

**THE QUESTION JESUS ASKED:
“WHY ARE YOU AFRAID AND FILLED WITH DOUBT?”
LUKE 24:36-49**

It was a very ordinary table in a very ordinary lunchroom. The flower sitting in a vase on the table looked a bit odd and out of place, however. A man came in, sat down at the table, and started drinking a cup of coffee. He set the cup down on the table between sips. All of a sudden, it happened! The flower reared up out of the vase, arched over, and took a drink of the man's coffee! The man saw it happen clear as day. But he didn't freak out. He didn't shout with amazement. He didn't gather a group of friends around the table to see if it'd happen again. No, instead, he looked quickly in every direction to make sure nobody else had seen the flower drinking his coffee. Then he simply got up and moved to another table. He pretended like nothing had happened. That was a segment from the old TV show, "Candid Camera" – a sort of early reality show for you "young-uns" in our midst. "Candid Camera" loved to create seemingly impossible events and then just watch how people reacted to them.

It was funny watching that man pretend he hadn't seen what he'd seen. But it was kind of sad in a way, too. Why, sad? A miracle happened. Not a big miracle, to be sure, but a miracle, nonetheless. A flower moved, bowed its head, and intentionally drank some of the man's coffee. That doesn't happen every day! The man couldn't avoid seeing it. But apparently life had taught him there's no such thing as miracles in this world. And so when a miracle did happen, he simply refused to believe it or deal with it. His view of reality excluded the possibility of miracles happening, so when one did happen, he just got up, moved to another table, and tried to ignore it.

For the last 2,000 years, most people have reacted exactly the same way to the greatest miracle in all of history – the resurrection of Jesus. They steadfastly refuse to come to terms with it. They won't consider the evidence. They decline to ask the question, "If this really happened – if Jesus truly rose from the dead - how does it change my life?" Like the man confronted with the coffee-drinking flower, they just try to ignore the resurrection, pretend it didn't happen, or assume it doesn't matter. They prefer to get on with trying to answer the questions of "real" life. What's for lunch today? What kind of car should I buy next? Is that proposal ready for work tomorrow? Where will I go on vacation this summer? Those seem to be the more relevant questions, not whether Jesus really rose from the dead or not! But it did happen and it does matter. The resurrection changes everything! Once you get a hold of the resurrection – or the reality of it gets a hold of you – you cannot live the same way even one more day.

I say that because of the profound, life-altering effect the risen Jesus had upon those who encountered Him on the first Easter Day. During the past several weeks, we've looked at several questions individuals or groups asked Jesus during Holy Week. But today, we're going to consider a question Jesus asked instead. Today, I want to read with you from the Bible the story of Jesus' encounter with ten of his original twelve disciples after His resurrection. You might recall Judas, who betrayed Him, was dead. Full of remorse, he'd killed himself. Another disciple, Thomas, was absent for some

untold reason, although he had his own memorable encounter with the risen Jesus later on. Let's read the story just now. Jesus asked those ten men, "Why are you frightened? Why are your hearts filled with doubt?" (Lk. 24:38 NLT) That's the question Jesus asked them on the first Easter Day. It's a good question to ask ourselves this Easter Day. If Jesus is risen, why are you afraid? If Jesus is risen, why are you filled with doubt? I suggest you and I need to have something happen to us today that happened to those ten men. What's that? First of all, we need to ...

COME ALIVE TO JESUS' RISEN PRESENCE.

It's fascinating to see how people reacted to Jesus after His resurrection. Three different Greek words keep popping up in the different accounts. The first word is "phobos" which means "fear, terror." We get our word "phobia" from "phobos." That's a word used right here to describe how the disciples reacted when Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst that first Easter evening. It's understandable. After all, they thought Jesus was still dead. They didn't expect any resurrection. Another word used in the resurrection appearances was "ekstasis" which means your mind is temporarily displaced from its ordinary state. You hear our word "ecstasy" in "ekstasis." Something transcends your normal thought processes. Something just blows your mind! You're stunned or shocked to the core of your being. When it was used to describe people's reaction to seeing Jesus alive again, it meant profound amazement or incredible astonishment. Their minds had a hard time taking in what their eyes saw.

