

John 20:19-31

How did you spend your **Easter** this year? Did you have a **good day**? I'm guessing that **my** Easter wasn't too different from many of **yours**. We started off the day with **breakfast** here at church, then on to a wonderful **worship service**, and finally headed for **home** to spend time with **family** members. It was definitely a little **colder** this year than we would have liked, but regardless of the **weather**, Easter Sunday is **always** a **good** day. But what if I asked you a question which is a little bit **bigger** in scope? **Did Easter Change Your Life?** In our sermon text for today, we get to see how Jesus' **disciples** spent **their** day on that **first** Easter Sunday, and we see that it was quite **different** from what we're used to. There was no **church service**, no **special breakfast**, and no **family gathering**. Instead, they were huddled together behind **locked doors** - afraid of losing their **lives**. For them, Easter Sunday was definitely a **life-changing** experience.

It's hard for us to even **imagine** how those disciples must have **felt** on the first Easter Sunday. The trauma which they had experienced over the past week had clearly left its **mark**. On **Friday**, the man they called the **Messiah** had been severely **beaten** and **crucified** - but that following Sunday His **tomb** was **empty**, and Jesus' **body** was **missing**. There were **rumors** floating around that these very disciples had **stolen** His body in order to **claim** that He was **alive** again. That **rumor** put them in great **danger**. This was clearly a **life** and **death** situation for the disciples.

But on that same Easter morning some of the **women** who were **followers** of Jesus had actually **seen** Jesus with their own eyes. Could it really be **true** - or was it just **wishful thinking**? And even if Jesus **had** risen from the dead - which seemed to be totally **impossible** to them - would Jesus be able to **forgive** His disciples for the way they had **deserted** Him? The last time Jesus had **seen** most of these men had been as they were **running away** from Him - **afraid** for their own **lives**. A wide range of thoughts and emotions were running through their minds - from **fear** of the Jews, to **doubts** about Jesus' resurrection, to the **guilt** which was brought on by their own faithless words and actions. Easter Sunday was a very **traumatic** day for Jesus' disciples.

Their situation is totally **foreign** to us. None of us have ever spent an Easter morning **locked** in a room, and **fearing** for our lives. But the **emotions** which the disciples were experiencing are **not** completely foreign to us. We have also been **afraid** that our relationship with Jesus isn't even **close** to what it's **supposed** to be. And with the world the way it is right now, we've been **afraid** that intense

persecution may well be right around the corner for us as Christians. And there are many **other** fears in our lives as well. Unfortunately, wherever there are **fears**, **doubts** also begin to creep into our minds. We begin to **wonder** whether the resurrection of Jesus - which sounded so **great** last Sunday - is even **relevant** for us, when our lives are in a continuous **downward** spiral. Is it **possible** that God has left us to fight these battles on our **own**?

But maybe you've never **felt** that kind of fear or doubt in your life. And if that's the case, **thank God**. But I know we're **all** familiar with the burden of **guilt**. It doesn't really matter **what** the sin is - **lying, cheating, stealing** - or even **denying** our Savior as **Peter** did. It doesn't matter **how many times** God has had to see us **running away** from Him, because of the sinful things we have **thought, said, or done**. Our **guilt** is **there**. And even though we aren't **physically** with those disciples in that locked room, we **are** still with them in **spirit**. We understand their **doubts** and **fears**, and we feel their **guilt**. We need to see and hear the risen **Savior** just as much as **they** did.

And what a **comforting** moment it was when Jesus **did** appear to them in the middle of all their **anxiety** and **fear**. The locks on the doors were **not** able to keep Jesus **out**. With His glorified and resurrected body Jesus simply **passed through** those doors, and stood in front of His dear friends. Jesus knew **exactly** what His disciples were **experiencing**. He understood their **doubts** and **fears**, and He brought them a **simple** message - a message which they **needed** to hear: "*Peace be with you!*" It was a very **common** greeting - one which they had probably heard **thousands** of times before. But suddenly it took on a much **deeper** meaning. The peace which they had been **missing** that evening could be found in **Jesus**. He brought peace to their **lives**, and peace to their **souls** - **real** peace - **lasting** peace. The peace which Jesus brought to them consisted of **sins forgiven**, and **heaven won** - a peace which surpasses all understanding.

