

Speaker 1:

As some of you know, it's Worldwide Communion Sunday, and I can tell you by the look of this altar, a large part of the world is represented, especially the South. I don't know if you noticed here, there's a skillet of cornbread. How's that? Amen. Alma Owens. Where's Alma? I'm going to embarrass her. She's somewhere out there. Where's Alma? There she is. Alma does all this work for communion. Sets up the altar, does such a great job every time. Let's give Alma a hand, all right? Yeah.

My text for today comes from the 24th chapter of the Gospel of Luke. It's a post resurrection story. Some of you are familiar with it, it's one of my favorite stories in all of scripture. It's about the road to a Emmaus. Beginning with verse 13, "Now, that same day, two of them were going to a village called a Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them, but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?' They sit still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened there in these days?'" Translation, "Buddy, have you been living under a rock?"

"'What things?' He asked. 'About Jesus of Nazareth,'" they replied, 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priest and our rulers handed Him over to be sentenced to death and they crucified him, but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel, and what is more, it's the third day since all of this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning, but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they didn't see Jesus.' He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things then enter his glory?' Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther, but they urged Him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it's nearly evening. The day is almost over,' so he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened, they recognized him, he disappeared from their sight, and they asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us as he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?' They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There, they found the 11 and those with them assembled together and saying, 'It's true. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then the two told what had happened on the way and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread."

May the Lord at his blessing upon this reading of his Holy word help us to hear it, understand it, believe it, and then live in response to it. Let us be an attitude of prayer together. Eternal God, we thank you for the gift of this passage of scripture that reminds us of your power and your presence. Lord, I thank you for the gift of being able, being given the opportunity to preach this passage to these, my friends and your servants. Lord, a task, I need your strength in order to do. Lord, I ask you to speak to me and through me in such a way today that all of us do receive a word from you that will make a difference to our lives. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Some of you may know that I only read the best literature. I'm very educated and I love Winnie The Pooh. How about y'all? The simple wisdom of Winnie The Pooh. For example, one time, Pooh and Piglet were taking an evening walk in silence, the kind of silence that only best friends can share. All of a sudden, Piglet breaks the silence and asks Pooh, "Pooh, when you get up in the morning, what's the very first thing you say to yourself?" "'What's for breakfast?' What about you, Piglet?" "I say, 'I wonder what

exciting thing is going to happen today." Now, when you got ready for church this morning and drove yourself here, did you say to yourself, did anybody say to themselves, "What exciting thing is going to happen today in worship?" You should have, because I tell you, church, for the last 2000 years, Christians have not gathered on Sunday to proclaim, "The stock market has risen. It has risen indeed," or, "My 401k has risen. It has risen indeed," or, "The employment rate and record has risen. It has risen indeed."

No. For 2000 years, Christians have gathered to proclaim and say, "The Lord has risen. He is risen indeed." Christ is alive. Today, folks, I'm ready to preach. I'm ready to proclaim to you the power of his resurrection. That's why we worship on Sundays. I don't know if y'all knew that, because every Sunday is Easter Sunday. Every Sunday is resurrection Sunday, because the only hope that is real in this world, the only hope that holds this world together in the midst of all the famine, disease, the terror, the violence, the terrorism, and a pandemic is that Jesus is alive. Christ is risen, and He is real. He is alive. Now what does that mean exactly? For some people, it just means that it's a powerful metaphor or symbol.

They don't really believe, some folks don't really believe that Christ is alive, that He rose from the grave, but they see it as a metaphor. "We believe in the memory of Jesus, we believe in his teachings." We believe in the idea of, "Jesus Christ is alive." The idea. Many people believe that, they do. They believe in this metaphor or some symbol of optimism, of the power of the human spirit. If you believe that, that's fine, but there's only one problem. The existence of the church of Jesus Christ. You see, church, when Jesus was beat up, hung up, and shut up, everybody scattered in fear. Everybody. No one was around. The disciples, they abandoned Jesus. Peter denied ever knowing Jesus. Here is the issue, here's the question for all of us today. How in the heck is there a ratter-tattered group of disciples who are covered in fear, covered in anxiety, and covered in confusion?

How in the world do they galvanize almost overnight and change the course of civilization? How do you explain that? Something must have happened, because I'll tell you this, they weren't transformed by a metaphor or a symbol. They didn't create a community filled with Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, and female. They didn't break cultural barriers and ethnic barriers for a metaphor, for a symbol. They didn't sacrifice property, position, and possessions for a metaphor. They didn't risk their lives for the memory of some strange teacher from Nazareth. The only way you can explain it is, what truly transformed them, was the real power of Jesus Christ. He is alive and He is well.