Then there's the word "thaumazo." It describes what a person feels when you've just experienced something beyond what you consider possible. I suppose the poor guy who witnessed the coffee-drinking flower was "thaumazo-ized." You've heard the word "flabbergasted," yes? The other day I read about someone who experienced something so totally astounding and unbelievable, he said his "flabber" was "gasted." I like that! When it says in our story, "Still they (the disciples) stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder." (Lk 24:41 NLT) It means they were completely "thaumazo-ized." On the one hand, they were filled with incredible joy. On the other hand, they were unable to process or take in what their eyes were seeing. Their "flabbers" were "gasted"!

Those ten men went from the lowest point possible to the highest point possible in a fraction of a second. Before Jesus arrived, they were an utterly defeated bunch. Judas had hung himself. Thomas was nowhere to be found. Worst of all, Jesus was dead – or so they thought. His mission was meaningless now. Their dreams had been crucified on the cross along with Jesus. They lived in fear the Jewish religious leaders had sent the temple police to arrest them. They'd either forgotten about, never understood, or just didn't believe Jesus' predictions He'd rise from the dead. Into that dejected, defeated, and despondent scene stepped the risen Jesus. Can you imagine their reaction? Jesus... alive? Really? Truly? At first they thought they were seeing a ghost. That's why Jesus invited them to inspect the nail wounds in His hand and feet. He invited them to touch His body so they'd know He was solid – not some kind of spirit being. He asked for a piece of fish and ate it. Ghosts don't eat, do they?

“Well, Rick, if Jesus appeared to me like that, I’d believe in Him, too!” Many people say that. Woody Allen, the comedian, says it’d be easier to believe in God if He’d deposit a million dollars in a Swiss bank account in our name! Why can’t Jesus do for us what He did for those ten men? Why can’t He do something that would leave our “flabbers gasted”? Often your life and mine can resemble the dejection and defeat those disciples demonstrated before Jesus arrived. Life’s problems can defeat us. Difficult or broken relationships – with our spouse, our parents, our kids, a close friend – can frustrate us. An insecure financial situation can be painful. That impossible job situation you have to return to tomorrow can drag you down. The poor health of a dearly loved one can fill us with anxiety. The overwhelming sadness of a loved one’s recent death can still overwhelm us. Yes, we know in our heads Jesus is risen. We’ve heard about it. We’ve maybe even read about it in the Bible. But what difference does Jesus’ resurrection make in our real, every day, walk around life?

You and I need to come alive to Jesus’ risen presence. But, how? No, He probably won’t appear to you and me like He did those ten disciples. Jesus told doubting Thomas, “You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.” (Jo. 20:19 NLT) It’s possible to come alive to Jesus’ risen presence without actually seeing Him with our two physical eyes. No, it’s not faith in fables, but faith in facts. Check them out for yourself if you’re unconvinced. I think German theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg, nailed it when he said, “The evidence for Jesus’ resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live.” Coming alive to Jesus’ risen presence happens when I realize that because Jesus’ resurrection is a fact, the greatest problems of my life have already been addressed. Because of Jesus, our sins are forgiven. Our lives now have a purpose and meaning beyond just existing. The awful finality of my death has been taken away. I have the assurance of eternal life in Heaven. When you realize God’s already answered the big questions of life in and through Jesus, it’s easier somehow to live with the smaller unanswered questions. The fact that Jesus is alive changes everything. The tough, ugly things about life are still there, still very real – to be sure – but there’s a far greater reality out there than them. It’s the empty tomb of Jesus. There’s nothing more real or more significant than that fact!

Coming alive to Jesus’ risen presence means also being able to access Him anywhere, anytime, and anyplace. When you leave this building today, you won’t leave Jesus behind and hope He’ll be here next week. He goes with you because now He’s in you. You can reach the risen Jesus from wherever you are today, or tomorrow, or on April 1st of next year. Even when you feel powerless, confused, defeated, and helpless. Oh, yes, especially then. Coming alive to Jesus’ risen presence means experiencing and possessing His peace. What was the first thing the risen Jesus said to those ten men on that first Easter evening? “Peace be with you.” (Lk 24:36 NLT) Yes, it was indeed one way to say hello back then and there. “Shalom.” True enough. But here, it’s something more than just a greeting. Right along with Jesus’ risen presence, comes His peace. There are many people in this room this morning who can give a testimony of how they’ve experienced God’s peace in the midst of very tough situations in life,

peace even in the mist of difficult relationships, and peace even in the most anxious moments of their lives. One of my all-time favorite Bible verses says, "You will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." (Ph. 4:7 NLT) An inner harmony even when disharmony is all around us. A kind of wholeness even when we find ourselves in brokenness. Supernatural calm even in the midst of life's storms.

