

## **“Easter Heartburn”**

An Easter Sermon on the Last Line in the Lord's Prayer

First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood

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I don't know whether you've noticed or not but the story of Easter is full of conversations. There's the one the women have with each other as they walk to the tomb early in the morning. On the way, Mark says, they're talking, asking each other, "Who'll roll the stone away for us?"

Then there's the one that happens when they get to the tomb. The stone's not there! It's been rolled away, by an angel, Matthew says. And the angel starts a conversation with Mary. "Don't be afraid," he says. "I know you're looking for Jesus. He's not here. He's risen! ... Now go and tell his disciples."

So Mary goes. She finds the disciples and tells them she's just talked with an angel. And Peter and John run off to see if it's true. Mary follows. She watches them go into the tomb. She watches them come out. They don't speak to her. But a gardener does. He starts a conversation with her, John says. And the conversation continues till he calls her by name. "Mary!" And she recognizes the voice. "Rabboni" she replies and recognizes the man she thought was the gardener is in fact the risen Christ.

Yes, the story of Easter is full of conversations because you see Easter just wouldn't be Easter without them. If the empty tomb had been empty without explanation, it would be mystery but it wouldn't make a statement. And if Christ had showed himself and said nothing, his appearance would be an apparition, but it wouldn't prove his resurrection. You see without words or conversations, Easter wouldn't be Easter.

So on this Easter Sunday I want to take a look with you at another conversation. It didn't happen in Easter morning. It happened in the afternoon. And it didn't happen in Jerusalem. It happened on the road to village called Emmaus, seven miles away. Luke tells us about it. But before we look at Luke's story, I want you to listen to another one. It's a story that takes place at Christmas, but it's actually an Easter story. Listen ...

A ten year old boy was sitting in a classroom. The walls were made of concrete blocks. The floor was concrete too. The boy was sitting on a wooden bench along with seven other boys and he was listening to his teacher.

He was an African. She was an American. She had come from Texas to Tanzania eight months ago to teach English. The school she was teaching in was a school for orphans. It was December. And the teacher was trying to explain to the class why Americans give presents to each other at Christmas.

"Christmas gifts" she said, "are a way for us to imitate God's love. He loved us enough to send us his Son. It was a special gift. So we give gifts too. We choose special gifts at Christmas to show our love to our family and friends." And though she didn't see it, when she said those words, the eyes of a ten year old African boy started to sparkle.

A few days later, just before Christmas, the boy came to the teacher's apartment and knocked on her door. The boy handed the teacher a seashell. It was incredibly beautiful. "Where did you find it?" the teacher asked. The boy told her there was only one spot where such a shell could be found. He named the beach and when he did the teacher realized it was on a bay miles away from the school.

"The shell's very beautiful," the teacher said, "but you shouldn't have gone all that way to get it for me." The boy hesitated. Then with a broad smile he said, "No problem. Long walk part of gift."

A long walk. It's part of the gift Jesus gave us too, isn't it? For Jesus the walk started with a huge first step. He stepped from heaven down to earth. But that was just the first step. The long walk still lay ahead of him. He took the next step when he stepped off the bank into the Jordan. He was baptized, the Bible says. But it wasn't to wash away his sins. It was to keep walking to give us the gift that would wash away ours.

Then there were more steps. He walked into the wilderness to be tempted for forty days. He walked out of the wilderness to preach and teach about the kingdom of God and show people it's power and its glory. But his walk wasn't done. After three years he walked to Jerusalem. He knew what would happen. But he walked there anyway. He was arrested, sentenced to death and carried a cross to a place called Golgotha. It was all part of the long walk he took for us in order to find the gift for us.

He was crucified. And as he died, he prayed for us; for you and for me. He prayed that we would be forgiven. Then he gave his life so it could happen. And with his last breath he took another step. He said, "It's finished" because it was. The walk to where the gift would be found was over. But the walk to bring it back to us was just beginning.

For three days Jesus lay in the tomb until God put the gift in his hands; the gift of eternal life! It's a gift that overcomes sin and death, a gift that brings salvation and hope. It's a gift Jesus wants to give you. It's an Easter gift. But before you can receive it, you need to have a conversation with the risen Christ, an Easter conversation.

