

2nd Easter
April 23/24, 2022

The world does not want the resurrection to be true. If Jesus was raised from the dead, then He is who He says He is. If He is who He says He is, then the answer to life is the answer He gives. It means that we are not our own, but belong to the One who created us. The only thing by which we can have this identity of the self and know we are a self is also the very thing by which we can have love. We were created to love and be loved. The world agrees with this, in principle, but adds that it wants to do so on its own terms.

Think about all of the confusion that is going on in our world. For those of us who are older, we could not have imagined a day like ours where such simple things as our basic human identity would be so confused. What ethnicity am I? What sex am I? How do I identify myself? Without getting into all of the controversy of insistent opinions, look at the simple fact of the matter. Either I identify myself, or else I already have been identified. In simpler terms, either I create myself or I am created.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. We have been created. I did not chose the time, place, or circumstances of my birth. I did not choose to be born. Someone else made that decision. We each impact others by the decisions we make. Think about the decisions that have stopped children from being born. What will the impact be? Through our choices we impact not only those around us, but generations that will follow (or not) after us. Beneath this is the simple reality of whether or not we belong to the One who created us, or believe that we belong to ourselves. This is the battle that has been going on since the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden.

I am not my own and neither are you. See this simply and let your life be guided by the simple truth that you have been called by the Lord, the One who made you, or you can continue in the rebellion of this age thinking you are your own person. This is at the heart of why people are so angered by the name of Jesus.

Something big happened. People's lives have been transformed. Former timid people became bold and willing, even under a death penalty, to make a proclamation that angered others. No one has ever forced another to follow Christ. Oh, I know, there are groups that have been forceful in their tactics, but the truth is a matter of the heart. An unwilling heart may know how to play a part, but if it is unwilling, it will not submit. Equally, a willing heart is transformed and a new journey begins. We see this all the time around us. This is why it seems so confusing. Some are pretending (goats), some use others in pretense (wolves), and some humbly submit and walk the journey set before them by the One who made them, called them, and leads them in a life of faith. Some are somewhere in the middle of this mess unknowing and confused.

It comes down for us in our time to meet the place where we will either bow to human authority, or else humbly submit to the One who created us. The world wants to shut Jesus out. You can join the world. Jesus calls for You to submit to the Father's will as He submitted to the Father's will. Those who obey the Lord have been given the Holy Spirit. Those who do not obey Him do not have the Holy Spirit. It is not a competition, but a reality that either we walk by faith or else walk in the way of fallen humanity.

In the beginning of walking by way of the Holy Spirit, coming out of a worldly way of living life, we may be afraid. The disciples were. They were locked up in fear that they would be next. How much does fear still our voice and cause us to be conciliatory in this world? We are afraid to speak the truth. The world works that way. Forced conformity. The Lord does not

force us. Jesus gave Judas the freedom to act in his will to betray the Lord. Judas could have just as easily repented and continued walking with the Lord in grace. The world forces, our Lord does not. This is consistent with love. The Lord desires that we enter into the love relationship, but love cannot be forced. It is the willing participation for the sake of the other.

I believe the Lord gives every opportunity for each one of us to either come to Him, or else reject Him. But that really is the Lord's business. Today, we are talking about each one of us, individually, before the Lord. He has called you. Each day, we will either say, "Yes," to the Lord, or we will say, "No." The answer often comes through our actions.

Some will say, "Unless I see with my own eyes, I will not believe." The Lord knows what each of us needs. More than that, the Lord know the condition of our heart. So much so, that our Lord even know those who will come to Him and those who will not no matter how much is shown them. We live in an age where we say, "Seeing is believing." Unless something is shown us, we will not believe. I remind you that there are those things in life which you did not see and yet believed. The day you were married, that first mortgage, the day you first went to work in your career, all of these were steps of faith. You had hope, but could not see what lay ahead. Much of life is this way. If we demanded that everything be shown us beforehand, we would wind up doing nothing at all. Do not be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of your mind in the One who was raised from the dead.

Our Lord knew that there would be those like Thomas who needed to see before they believe. Look at what Thomas did before hand. He could have easily told himself that it was not worth the bother, that the stories were pointless. But, he came to the upper room. We are reminded that sometimes we have to take those steps in spite of our unbelief and come anyway. Faith works by being, well, faith. The hope we have within us needs to push us forward. Thomas was unbelieving, but it seems he wanted to believe. There is a difference between being skeptical and cynical.

Jesus took Thomas' hands and had him touch where the wounds were. The cynics of this world will not believe no matter how much evidence is produced. We proclaim constantly for the sake of those who are skeptical. One never knows whether or not a sister or brother will come to believe by our witness. We who have faith have been blessed by others who have shown us Jesus. There are some who come to faith without the benefits we have experienced. Through all of these things, we are reminded that our Lord is always seeking those who are His and He will bring them into the fold.

Where you doubt, turn to Jesus. Where you are unbelieving, let Jesus replace your unbelief with belief. Where You are unsure, lean into the faith He has given you and learn to trust the Lord above all things. When you encounter cynics, pray for them. Where you find skeptics, give them an account of why you believe.

We are not to lock ourselves away for fear, but to go out into the world no matter the conditions and live the life we have been given in Christ. When Thomas understood for the first time who Jesus is, he fell to his knees and proclaimed, "My Lord and my God." We too are invited each day into the life of faith where we proclaim with our live that Jesus is God in the flesh, raised from the dead, who has come to lead the way for all who believe. All of Scripture was written, every sermon ever preached, all that we do together as the church is so that we may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing we may have life in His name. Be not unbelieving, but believing and come into the eternal life prepared for You by our Risen Savior. Amen.