Married)

So, today we’re talking ‘and’ – we’re talking about the gift of Christmas – a savior who is Christ the Lord ***and*** we’re talking about the gift of Easter – a risen savior who lives in us

In all honesty, there are so many gifts from God in this Easter season

* (The gift of a Palm Sunday snowstorm doesn’t count)
  + The gift of his resurrection sets us free
    - Free from the feelings of not being enough
      * You’re enough for him to die for
    - Free from repeating the same patterns that have been repeated for generations in our families
      * “So if the Son sets you free you will be free indeed”
    - Free from anxiety and depression
      * “I’m come that you might have life and have it in abundance”
    - Free from death itself
      * Just ask Lazarus and Jairus’ daughter
      * Just ask those dry bones
  + Easter is a season of gifts!

I want us to focus on 3 things, though

* Three gifts of Easter that I believe changed the world
* Three gifts that can change our lives

First, Easter gives us the gift of an empty tomb

The gift of an empty tomb

John 20:1-9

* John 20:1-9 – read
  + Jesus had predicted his death, burial, and resurrection at least 5 times
    - And his disciples didn’t “get it”
      * He told them, plainly (Mark 9:31-32)
        + ***For he taught his disciples and said to them, “The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.” But they did not understand this saying.***
    - They didn’t get it
  + So, on the first Easter, the disciples had bailed on Jesus and the women who were also followers were the only ones to show up at the tomb
    - And they were expecting to find his body there
      * They brought spices to anoint his body
        + But he wasn’t there

He was risen

Let me just say this

Any guy who predicts his own death – and resurrection – and then pulls it off

That’s my guy, I’m going to be on his side

* + So, the gift of the empty tomb can really be looked at as the gift of hope

Jesus’ resurrection gives us hope

John 11:25-26

* ***“Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, ye shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”***
* While evil was lurking and there was the darkness of Good Friday
  + And the silence of Saturday
  + God was working and planning the glory of Resurrection Day
* There is hope behind the fact that regardless of how things look for you right now
  + Finances are rough
  + Marriage is on the rocks
  + Adult kids are out of control
* No matter what things look like now, we can all see hope
  + Regardless of what’s going on, the darkness, fear, sadness, anxiety
    - We have hope in the fact that God is working even when things look hopeless
  + Even though we’re caught in the darkness of Good Friday and the silence of Saturday
    - We can know that Resurrection Day is right around the corner
      * The tomb was empty
        + Death was defeated
        + Our Savior lives

Easter is the gift of an empty tomb

* And that gives us hope

Easter gives us the gift of mission

The gift of mission

Luke 4:18-19

* I’m not talking about sending missionaries around the world because that’s a thing too
  + I’m talking about a mission for us
    - A mission for me and one for you
  + Jesus had a mission here on earth
    - A mission that led him to the cross
      * It wasn’t an accident that he ended up there
        + God wasn’t surprised that His Son was betrayed, brutalized, beaten, and crucified

He was sent here on that mission

Jesus spoke of his mission throughout his time here on earth

* When he first came onto the scene in Jerusalem, when his own people were rejecting him and doubting him
  + He shared his mission with them and with us
    - Luke 4:18-19 – *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set a liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord”*

How many of us, either now or in the past, were poor in spirit and needed to hear the truth of the gospel that Jesus preached

* He preached it with his life/actions as much as with his words
  + How many of us have/had broken hearts that needed to be healed
  + How many of us are/were captive to our own devices and need liberty
    - Captive to our thoughts of being less than
    - Captive to the negative habits of our parents
    - Captive to the harsh and horrible words that have been spoken over us
    - Captive to our habits, overindulgences, and addictions
  + How many of us are blinded by the circumstances of the day
    - And need to have our sight restored
  + How many are oppressed – and need freedom?
* Today, Jesus is proclaiming over you that you are enough
  + You are not a victim of your past – going to start a sermon series on this in 2 weeks
  + Those words spoken over you were a lie straight from the pit of hell
  + That blindness that prevents you from seeing the truth has been healed
  + And that oppression is going straight back to hell where it came from
* This Easter is the day to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord in our own lives

That’s the gift of his mission for us

Easter is a gift

* The gift of an empty tomb
* The gift of mission

Thirdly, there is the gift of new life, the gift of salvation

The gift of salvation

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus had an encounter with a man named Zacchaeus