As **precious** as that peace was for them, it didn't **end** there, because Jesus brought them even **more**. He gave them a **mission** - a mission to go out into the **world**, and to bring the peace which they had received from Him to **others**. Again we read, "*(Jesus) breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. Whenever you **forgive** people's sins, they are **forgiven**. Whenever you do **not** forgive them, they are **not** forgiven.'*" The disciples were now Jesus' **representatives** here on the earth, and that title carried with it a lot of **responsibility**. They were privileged to offer the comforting message of **forgiveness** to **repentant** sinners, and to bring the **harsh message** of God's **condemnation** to those who were **stubborn** and **unrepentant**. Those disciples took their mission to **heart** as Jesus took away their

doubts and fears. They became **bold** and **enthusiastic** workers for the Lord. Even **Peter**, who had wept so bitterly after denying that he even **knew** Jesus, would soon be loudly **proclaiming** the name of Jesus on the Day of **Pentecost**. After Easter, these men's lives would never be the **same** again. They had **seen** that Jesus had **risen** from the dead, just as He **said** He would - and it changed how **they lived** every minute of every day from that day **forward**. **Easter Changed Their Lives**.

So, how has Easter changed **our** lives? We may not be able to see the **nail prints** in Jesus' hands, and the **wound** in His side as **Thomas** did. But we don't **need** to. We are among the blessed people, "*who have **not** seen and yet have **believed***." We can be completely **confident** that Jesus rose from the dead, because He **said** so. In fact, the closing words of our text tell us that this was the very **reason** John **wrote** his Gospel. He said, "*These are written that **you** may **believe**, that Jesus is the **Christ**, the Son of **God**, and that **by believing** you may have **life** in his name.*" In the **Bible**, Jesus comes to **us**, just as He came to the **disciples**, and He says, "*Peace be with you.*" And along with His **peace**, Jesus gives us the **same mission** He gave to His disciples. We are to faithfully share **God's Word** with **everyone** who will listen.

So, let's go back to the question I asked at the beginning of today's sermon: **Did Easter Change Your Life?** Maybe some of you have heard of a man named **Josh McDowell**. He's the author of the books: **Evidence that Demands a Verdict** and **More than a Carpenter**. Josh spent the early part of his life as a self-proclaimed **atheist**. But all that **changed** after he received a challenge from some of his friends at Kellogg College in Michigan - a challenge to try to find enough **evidence** to **disprove Christianity**. Josh spent endless hours **studying** the topic, and attempting to **disprove** the claims which are made in the **Bible** - most **specifically** the claim of Jesus' **resurrection** from the dead. And what was the **result** of all his study? His **Life Was Changed**. Josh McDowell is now one of the world's most widely-known **defenders** of the Christian faith. Not only couldn't he prove that Jesus' resurrection **didn't happen**, but his research led him to believe that it was **absolutely real**.

One of the most **convincing** proofs that the resurrection is real was the way **Easter Changed The Lives** of Jesus' disciples. These men went from being **frightened** followers of Jesus, to being **bold proclaimers** of the Gospel. Their hearts were so on fire for the Lord that they were willing to face **persecution**, **torture**, and ultimately even **death** for Jesus' sake. No one is willing to risk **all that** for something which **may or may not** be **true**. Their **lives** were **proof** of the fact that they had **seen** the **risen Lord** face to face.

Our lives can **also** serve as **proof** of the resurrection. When we **stand up** for the Gospel and **tell others** about our Savior, we are proclaiming that **we** have seen the risen Lord ourselves - and He has **Changed Our Lives**. Obviously, it's not always **easy** to **do** that. Our **fears** of how people will **react** still get in the way of proclaiming a **risen Savior** to a **dying world**. But we need to **remember** that just as Jesus **breathed** on His disciples, and gave them the **Holy Spirit**, God has also put His Spirit in **our** hearts as well. And as we make more and more use of the **Word of God**, His Spirit will convince us again and again that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is **real**, and that we have **life** and **peace** in **Jesus**. **Did Easter Change Our Lives?** You bet it did! Without Easter, we wouldn't even **have** life - at least not a life that's **worth living**. But because of our **resurrected Savior**, our lives have been **transformed** from lives filled with **doubts** and **fears**, to lives filled with **peace** and **forgiveness**. **Easter Has Changed Our Lives**. Let's boldly and confidently **share** the Good News of our **risen Savior** with **everyone** who will listen. Amen.