And I believe Luke knew that. I believe that's why Luke chooses to make the story of the conversation that happened on the road to Emmaus the centerpiece of his Easter Sunday story.

Now there are many things we could say about Luke's story. But let me take us right to what I believe is the core of it. In verse twenty-six Jesus asks Cleopas and his companion a question. "Did the Messiah not have to suffer these things," he asks "and then enter his glory?"

And on the surface, that might sound like a simple question. But it's not. It's a complex question, and the reason it's complex is because you can't answer Jesus' question truthfully unless you're willing to trust ... to trust that there was no other way, no other way for the Messiah to get the gift he wanted to give us.

So think carefully before you answer Jesus' question. Are you willing to trust him, to believe with him that if God's law is really a standard, and not just a suggestion, then breaking that law has to have real consequences. And someone has to suffer those consequences. "Did the Messiah not have to suffer these things?" That's Jesus' question to his Cleopas, to his companion and to all the rest of us this Easter Sunday.

And let's be honest. For if we are then I suppose at least some of us will want to answer "No! There must have been another way. There must have been another way for Jesus to get the gift for us, the gift of eternal life. But when we think that we need to remember the teacher who realized how far the boy had gone to get the gift for her. Remember what she said to him? "The shell's very beautiful," she said, "but you shouldn't have gone all that way to get it for me."

But like the boy, Jesus asks us to trust, to trust that the long walk was necessary to get the gift. The long walk that led Jesus to the cross was the only way that the gift of forgiveness and eternal life could be obtained. The only way. So Jesus asks us to trust that's true. He did what he had to do so we could receive the gift. He died so we could receive eternal life.

It was a few weeks after Easter. It was May 21st 1946. The place was Los Alamos, New Mexico. A scientist was carrying out an experiment in a lab there. He was trying to determine the precise amount of Uranium necessary to produce a reaction. Scientists call it critical mass.

In order to perform the experiment using 1946 technology, two hemispheres containing uranium had to be brought together by a mechanical device. Then when the mass began to go critical, a scientist had to insert a screwdriver and turn a screw counterclockwise so the two hemispheres were pulled back apart to prevent the reaction from continuing.

But that day, a young scientist named Louis Slotin didn't follow the rules. The safety rules said that the screwdriver was never to be out of his hand during the experiment. But for some reason, he put it down that day. He put it down on the edge of the table holding the machine. It slipped off the edge and dropped to the floor. The hemispheres stayed together too long. A reaction occurred and radiation began to leak out of the machine in a blue haze.

Instead of running from the room the young scientist reached down for the screwdriver on the floor. It had rolled under the table. He knew there was no time to look for it, so he reached his own hands into the machine. He separated the two hemispheres manually and stopped the reaction. By doing so, he saved the lives of seven other people in the lab.

But he knew the consequences of his action. As he waited for a car to come to take him to a hospital, he said quietly to one of his co-workers who was waiting with him. "You'll be all right. I know it. But I haven't the faintest chance." And he was right. He died a few days later.

There was no other way that day in Los Alamos and there was no other way that day in Jerusalem. There was no other way for the scientist to give the gift of life to his colleagues in the lab, and there was no other way for Jesus to give the gift of eternal life to the world.

"Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

It's a question, part of an Easter conversation Jesus wants to have not only with two of his first century followers but with all of us too. Because when we answer Jesus' question correctly then something happens inside us, our hearts begin to burn with the real joy of Easter. When we accept what Jesus did for us and receive the gift he offers us at the end of the long walk he took to get it ... then we understand and enter into the real joy of Easter.

Later on, in the evening, after the two disciples recognized Jesus and he disappeared from their sight, Luke says they felt it. They looked at each other and said it out loud. "Didn't our hearts burn within us," they said, "as he talked to us on the road?"

Well I don't know the road you're on this morning but I do know one thing. If you want to enter into the true joy of Easter you need to remember. You need to remember the long walk that Jesus took to find the gift of forgiveness and eternal life for us.

And if you remember the walk, I guarantee you won't be able to come to this table without a smile on your face this morning and you won't be able to finish singing the last line of the Lord's prayer without a crescendo in your voice. For the kingdom, the power and the glory belong to our Lord and to His Christ forever and ever.

Amen!