That's how you explain it. They came to the tomb that day expecting to find a dead body. Instead, they were surprised by the risen Lord. They came to the tomb that first Easter morning, they were looking down, they were distraught, they were shuffling and looking at their feet, and they left shouting and praising God. They came, that first Easter morning, to the tomb feeling the agony of defeat and they left with the thrill of victory. As we all know, Jesus appeared to His disciples. He appeared to Mary, He appeared to Thomas and said, "Listen, I'm real. Touch me, touch me, touch me. I'm real." Then we have our text for today. That very first Easter morning, Cleopas and his friend walking on that familiar road to Emmaus, but they weren't happy.

They had killed their Lord and they were dejected, they were disappointed, they felt hopeless. They said, "There was a time when we believed in Jesus, but he is no more. How could we be so foolish to believe this guy?" They were on their way back to their old lives, on their road to a Emmaus, filled with hopelessness and despair. I tell you this, every one of us has been on that road of hopelessness, of despair. Maybe you're there right now, maybe it took all the energy and courage you can muster to get up today and come to worship, because you're on that road to Emmaus. You've been dejected, you've been rejected, you've been disappointed, you don't know which end is up. You think the valley you're in, that you're going to stay there the rest of your life. You think that there is no light at the end of your tunnel, whatever it is, and I'm here to proclaim to you today that it's not over.

You know why? Because we know the rest of the story. Jesus joined them on that road to Emmaus. At first, they were so overwhelmed, they didn't notice that it was Jesus. They didn't realize it was Him, but then, as he walked with them, talked with them, shared scripture with them, taught them, and broke the bread, they suddenly realized it was Jesus and the risen Lord changed them. My favorite part of this passage is when they say to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us, burning within us?" Can you imagine Jesus walking with you and hearing his teaching? "Were not our hearts burning within us as he opened the scriptures to us?" Then what'd they do? They made a big U-turn, went back to Jerusalem to tell everyone they could that it was real. This wasn't a myth, He was alive. For these early followers of Jesus Christ, it wasn't, "He taught some good things, why don't we just live by them?" For these early followers of Jesus Christ, it wasn't, "Let's keep His memory alive and stay positive." No, Jesus is real. He is alive and He is here.

Let me speak to those of you who maybe aren't still not sure about that. By the way, your doubts and questions are always welcome here. There is more faith and doubt than most people realize, so know this is a safe space to question, to doubt, to even get angry with God. The Old Testament is filled with it, so you're in good company. One of the things I've learned, at the end of the day, what I've learned as a pastor and as a Christian is I've guided people, but at the end of the day, we come to the faith not head first, but heart first. We can know all there is to know about Jesus, we can know all there is to know about dogma, doctrine, theology, and everything we want to know, but this faith of ours, all of this stuff, will not make a difference to anybody. All of this stuff will mean nothing more than just hearing nice music and a nice message unless we are willing to open our heart to the risen Lord who is real and alive. Have you ever done that?

Because believe me, He's here and He's real, because the apostle Paul said, "If Easter really didn't happen, our faith is a sham. This is a joke, this is just a show." John Ortberg talks about a good friend of his who, at one time, believed in the idea of God, but kept her distance from God. Something happened in her life that caused her to get more curious about God, so she did what a lot of people do. She began to read the Bible, she read books about the faith, she watched documentaries, and then she came to this conclusion. Her issue was not a lack of information, her issue was a lack of commitment. She said, "I probably believe there is a God, and I think I believe that Christ is real and alive, but I'm not ready to open my heart to that yet," because she said she knew that if Jesus was really real and alive, Jesus would change her life. One day, Christ was tugging on her heart and she was ready to respond. She was at her home alone and she was standing in the kitchen.

In between her kitchen and the living room was a threshold, and as she thought about Jesus, she said to Jesus, "I want to make sure this is clear." She said, "When I cross that threshold, Lord, I'm leaving my sins behind, I'm leaving my fears behind, my worries behind, my preoccupations behind, my gods behind, and I'm ready to follow you. Lord, I need a forgiver and I want you to be my forgiver. I need a savior and I want you to be my Savior. I need a God, I need you." She stepped over that threshold and she said, "I knew at that moment, I had made the commitment, because I began a relationship with God. I knew no matter my doubts, no matter my questions, no matter my issues, I knew who I could go to and I would never be alone." Have you ever taken that step?

What a great day to do it on this worldwide Communion Sunday, there is no time like the present. Maybe today in your home, in the privacy of your home, in a very personal, but powerful moment, stand out of the threshold somewhere in your house and say, "Lord I'm tired of trying to live life on my own. I'm out of lies, I'm out of excuses. I'm so sick and tired of being sick and tired. I can't do this anymore on my own. I can't manage this anymore on my own. I need you, I need you. Would you save me? I surrender my heart to you. I'm tired of living a boring life and a life with no purpose. I give my life to you." You watch, Jesus will heal your broken heart. He will fix your broken places, He will make you

whole. Many years ago, there was an engineer at GE by the name of Charles Steinmetz. He was a genius, he knew how every single piece of machinery operated at GE, and could fix anything. He eventually retired, and can you imagine? They really struggled after he retired at GE.