* (If you grew up in Sunday School, you’ll know that Zacchaeus was a wee little man)
* Jesus had this encounter with Zaccheaus
  + The Bible doesn’t give us a lot of detail of the encounter
    - But we know that Zac was a tax collector
      * A very lucrative job that came with the consequence of being hated by his fellow Jews
    - He collected taxes for Rome (the superpower of the day that was oppressing the Jews and Israel)
      * A very rich man, a very lonely man
    - Zac heard Jesus was coming down the street
      * Couldn’t see him for all the annoying tall people surrounding him so he climbed a tree to see Jesus
    - Jesus noticed that
      * Noticed that Zac was searching him out
      * Wanted to meet him
      * Was curious
    - We can see that Zac didn’t clean up his life, make all his wrongs right, before he came to Jesus on that day
      * He came just as he was
      * Curious about Jesus
        + Who he was
        + What’s his story
        + Was all that he had heard about Jesus true?
* While it’s very important for us to realize and remember that Zac hadn’t cleaned everything up before meeting Jesus
  + It’s also a very important to notice that Zac didn’t invite Jesus into his life and his home
    - Jesus invited himself ***(Luke 19:5 – Quick, come down, I must be a guest in your home today)***
      * So many times, I hear people say, “I found Jesus”
        + We don’t find Jesus, Jesus finds us

Relentlessly

Inviting himself into our lives

I can’t believe that was just a coincidental statement Jesus made

* That it was just happenstance
  + Wasn’t just Jesus trying to say (like we all do), “let’s get together sometime, it’s been way too long so let’s make it happen
    - Only to never make it happen!
* I believe this was a very intentional attempt by Jesus to invite himself into a relationship with Zac and change his world
  + Just like he’s doing to some of us here today

He gives us, today, that same invitation

* An invitation to be in relationship with him
  + We don’t need to clean ourselves up
  + He invites us as we are

The gift of salvation is quite likely the most powerful, most generous, most impactful gift God has given us

* Christmas and Easter all lead to salvation
* A gift from God
  + It’s a gift that changes our lives
    - Changes the world for us
    - Changes the world for our families
    - Our children and our grandchildren – and their children
  + The gift of salvation is the gift that impacts the world

The greatest news is that it is a gift

* All that is required of us is to accept it
* To be like Zacchaeus and accept Jesus when he invites himself into our lives

Salvation is here because the tomb was empty when the women came to embalm Jesus’ body

* He wasn’t there
* I’ll say again, anyone who predicts their torture, their death, and their resurrection
  + That’s my guy, I’m with him

He is risen

* He lives today and through the presence of the Holy Spirit, he is here today
* And the great thing is that he’s not going to wonder why you’re here – it’s no accident that you’re here
  + The good news is that it’s not an accident and that Jesus is pleased with you and your choice to be here this morning
    - He’s not saying, “hey, I know what you did last week – now who do you think you are coming to church just because it’s Easter”
    - He’s not saying, “I came to seek and to save – the religious ones”
      * Not saying, “Ugh, your life is a mess – go clean it up and then come back and we’ll talk”
    - No, his grace and mercy toward us don’t line up with that
* He’s here today and his grace and mercy are speaking
  + Speaking to you
    - Something like, “Hey, I’m so glad you’re here. You made a great choice to come to church today”
    - Something like, “I know you! I know all of your mistakes and shortcomings. As a matter of fact, I knew all of those before I created you – but I did it anyway.”
    - Saying something like Eugene Peterson paraphrased in The Message from Matthew 11:28
      * “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” – Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message)

He’s inviting himself into your life today

* He knows you’re curious and he knows you’re tired, burned out, and tired of that same old religion
* And he’s saying, “Come, follow me and I will give you rest, peace, hope, grace, mercy”

Maybe you came here today wanting to just get this Easter thing done so you can get to that ham dinner afterwards

* I get it – I’m looking forward to a great Easter lunch, too
  + But today – this Easter, Jesus is inviting himself along
    - To start a relationship with you
    - To draw you away from religion – and toward a relationship, a friendship with him

Some of you think God would never want to be your friend

* The Son of God would never want to invite himself into your life, your world
  + But he’s here
    - And think of Zac, did he really ‘deserve’ to have Jesus come to his house for a meal?
    - His grace and his mercy are reaching out to you
      * The gift of Easter is an empty tomb, it’s mission, and it’s salvation
        + The gift is for all of us

And our only requirement is to receive the gift – that simple

Salvation prayer

We have a gift for everyone today

* Something that can help you stay focused on the gift of Easter
  + The ushers have one of these rocks for you – grace, love, patience, blessed, faith, and joy
  + Take one as you leave and always remember an never forget the gift of the empty tomb, the gift of our Savior’s mission, and the gift of salvation

***We love you and there’s nothing you can do about it***