

# “Why?”

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Unless otherwise indicated, Scriptures quoted are from 2011 New International Version.)

***When you come to this place, you get Jesus and his church. It's all I have to offer.***

***Luke 24:1-12***

***April 9, 2023 – Easter Sunday***

***Why did you come?***

As I prepared for today, I wondered about *why* so many more people come to church on Easter. Rather than guessing, I thought I'd ask. Why did you come to church today? (The following are actual results from the live poll.)

- He is risen! (78%)
- I go to church every Sunday. (51%)
- It's a family tradition. (46%)
- It's Pastor Bob's last Easter. (36%)
- I heard about the donuts. (10%)
- Someone invited me. (9%)
- I'm struggling and need hope. (7%)
- Something else. (7%)
- Someone made me come. (5%)
- I need convincing. (3%)

While we're waiting for the results, I'll briefly answer some other why questions.

- *Why do we have Easter lilies in the church?* The white flower stands for purity, and local allergists appreciate the extra business.
- *Why do eggs symbolize Easter?* They're a symbol of new life in almost every culture.
- *Why do we eat chocolate on Easter?* I don't really care as long as we keep it up.
- *Why do we dress up on Easter?* In the early centuries, baptisms and weddings were often held on Easter Sunday. In medieval times, it was the one day a year when peasants were invited to the castle. Then it became a

competition, and for a while the after-church Easter parade became a tradition. If you're all fancied up, why not show off?

- *Why does the Easter bunny symbolize Easter?* Nobody knows. Seriously.

"Why?" is one of my favorite words, usually when I'm alone and feeling a bit snarly. True story from a Sunday morning not long ago. I'm over on the West campus setting up for Sunday School and the stupid Mac is not showing up on the giant monitor. I mutter, "Why?" I call Reagan, our IT guy. "Reagan, I can't get the big screen to work." Reagan: "Try unplugging the HDMI and plug it back in." Bob: "Oh, it was disconnected."

"Why?" is the right question for Easter. "Why?" dominates this entire passage.

### ***Why was the tomb empty?***

When Luke says "the women" (1), he's referring to specific women that he will name in verse 10, but he's already told us about them in the previous chapter.

*The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Jesus and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes.*

Jesus had both male and female disciples. The men had all abandoned Jesus in the Garden early Friday morning when he was arrested, but the women stayed to watch the horrible scene unfold. When a wealthy man named Joseph took Jesus' body down to give him a proper burial, they were there. When he buried Jesus, they saw.

That night and at the next day must have been horrific for the men, who realized they had deserted Jesus when he needed them most, as well as for the women, for whom the events replayed in their minds like the worst horror scene from a movie.

Now it's Sunday morning, and the women head to the tomb. The first surprise on arrival was that the large round stone covering the entrance was dislodged. The bigger surprise as they entered the opening was that Jesus' body was not there. Why?

### ***Why did they not remember?***

The next surprise was the sudden appearance of two male strangers in brilliant white clothes. The women were terrified and bowed down low, indicating they recognized these as supernatural beings. The men scold them: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" My question is why they thought the women should look anywhere else. Of course they would come here.

Then the angels reminded them that Jesus himself had told them – three times (Luke 9:21-22, 44-45; 18:31-34) – that he would have to die and be raised to life. Luke's readers have been prepared for this. At the time, Luke had recorded that the "meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about."

What intrigues me is this statement from the two men, which only Luke reports. They said that Jesus himself said not only that he *would* be, but that he *must* be delivered, crucified, and raised again. There is no Christian gospel without Good Friday, but Friday is not good unless there's Sunday. You also can't have Sunday without Friday.

The modern world loves Sunday much more than Friday. We love the eggs, the chocolate, the upbeat message of spring and life and hope. But there never would have been a resurrection if there hadn't been a death. The gospel is not, "Jesus rose again and we have life forever." The gospel is the "mustness" of his death and resurrection as a package deal. Why?

### ***Why did the men not believe?***

Luke says the women then left the tomb and "told all these things to the Eleven (remember, Judas committed suicide) and to all the others," implying there was a larger group of Jesus' followers apparently huddled together since Friday afternoon. Now we learn the names of the women who had gone to the tomb – (Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others...) (implying there were more women than just the three named), but the men didn't believe them and thought their words were gibberish. Why?

