

Jesus Is Alive! Now What?

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Preacher: Preaching Cohort

[0:00] Well, good morning, everyone. My name is Matt Collinson, and I'm finally back home here in the downtown parish. I've missed it. It's only been like 14 months, I think, and I'm finally, finally back home.

So this morning, I'm here with Tim Cody and Edward Marr, and we're going to be the final three members of the preaching cohort that are bringing you a message in this season. And we're going to be sharing some thoughts with you on Luke 24, the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

But before we get to the scripture, I want to pose the question that we're going to be working through this morning. And that is, Jesus is alive. Now what? So let's read the scripture. You can find it in Luke 24, starting at verse 13.

And it says this. Now on that same day, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things together, Jesus came up to them and walked along with them, but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, what are you discussing as you walk along? They stood 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 in these days?

[1:11] What things? He asked. About Jesus of Nazareth, they replied. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed. Before God and all of his people, the chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him.

But we had hoped that he was going to be the one to redeem Israel. And what's more, it's the third day since this took place. And some of our women have amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning, but they didn't find his body.

They came back 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 also didn't see Jesus.

And so Jesus 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 and then enter his glory?

And beginning with Moses and the prophets, he explained to them all that was said in scripture concerning himself. And as they approached the village where they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going further.

[2:15] But they urged him strongly, stay with us. It's nearly evening. The day is almost over. So he went in to stay with them. And when he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them.

And then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. And he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, were our hearts not burning as he talked with us as we walked along the road?

Immediately they got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven and those with them assembled together and saying, it is true. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon. Then the two told what had happened on the way and how they had recognized Jesus when he broke bread.

So this morning we're going to take a journey, much like the two disciples did. But our journey follows their emotions and their questions. Starting with their disappointment, their fear, confusion. And then we'll track their realization and excitement of the truth of the resurrection. And then finally we'll wrestle with that question that I asked you at the beginning. Jesus is alive. So what changes?

What stays the same?

[3 : 25] What's next? But our journey really begins about ten days ago on Good Friday. Jesus has just died and this fledgling movement of believers who thought he was the Messiah find themselves crushed and disillusioned.

Despite hearing the reports on Easter Sunday from Mary Magdalene and Simon Peter that they'd seen Jesus alive. And so at the end of the Passover weekend, these two disciples leave Jerusalem for what we assume was their home in Emmaus.

So where did they go? Maybe they'd always planned on leaving. Maybe sticking to this plan was part of their healing. Maybe they were still processing their grief.

Maybe they thought they'd fallen for a false messiah.

Maybe they thought they'd been there. And all that aside, they'd just lost a close friend, someone who'd been with them for three years. And so angry, disappointed, sad. Maybe they just wanted to go home.

[4 : 44] But whether their departure was pre-planned or not, these two had made a decision in that moment to leave. And where they were going is probably less important than where they were leaving.

And again, we don't know from the scripture whether anyone else left. But the end of the passage certainly suggests that the other disciples had remained together. So here we have one or two heading away from the group with no clear destination in mind, just going away.

And that reminded me of a parable that Jesus shared earlier in his ministry. The parable of the lost sheep. Now Jesus tells this story to illustrate God's love for each of his children. That God will literally leave the 99 and go seek after the one that was lost.

And here is Jesus at the start of his heavenly ministry, entering his new kingdom. And one of the first things that he does is goes to seek out the two that were lost, rather than hanging out with his 99 friends.

And it's also interesting to note that one of the disciples doesn't even get a name. And Cleopas is certainly not one of the 12. But even then, Jesus felt they were important enough to his ministry to go after them.

[5 : 54] He ignored his 99 friends and went after the two that were wandering away. And when he catches up to them, he first acknowledges their emotions and asks them to explain what's going on.

I will say that if you're comforting people who are going through grief and losing a friend, the best response to them powering their hearts out is not how foolish you are, how slow you are to believe. But Edward's going to explore a little bit more about why they didn't recognize Jesus.

Maybe it was grief. Maybe it was just dark. But upon hearing their explanation of what had happened, what was going on in the moment, Jesus challenges their perception.