From his hospital bed on the evening before open heart surgery, Pastor Bruce McIver asked his famous cardiologist, Dr. Dudley Johnson, "Can you fix my heart?" The doctor, known for being short and to the point, said, "Sure." Then he quickly turned and walked away. Following the 12-hour surgery, McIver asked Johnson, "In light of the blocked arteries that I had when I checked into the hospital, how much blood supply do I now have?" "All you'll ever need," replied Dr. Johnson, who again ended the conversation by walking away. Upon his discharge from the hospital, McIver's wife, asked the doctor, "What about my husband's future quality of life?" Dr. Johnson paused and then said, "I fixed his heart; the quality of his life is up to him." Very true.

The resurrection of Jesus presents us with a choice this Easter Day. Yes, you can be like the man who saw the flower drink his coffee and just pretend nothing unusual really happened. Or you can open your life to the utterly transforming life and presence of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. That's what happened to those ten men and it can happen to everyone here today. Another thought. You and I can also come alive to something else this Easter Day. Just like those ten men. Like them, we can ...

COME ALIVE TO JESUS' RISEN POWER.

Jesus said, "And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven." (Lk. 24:49 NLT) What was this power? Not what but who! Jesus was speaking about the Holy Spirit. Before He died on the cross, Jesus had said, "It is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you." (Jo. 16:7 NLT) When you're alive to Jesus' risen power, you're able to deal with every difficulty in life through the Holy Spirit who now lives in you.

One of the most interesting things about kid's sporting events is the parents' reactions to their children's athletic efforts. Here's what happened at one track meet. It was the fourth and final lap of the boys' mile run. As the runners approached the finish line, the group of parents in the bleachers was cheering wildly. Behind two front runners was a clump of other runners a few yards back. Behind the clump was one more runner – a short, overweight kid running hopelessly last. By the look of him, he probably would have been challenged to walk a mile much less run one. His entire body was wobbling toward the finish line. His bright red face was twisted in pain. Suddenly, an adult leapt down from the bleachers to the railing of the track. It was obviously the boy's mother. She yelled at the top of her lungs, "Johnny, RUN FASTER!" A look of hopelessness crossed Johnny's face. He had to be thinking to himself, "Run faster? Run faster?"

What do you think the problem is here – I just forgot to run faster? I'm running as fast as I can!"

Have you ever felt like Johnny when it comes to life? You come to church after a week that's left you weary beyond words and Pastor Rick says in so many words, "Run faster!" You read a book to get some encouraging insights and what overall message do you receive? Run faster! You open up to a friend about your problems, but you get a familiar sounding piece of advice. Just run faster. I don't know about you, but when it comes to living life, I don't need advice so much as I need power. Power to deal with life's challenging realities. I don't need encouragement to try harder; I'm trying as hard as I can. I need strength to prevail that comes from somewhere outside of me. The risen Jesus promises you and me the power of His Spirit. He enters your life the moment you put your faith in Jesus. He now lives in you. His power is now accessible to you. How do you get it to work for you, then? Jesus told His disciples to wait – to wait for God to do something. Sometimes that's the very best course of action when we're up against life's challenging realities. When we feel at wits' end. When life's stresses feel unbearable. Call out to the Lord. Tell Him all about it. Invite the Holy Spirit to take over. Then, wait on the Lord. Continue to trust Him. Instead of telling us to run faster, the risen Jesus most often tells us to wait and trust in Him more.

When you're alive to Jesus' risen power, you begin to understand God's will better. Jesus supernaturally enlightened those disciples so that – at last – they could finally understand how the Old Testament was fulfilled in Him. It says, "Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." (Lk. 24:45 NLT) We all face times of confusion and uncertainty as we walk through life. Quite often Jesus does give us His wisdom through the Bible itself – just like He did for those ten men. The Bible says, "If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking." (Jam. 1:5 NLT) I'm not saying you always get specific answers to specific questions just by reading the Bible. It's more subtle than that. As you read and meditate on the Bible consistently with a spirit of submission, as you listen to it proclaimed, as you study it with others, over time the Holy Spirit builds up within you a reservoir of wisdom. There's power in here – God's Word. It's mediated by and through the Holy Spirit. It's one primary way God can speak into your life. And as you interact with God's Word day by day, the Holy Spirit empowers you to understand God's will better.

