

# JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Easter - Hope or Hoax?

John 20:19-23

Sunday, April 17, 2022

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Welcome! Thanks for joining us on this beautiful Easter day! What a glorious day to be in worship. We have already had church with our wonderful music. Hasn't it been wonderful?

All this music and all the flowers and all the fuss and fanfare are for one reason: Jesus Christ is alive! He defeated death. He defeated sin. He defeated hate and he defeated evil. That's why we celebrate today! Jesus Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Today I want to address a question that is on many of your minds. You may not want to admit it but I'm willing to bet many of you have it. The question is: Is it really true? Did Jesus Christ, a poor homeless peasant who was executed as a criminal 2,000 years ago, really rise from the dead? Do we really believe that? Is it really true?

I am sure there are some of you here in worship because that's what your family does on Easter. You go to church. But truthfully you really don't believe all this stuff about Jesus rising from the grave. You think it is just a fairy tale or myth embellished throughout history. But you are going through the motions today because it is a family tradition. Well, I'm glad you are here. You are always welcome here. The church can handle your doubts. The church welcomes your doubts. So just bear with me for a few minutes and listen to what I have to say and you just might start doubting your doubts.

I am sure there are folks here today who have friends or family who won't even go to church at all because they are very vocal about their disbelief. They say to you all the time, "Really? A poor, homeless peasant, the son of God? A wise teacher, maybe, but God in the flesh who rose from the dead? I can't believe that. That's nonsense." They think you are a weird religious person for believing all this stuff about a risen Jesus. Well, after my message today you will be equipped to challenge their thinking and they just might think again about what they believe.

I am also sure there are many of you here today who consider yourselves followers of Christ. Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior and you seek to follow him every day. But truthfully there are days when life kicks you around, when tragedy strikes, when the bad news comes, when the diagnosis comes, when a loved one dies, when you have doubts about your faith. You think is it really true? Is it really true that because Jesus lives I will live? Is Jesus really alive? You hope it's true but there are days when you really wonder. Well, I believe today's message will renew your faith and encourage you to rise above your doubts and stand firm on the truth of the resurrection.

Last Easter I had a man come through the receiving line at the end of the service. He looked straight at me and said, "Do you really believe all this stuff?" I said, "What stuff is that?" He said, "About Jesus being God's son and rising from the dead?" I said, "I not only believe it. I am counting on it!"

What makes me so sure? What makes me so confident? What makes me so sure I can persuade many of you today to doubt your doubts? Because when I was younger I used to have the same doubts too. I went through a period in my life long before I went into the ministry when I questioned everything about faith. After doing some serious soul searching, praying, reading and studying I reaffirmed my faith and I came back to the truth that Jesus did rise from the dead and he is alive and lives in my heart. I believe it so much that I have dedicated my personal life and professional life in serving him. Today I'm going to share with you some of the things that convinced me.

Why is it so important to believe that Jesus rose from the dead? Because when you put your faith in Jesus and his resurrection life takes on a whole new meaning. You see and experience life in a new way. Your life is no longer dominated by fear and hate but by faith and love. You do not face life alone. You are empowered by a living relationship with Jesus. This

relationship gives you strength in crisis, power in weakness, and purpose in living. Each day is life giving instead of life-taking. When you put your faith in the risen Jesus, you see the meaning of your life.

But if you refuse to believe that Jesus is alive, if you refuse to believe that Jesus defeated death, then there is no way you will find meaning, purpose, joy, hope and love and peace. Your life will be dominated by hate, sin, darkness and discouragement. Your whole life will be swimming upstream instead of flowing with the spirit of Christ. Life becomes a numbing series of obligations instead of an adventure of love and transformation.

So, do you really want to believe that Jesus rose from the dead but your doubts are too strong? Do you really want to experience life with the resurrected Jesus but your doubts are getting in the way? Well, get ready to tell your doubts that they are not welcome in your mind and heart anymore. Let me share with you some powerful and simple facts about the resurrection of Jesus. These simple facts are responses to some common theories that have sought to discredit the resurrection. In fact, some of your doubts may be named in these theories.

One theory is called the Swoon Theory. The swoon theory maintains that Jesus was not really dead but only fainted on the cross. After He was laid in the tomb, the cool, damp environment of the cave revived him. Somehow Jesus had the strength after fainting to roll away a two-ton stone, fight off the guards like Bruce Lee and walk away.

Well, there are biblical and practical problems with this theory. First of all, the Bible does not say Jesus fainted; it says he died:

**46 And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"**

**47 When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." 48 At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." 50 Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. –Matthew 27:46-50**

Another thing to remember is that the religious leaders of the day wanted to be sure Jesus was dead. They made sure. They wanted his body locked up forever.

In fact, they took precautions to be sure Jesus' body never left the tomb:

**The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate 63 and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' 64 Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." –Matthew 27:62-64**

From a practical point of view, those who hold to the swoon theory don't really understand how gruesome crucifixion was. Most people who were crucified did not die from the elements or from bleeding to death. They died by slowly suffocating. You see the way they were nailed on a cross made it difficult for them to breathe. They had to push up with their legs to take a breath. They would get weaker and weaker until they could not move to breathe and they would slowly suffocate. As a precaution many soldiers would just break the legs of those crucified just to be sure they would die or were dead. Well, the Bible tells us that the soldiers who started to break Jesus' legs realized they didn't have to because he was dead.

Another thing to realize is that no one who had just awakened from fainting could push away a two-ton boulder and then push through several guards stationed at the tomb.