He refused to let them stay where they were. He took the time to remind them of the scriptures, the stories from their Hebrew tradition, to lay this groundwork, this foundation for what he was about to reveal to them.

And it's interesting that even though maybe they didn't notice it at the time, the two disciples, when they were reflecting back on that journey home, they recognized that their hearts were burning when Jesus shared scripture with them.

[7 : 01] Jesus understood that their anger and their grief were rooted in the fact that they didn't see reality as it truly was.

And when he came, he didn't seek to alter their reality, but to alter their perceptions, to alter their perspectives. Tim's going to dig a little deeper in a minute into what that truth means for us, how the gospel is not this magic wand to make all of our problems disappear, but it's in fact much deeper and much more powerful, calling us to a radical transformation.

But that's not what the disciples wanted, right? They wanted a conqueror. They wanted a warrior. They wanted to be free from the oppression of Rome. They wanted to live freely as God's people in God's land. They weren't interested in transformation.

They wanted a violent revolution. They wanted utopia. And I promise you, if you read through scripture, utopia is not mentioned once. As Tim's going to share with us, when we come to know Jesus, when we come to believe in the resurrection, the world still sucks, but the resurrection is real.

And we see this most perfectly juxtaposed in this moment. Here was Jesus, real, resurrected before the disciples, but not a conqueror. He was a savior, not the leader of a rebellion.

[8 : 20] He was their redeemer. And the only way that their disciples could get over this disappointment and see who Jesus truly was, was to listen to his scripture and then to see him truly revealed as once dead, but alive.

But even then, that still leaves us with this question that was as relevant to Cleopas and his companion as it is to us today. If Jesus is alive, and if we really believe that Jesus is alive, then what next?

So, the Easter experience. I would assume we've probably, well, pre-pandemic, right? We've probably hung out with friends, family.

This might be the one, two, five times we go to church. There's probably an Easter egg hunt. Some might prefer the real egg. I prefer the plastic egg with the Reese's cup inside.

Very delicious. But is that really the Easter experience for all of us? Some of us might have those mountaintop experiences, whether it's an effective preaching. Great, you got a great pastor.

[9 : 26] Or it could be somehow an Easter conference and you've been convicted and your hearts were burning. But even after all of that, we probably experienced the same pattern over and over again.

We get the spiritual high, but we re-enter the case of Mondays. And if anyone has seen a Garfield comic, Mondays absolutely suck. And especially with times like these where we're just constantly barraged by the humdrum of Zoom and mass visits to Target, Giant, and your favorite retailer. You wonder, is this what really life is all about? Are the expectations meeting up with the reality I am experiencing? It's probably not the case.

So you wonder, if we're celebrating all of this for the past 40-ish days, and if you're on the East Church calendar, maybe a little bit longer, but you're wondering, how do we reconcile all this disjointed, disorganized noise?

How do we reconcile expectation versus reality? I probably shouldn't go too much in depth with this, but we already know that the Jews were expecting a physical conqueror of sorts.

[10 : 47] These Jews have been subjugated for hundreds of years. It's not just the Romans. It was the Greeks before them, the Persians before them, Assyria, and Babylonia. This long period of subjugation has been burning in their minds for a very long time.

And with the kind of pitch that Jesus, apparently this backwater prophet from Nazareth, he was speaking about the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven based on whatever scripture you're reading, it sounded really sweet, right?

He's doing all these miracles. He's speaking with power and authority. This looks like the right Messiah, isn't it? But unfortunately, Jesus just becomes another number in the Roman penal system, unjustly handed over for reforming what is the Jewish tradition at the time.

So here we are. We're literally a faction without a leader. We're this kingdom without a king for a brief moment.

So we're disillusioned because we were expecting one thing, but our reality, here we are. We're in this darkness for three days. And for our travelers today, this morning, they were still confused up to day three.

[12 : 07] And even then, I wonder if Jesus did show up to them on the road in the fullness of his glory, would Cleopas actually believe any of that?

I would guess not because that night for them were so dark, it almost seemed unnavigable.