When you're alive to Jesus' risen power, you receive a new ability to point other people to Him. Jesus told these ten men, "It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: "There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent." You are witnesses of all these things." (Lk 24:47-48 NLT) In John's version of this very same resurrection appearance, Jesus said to the disciples, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." (Jo. 20:21 NLT) Did you know that if you're a follower of Jesus this Easter Day, you've been given much the same mission as Jesus Himself? Like Jesus, we're sent into the world. What does that mean? Jesus was sent into the world. As the Son of God, Jesus didn't stay in Heaven. Instead, He came down to us. If Jesus took the initiative to come to you and me, you and I can take the initiative to reach out to people

who don't yet follow Jesus. How? Pray for specific people. Build relationships wherever possible. Look for opportunities to have conversations about faith. Be available to point people to Jesus whenever and however possible. Sometimes we Christians expect people who don't share our faith yet to come to us. We expect them to take the initiative while we stay safe and secluded in our churches. Of course, it's more comfortable in here. Heaven was certainly more comfortable for Jesus. But He was sent into the world. And because we're His followers, we're sent into the world, too.

Why was Jesus sent? To help bring people into a new relationship with God. Like Jesus, we're sent to people who aren't followers of Jesus yet. We see every person as someone God loves and for whom Jesus died and rose again. No one is written off. No one is beyond hope. No one is ever considered beyond the power of God's grace. It's the Bible itself that says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved." (Rom. 10:13 NLT) Anyone can come. No exceptions. Even if you feel like you're very far from God today, you're welcome. Like Jesus, we're sent into this world to help bring people into a relationship with God for the glory of God. That's why the Son of God left Heaven. That's why He became a human being in the person of Jesus. That's why Jesus suffered and died on the cross. That's why He rose again from the dead. And that's why He's in Heaven waiting His Father's command to return to Earth again and wrap it all up. Ultimately, it's all for His Father's glory. Every follower of Jesus can be alive to Jesus' risen power this Easter Day – and every day - by recognizing you're sent into this world to help bring people into a relationship with God for the glory of God.

A pre-school teacher by the name of Mrs. Terrell was facing what felt like burnout. She was a committed teacher whose heart particularly went out to disadvantaged kids. But lately, she'd gotten very discouraged. Some of her kids seemed so lost, so limited, so neglected even by their own families. She was losing hope she could make a difference in their lives. Then, Mrs. Terrell's mother died. She took a week off to attend her mother's funeral and grieve. She'd been very close to her mother. After the funeral she needed some time alone to process her feelings. Her frustrations at the pre-school added to her heavy feelings. When it was time to return, she felt more like a soldier going into battle than a teacher returning to her classroom.

The first day back was about what she'd expected. Mrs. Terrell kept her hurt and discouragement carefully hidden. After all, she was a professional. She smiled at the right times. She was patient. But then it happened. She came around the corner only to discover one of her students, Rachel, picking the last flower from a flower pot in the hallway. Rachel was the most distant and disruptive child in her class. In a stern voice, trembling with anger, she demanded, "Rachel, what are you doing?" Rachel held out the flower she'd picked. "Mrs. Terrell, you used to be like a mommy. Would this flower help you be like a mommy again? I know you're fussed in your mind. Wouldn't you like a flower?" Mrs. Terrell thought to herself, "Fussed in my mind? You mean it shows? To a five year old?" Then, she said, "Rachel, what's a mommy like?" "A mommy is like you used to be. A mommy likes being with kids." "But, Rachel, I like being with kids. I've just... well, I've been... well. Rachel, my mommy passed away last week, and..." "You mean she died?" "Yes, Rachel, she died." "Did she live until she died?" "Well,

yes, of course. All people live until they die; they....” Rachel interrupted her again, “Oh, no, they don’t, Mrs. Terrell. Some people stop being what they used to be. Mrs. Terrell, don’t die because your mommy died. Be alive while you’re alive.”

Be alive while you’re alive. That’s the difference Jesus’ resurrection makes in your life and mine. Jesus asked, “Why are you afraid and filled with doubt?” Get a hold of the resurrection and let the resurrection get a hold of you. Are you alive to Jesus’ risen presence today? Are you alive to Jesus’ risen power today? Be alive while you’re alive. Happy Easter!