Another theory that is often brought up is that Jesus' body was stolen. Maybe some of you have thought that before. Well, there are many problems with this theory too.

Only two groups of people could have stolen Jesus' body: his friends or his enemies. Let's consider Jesus' friends. Many of Jesus' followers were killed because they believed he rose from the dead. If they had denounced that belief their persecutors would have allowed them to live, but they held fast to their belief. People don't usually die for something they know is not true.

What about Jesus' enemies stealing his body. Okay, let's say for the sake of argument that Jesus' enemies had stolen his body. When all the rumors were flying around that he rose from the grave don't you know

they would have produced his body to prove everyone wrong? You bet they would have! But no one produced a body. To this day no one has been able to produce the remains of Jesus. Why? Because Jesus did rise from the dead and he is alive! In fact, the Bible says that after Jesus resurrected he walked the earth for 40 days:

**After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. –Acts 1:3**

Another interesting theory out there is Christ's followers merely imagined seeing him alive. Some think they were smoking funny grass and just hallucinated. After Jesus arose, he appeared to many people. He appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18) and Peter (1 Cor. 15:5)—and to small groups of people—such as the two men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-27) and his disciples (John 20:26-29; Acts 1:3-11). Did all those people just imagine it? Take a look at our text for today:

**When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." John 20:19-22**

Did all the disciples just imagine this or hallucinate at the same time? I don't think so. Of course, First Corinthians 15:6 really disproves this theory by saying this: **Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died.**

Skeptics can claim that a handful of people just imagined but skeptics have a hard time refuting his appearance to 500 people! A crowd that big would not hallucinate at the same time no matter how emotional they were.

If none of this convinces you, let me give you what I believe is the greatest evidence that Jesus rose from the dead and is alive. It is a question: How did 12 disciples, followers of Jesus, 12 peasant fishermen, tax collectors, farmers 2,000 years ago multiply to one out of every

three people on the planet who call themselves Christians today? There are 2.18 billion Christians in the world today. How did 12 simple men multiply into 2.18 billion people? The answer: The Resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus Christ transformed this world. You name for me one person in history who has had a bigger influence on the world than Jesus Christ?

Here is another way of putting it: How did a small group of followers of Christ scared out of their mind, who denied following Jesus for fear they would be killed, end up changing their tune in a few days and changing civilization? Answer: The Resurrection!

### **12 Disciples + 2.18 Billion Christians = The Resurrection of Jesus Christ!**

This means that Jesus is who he said he is and everything he said is true. This means that we can count on everything he did and everything he said. So let me just give you the highlights of what we can count on because of the resurrection of Jesus:

**-Jesus is Alive**

**-We Are Forgiven**

**-We Are Going to Live Forever**

**-We Will Have a Resurrected Body**

**-Heaven is Our Home**

**-We Will See Our Loved Ones**

The Bible is not the only source of evidence for these truths. There is a growing body of evidence found in documented cases of near-death experiences. For example, go see the movie "Heaven is for Real" or read the book "Proof of Heaven." The book "Proof of Heaven" was written by a neurosurgeon who was an agnostic until he had a near death experience and it changed everything he believed.

The most personal evidence of the resurrection and life after death for me is something my twin sister Nancy experienced. Nancy has always had a gift with spiritual connection. As many of you know my father died when I was 19. He never got to see me go into ministry or know my wife, Brandy, but somehow I believe he experienced those things from heaven. Let

me tell you why I believe this.

Shortly after Brandy and I got engaged a good friend hosted a beautiful engagement party for us outside in a courtyard in the evening. Nancy said she got away from the party to be alone for a minute just to take the evening in and was in a state of deep reflection. Suddenly, she felt a cool breeze on her face. Then she began to smell my Dad's scent. He wore Polo cologne. Then she felt my Dad's hand on her right hand and heard him whisper in her ear, "I love you sweetest heart." And he was gone. She said, "He just wanted me to know that he was there." I will never forget the look on Nancy's face and the tears in her eyes at that party as she told me what she experienced. My sister is a brilliant and well educated person who will go to her grave believing what she experienced was real.

She also had another experience with my dad. She writes, "There was also a time when my dad visited me in a dream. I had and have continued to dream about him, but this time was different. He came to me and was very excited and adamant that I pay attention. He pulled me in with him, and we were flying above the most beautiful place I had ever seen. The dream was in perfect, vibrant color. It was the most amazing garden surrounding a gorgeous white monument. He just wanted me to see it. It was just like him to be excited and to want to share something huge with me. I woke up and knew I had been with him. It was yet another reassurance of my faith" (<http://fortheloveof2030.com/?p=170>).

You know the word "Paradise" as Jesus used it can be translated to mean "the king's garden."

Nancy said she happened upon a painting that looked just like the paradise my dad showed her in the dream. I want to show you that painting. This was done by an 11-year-old art prodigy from Russia named of Akiane. She would see visions and paint the beautiful visions that she saw. This painting is called "Supreme Sanctuary." When Nancy saw this painting she almost

fainted because it looked just like the "paradise" my dad showed her in her dream.

You see, Jesus is alive and because he lives, we will live. We can have life now filled with love, hope, peace and meaning and we will live forever with him in heaven. We don't have to be afraid of death. Jesus' resurrection proves that. If you want the assurance of that today all you have to do is pray, "Lord Jesus, thank you. I believe you rose from the dead. I believe you are alive. I surrender my life to you. I want to follow you. Forgive me of my sins and fill me with your spirit. Guide my life and give me the peace and assurance of everlasting life. Amen."



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