And this isn't the first time we have disciples not fully grasping the point of things. You can read any gospel, pick any passage. Not all of these disciples really got the full meaning that Jesus was intending.

And it didn't even include the emotional baggage that they were facing at the time. So to put it in a more personal perspective, for my story, when I first became a Christian, it was back in high school. And I had this really difficult time with these big dictionary terms you read in Romans, like justification, righteousness. And I bounced a bunch of questions to pastors I knew, and I figured they'd care about me a little bit, and they respond back with even more trickier questions.

[13 : 28] And I just never really got a good grasp of what the gospel meant or what Jesus was or anything. So it unfortunately became a series of if-then statements.

And I've reduced this character of Jesus to a Windows 95 computer, which isn't great, is it? So it just became a series of if Edward didn't do this, or had Edward not go to a deep, dark corner of the internet, he could have been a better Christian.

He could have been a certain caliber, but now he's this C-rank rather than A-rank Christian. And it wasn't until I got to know Jesus a little bit later down the road.

Jesus wasn't this dark storm cloud that hung above my head. It was after engaging not just with the person of Jesus, but through the scripture, his people, and a big shout-out to the San Jose State InterVarsity chapter over there, for really revealing me the kindness and the graciousness that the character, the person of Jesus offered.

So let's bring it back probably a couple thousand years for Cleopas and his traveling mate. Jesus wasn't made known immediately, and it probably was intentional.

[14:48] However, this event's underscored by marrying their disbelief and Jesus intentionally hiding himself.

But however Jesus is able and kind enough to sit with them and roll with them and go through every part of scripture and navigate through that difficult conversation that they have.

And it wasn't a passing conversation. They spent the entire time, that entire night, to the point where they finally had dinner together. And at that point, things became clear.

So we're led to this exquisite experience as a reminder, a body broken for them. Cleopas and his friend finally recognize the person of Jesus. So I'll leave you with this. We've completed another Lenten season.

We celebrated Easter all over again. But what does that mean for us? What does Jesus trampling death and harrowing hell make sense in the great context of just average life of an American, just like you and me?

[15:51] For some of us, our calendars only afford Sundays, Christmas, and Easter as Jesus time. But what does that Christian experience look like throughout the week, besides the digital walls of here and elsewhere?

So if Jesus lived, died, and rose again, what now? So I want you to imagine for a moment a time in your life that you prayed for something that did not come true.

When someone was sick and you prayed for healing and the sickness did not leave. A time that you prayed for reconciliation in a relationship that was damaged, and that is a person that you no longer speak to.

A time that you prayed for a job and you did not end up receiving that job. Think about the feelings you had in those moments. That, as my two friends have told you before, is very much what the disciples were experiencing on the road.

They had spent years leading up to this moment following a man that they believed would be the Messiah, the chosen one, the savior of the Jewish people.

[17:06] And they thought that he was there to relieve them from Roman occupation. And they had watched that same man be murdered by the very forces that they thought he was there to overthrow.

The Jesus story calls for us to rethink some of our most intuitive ideas about God. I know that even before I became a Christian, I thought of God as a wish-granter, Santa Claus sort of figure.

Somebody, you have requests, you throw them up to him. If you're good, then he does what you ask him to do. If you're not good, then he doesn't do what you ask him to do. I actually remember, again, not even as a Christian at this point, in middle school and high school, I would not do my homework on a pretty regular basis.

And I prayed regularly for the teacher to forget to collect the homework that day. And if she just would forget to collect the homework that day, God, I promise that this is the week I'm going to do my homework.

And it was only very rarely that God moved in a supernatural fashion to affect my teacher's memory. And obviously, this is a very trivial example. And I don't want you to think for a second I'm suggesting that you shouldn't take your prayers before God.

[18:21] Take the things on your heart beforehand, because I think that that's good, and it's a healthy part of your own faith. But I think that we cannot reduce the Christian story down to that.

It calls for us to rethink the way that we think about God. Let's rejoin our friends on the road. Think again about what they were feeling on the days immediately following the crucifixion.