They didn't know what to do. Every time a piece of machinery broke down, they didn't know how to fix it, and they limped along. Then finally, one day, a big piece of equipment broke down and they had to call Charles in from retirement. He agreed. He came in, he looked over this machine for about five minutes, he took out a piece of chalk, he put an X mark where the defective part was that they had to replace, and then he went home. A few days later, they received a bill in the amount of \$30,000 and they thought, "Really? For five minutes of work, \$30,000?" They asked him to itemize it, they're like, "This'll get him." Couple of days later, he sent a bill in and he had these two items on it, "Making a chalk mark, \$1. Knowing where to put it, \$29,999." Now, that'll preach.

Let me ask you, who do you call when your life breaks down? Who do we call when we mess up? Who do we call when we say dumb things in anger that embarrasses us and embarrasses our family? Who do we call when we develop an addiction that's humiliating? Who do we call when our spouse has left us, we are nothing, and we are alone? Who do we call when our life is boring, has no point, and has no meaning? I tell you who we call, we call Jesus Christ. The only one who knows where we hurt and why we hurt, and can fix us.

How do I know that? Because Jesus said so. Jesus said, "I'm the resurrection, I am the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, yet shall they live. Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. I am alpha and I am omega." In other words, "You give your heart and life to me, and I'll change you. I'll transform you, I'll resurrect your life." That's what this is all about. Jesus can resurrect your life and give you the relationship that gives you strength in the midst of anything you face in your life. The relationship that gives you joy, no matter your circumstance. The relationship where you can have meaning and adventure.

Tony Campolo is one of my favorite preachers and speakers. Interesting guy. He's not your average ordinary Baptist preacher, if you know what I mean. Also, a sociology professor, or used to be. He said, many years ago, he had a colleague who had a PhD in English literature. Brilliant guy, taught all these amazing classes, and then one day, he just quit. Out of nowhere, he just quit. He stopped teaching classes, he retired early, just quit, and no one knew what had happened. A bunch of his colleagues got together and they... Tony was close to the guy. Said, "Listen, you've got to go talk to him and tell him to come back. What's his problem?" They would come to find out that he quit, because as he said, Jesus Christ had changed his life and he decided to become a mailman.

A mailman. Tony went over to his house and tried to convince him, "Listen, what are you doing? You have this brilliant mind, you have this PhD in literature. What are you doing being a mailman?" But he wouldn't budge. Finally, Campolo came back with the whole Protestant ethic thing. "If you're going to be a mailman, be the best mailman you can be." He said, "I'm a lousy mailman. Lousy." He said, "Why?" He said, "Usually, most mail carriers get it done by 1:00, but I don't finish by 6:00."

"Why in the heck not?" He said, "You wouldn't believe the people on my route who never get talked to in life. You wouldn't believe the widows and the widowers, the troubled teenagers I talk to, the stray cats and dogs, the people who are lonely and hurting, and I just can't help myself. I just have to talk to them, I have to reach out to them. I just can't sleep at night." Campolo said, "Why?" "It's hard to sleep when you have 24 cups of coffee every day."

Campolo said, "He's the only mail man I ever knew that, when it's his birthday, his route, his people, they get together, they rent out a gym form, and they throw a birthday party. Why? Because those people know that he loves them, that he cares for them." Campolo says, "He is an agent of God

changing lives, changing people one conversation at a time, and he's changing lives, because Jesus Christ changed his life. It's the spirit of the living Christ that turns an ordinary life into an extraordinary life." If we don't believe that, then why in the world are we here today? Are we just here for nice music, for a nice motivational speech, or do we believe it? I believe it, I can tell you that, because I've seen it.

I've seen what the risen Lord can do, I've seen what His love can do. I've seen His love make people whole. If you're here today and your health is not well, not good, and you're afraid, Jesus can resurrect your life. You have an addiction of some kind that you can't break? Jesus can resurrect your life. Your spouse has left you and you don't know what to do? Jesus can resurrect your life. If you feel like you have no meaning or purpose, Jesus can resurrect your life, because it comes down to this. What all this boils down to, what all this boils down to, what all the choir does when they sing, when I preach, and when we pray, it comes down to this question. Who is Jesus to you? Do you allow Him to resurrect your life?

Let us be in an attitude of prayer together. This is a moment for you and God. Maybe Jesus is already a part of your life, maybe you've already received that gift, committed yourself to Him, and you just want to say thank you. Just say, "Lord Jesus, thank you, thank you, thank you for the resurrection, hope, and power." Maybe today there's someone who's never really responded to the risen Lord. You've been curious, you've often wondered. This is your moment. This is when you say "Yes." Maybe for you there's more to understand than you know, you want to grow more, and you don't have all the answers. That's okay, that's what the church is for. One thing you can do right now is to say, "Jesus, I understand this much. I'm tired, I've messed up, I get afraid, and I need you to forgive me. I need you to give me grace, I need you to empower me. I need your love to make me whole. I'm saying yes to you right now." In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.