It's often assumed, and sometimes voiced, that the men didn't believe because the witnesses were female, but I'm not at all sure that's right. If the women had said, "The sun rose this morning," the men wouldn't have disbelieved just because *women* said it. It was what the women said. Nothing like this had ever happened before. If anyone, man or woman, said to you, "We saw two angels a few minutes ago and they told us a dead man is alive," would you believe them? I would have a hard time.

Peter, ever the impulsive one, had to see for himself. He went running, stopped and snooped, and all he saw were the strips of cloth lying by themselves. He walked away, "wondering to himself what had happened." He didn't get it. Why?

### ***The right question***

"Why?" is the right question – for women, men, angels, and you. If you don't ask why, you might miss something big. You might miss the Biggest thing of all time. If you're curious enough to ask "Why?" today, that's a good thing.

It may be more important to ask the right questions than to give all the right answers. I like the fact that Easter Sunday in the Bible doesn't end with easy answers. I love that there are confused and curious people, and that they don't quit on the story.

I love that the story doesn't end here. Luke tells another story, my favorite Easter Sunday story from the Bible, but you have to come back next week for that one.

Luke alone doesn't quit there either. His sequel to the Gospel is called Acts, and that's where we're going as soon as we finish Luke. Spoiler alert – Acts doesn't tie up all the loose ends either. Acts ends with the Apostle Paul under house arrest in Rome, still speaking boldly about the Lord Jesus Christ. And we'll tell you that we are still writing that story. I have had the privilege of watching it unfold here for 30 years.

You might be surprised to know that pastors love the question "Why?" even when we don't have a simple answer. I get a lot of them. Why do bad things happen if God is good? Why are there so many hypocrites in church? Why is the God of the Old Testament so harsh? Why is church so important? Why are you retiring?

Let me tell you the Why question I'd most like to answer. "Why have you and Linda stayed with church for 45 years before you retired?" It's not because I think I got it right all along, or have it right now. I'm more aware now looking back of all the things I got wrong. Do you want to hear the dumbest thing I ever said on an Easter Sunday?

I said it from this pulpit on an Easter Sunday. If it wasn't my first year at Corinth, it was probably the second. After I said it, I'm surprised they didn't fire me.

I was trying to be funny in the introduction to my Easter sermon and said something like this: "This is amazing, all these people at church! The feeling I have today is so amazing I feel like it could keep me going for a whole year. And by the size of the crowd, some of you feel the same way." I have been given such grace.

Why have we not given up on church, on this church? Why have we been in church not only every Easter but every Sunday with rare exceptions and all through the week as well? Why is this messy thing we call "church" worth a lifetime investment?

The answer is expressed best by the Apostle Paul who wrote the following words to the church in first century Corinth about 25 years after the first Easter Sunday.

*Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.*

I'm not telling you anything I haven't said the other 29 Easters in this pulpit. Preaching is much more reminding than it is creating something new.

*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,*

Of all the things I do – we do – this is top priority.

Jesus is all about sinners – reconnecting them to a God who without this story would have always seemed unreachable – either because of his nature or our failures.

Christ died to accept in his body and soul all the consequences for our sins. His death gives us perspective. No matter who we are or what we've done, we can know that we are loved that much.

He was buried to prove he was really dead, and also to enter into the full range of our humanity. Like us, he ended his earthly journey in the grave. His burial gives us reality. Life may be extended, but for all of us it ends in burial.

On the third day those decaying cells sprang to life again, and the body of Jesus walked out of the tomb, never to die again. His resurrection gives us hope.

It's all "according to the Scriptures." It's all in the Bible, and I've got nothing better to say on Easter Sunday or any other day than what's in the 66 Books.

*and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom who are still alive....Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me....*

While the first witnesses of the empty tomb went away with more Why questions than they came with, the story didn't end there. Jesus kept showing up to more and more people.

The first experiences at the tomb were confusing and disconcerting, but then – to one after another and even to 500 at once – Jesus kept showing up. And, Paul says, it didn't end when he ascended into heaven. He showed up to me too! Then Paul invested his entire life in telling how God even showed up to a former persecutor of Christians. He kept inviting people into communities like the one at Corinth, into relationships with people who have the same questions so they can ask them together, sharing life's joys and life's challenges.

*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.*

Looking back over these years, I am deeply humbled and grateful to have experienced and shared this grace, and it's all I have to offer again.

When you come to this place, you get Jesus and his church. That's all we have to offer, because that's all you truly need.

Whatever your "Why" question is, I will always point you back to this Gospel. I pray this will always be the truth on which this church will take its stand. Amen.