This had to be devastating. Their whole lives and friend turned upside down in a single moment. And the revolution that they thought they had been approaching had been blotted out in a single instant.

Then they're told that the tomb is empty. It would be natural, and it would be, frankly, crazy if they didn't have questions, if they didn't walk down the road debating, trying to understand what was happening.

Jesus gives them a hard time for it, but I, frankly, don't see how you wouldn't doubt some of that story. The whole thing is just so fantastical. And them just wondering, where do we go from here? [19:30] But look at what brings... At the end of the story, the scripture reads, were not our hearts burning within us as he talks with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?

This, I think, is a line that I personally really like and relate to a lot. Because I have felt that in my life as a Christian.

I have felt times where God entered into my heart and felt just on fire for God, for Jesus. I've experienced what they're describing there.

But I want you to see what brings about that experience. They're walking down the road debating, trying to figure out what has happened. That debating, that is not what brings about this experience for them.

It is when they meet the risen Jesus that they have this experience. It is not their attempts to understand. And now, I don't want to denigrate anybody that really enjoys a good, deep theological discussion.

[20:37] And I also think there is great value in being religiously learned. But over and over again in the Gospels, the people we see have the most powerful experiences with Jesus are not those who are the most religiously educated.

It's the poor and the sick and the outcast. These people on the margins that meet Jesus in the most powerful, heart-burning sort of ways.

The point I would like to make here is that it is not us trying to understand or believe or like our knowledge of the resurrection is not what brings about change inside of us.

It is our experience with the risen Jesus. And what exactly do I mean when I say changed in that context? Well, go back to the experience that you thought of at the beginning of my portion of this sermon.

And I'll tell you what came to mind for me. I became a Christian in my early 20s and had a pretty much like white light religious experience. Like a kind of literal come to Jesus moment, if you will.

[21:47] And at that time, my life was very much in chaos. I was drinking way too much. I had like just complete disorder. And so I have this experience where I meet Jesus. And much like the disciples, I like think, this is it.

This is what I've been waiting for. All of my problems are solved. And frankly, all of my problems were not solved at that point. It was a number of years before I was able to clean my life up and be able to stop drinking.

And I like didn't understand this for a very long time. After all, you go to church, you hear about Jesus. Jesus has risen. He has defeated all of your problems. And that was not immediately my experience at all.

And since that time, I've come to have a very different understanding of what the resurrection means in my life. And I think it's similar to the disciples' experience.

After all, look at them and the other early disciples. And in almost every material way, their life got harder after Jesus showed up, not easier. Like, you can look at the early church and there's like an uncomfortable number of like imprisonments and executions of the earliest followers of Jesus.

[23:02] Their lives were very difficult. And yet they and Christians for 2,000 years since then have been proclaiming that Jesus was the best thing to ever happen to them.

That they were saved. This almost seems like a contradiction, but I don't think that it is one. The resurrection does not mean that you will face a life devoid of troubles because Jesus has overcome all of that.

But I think you're promised something else that might even be more beautiful. These two men had an experience with the risen Lord that changed them from the inside out.

Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us? Here is what I want you to take away from this this morning.

This is an experience. That heart burning experience is something that I have had and I desperately want you to have it as well. The resurrection has shown us that that is possible.

[24 : 05] No matter how much pain or brokenness or death still reside in the world. It shows us that there is not a single thing on earth or in heaven that can keep the love of God away from you.

We, every single Sunday, look at a world full of sin and brokenness and death and declare victory over the powers of sin and brokenness and death.

If you're able to join us for communion outside shortly, continue to think once more about whatever events you thought of at the beginning of this portion. It was in the moment of the breaking of the bread that Jesus revealed himself to the disciples and their conception of what God was here to do changed.

I want you to have that experience this Sunday and every Sunday when you experience communion. It was in that moment that he showed them that just because God had not given them everything that they wanted, had not overthrown the Roman Empire, he was still there, still alive, still working in the world.

My prayer over you this morning is that you would find the same comfort in the simple gifts of bread and wine. May God bless you as you go out from here this week.