**From Poverty to Riches**

**Easter Sunday**

**April 20th, 2014**

**2 Cor 8:9; John 20 & 21**

I wonder who you might identify most with in this Narrative?

**Mary** and the other women – first eye witnesses

**The disciples** who simply worshipped jesus w/o hesitation

**Thom**as the skeptic – with this seemingly impassable divide between him and faith

**Or Peter** – whose life seems to be defined by disaster and denial. Wondering if his past truly defines who he is.

Scripture says that some of Jesus’ disciples worshipped and some hesitated. Some doubted.

Do you ever doubt this story? Have questions?

Just recently I talked with someone who questioned the physical resurrection and if it actually promised Jesus’ followers that one day we would be resurrected?

She had her questions. “How would He do that?” What would he d in the case of cremation. Or if the body was scatterd. Lost? What then?

I think these are good questions. Good questions to work through b/c it can make our faith stronger.

I think it’s easy for us to like the enlightenment, just want to confine God to His room. Give Him a big time out. Because it’s easier to do that than face Jesus’ claims.

Or it’s easier to just believe in Nirvana or something like that than the resurrection.

Easier to believe that one day we will all just end up in a place of perfect peace and happiness; the highest place of enlightenment where individual desires and suffering cease.

Easier to believe that than the hope of the resurrection.

But is that as good as it gets?

Is that all that Jesus accomplished in his dying and rising? I think it promises us so much more not only in the future, but in the present.

But we need a beginning place. A starting point.

For some, your starting point is where Thomas found himself.

With honest doubts. Questions.

I think we need to be honest when approaching the resurrection narrative.

Fact is it is a bewildering story. It is strange.

It’s Strange for it’s…

1. **For it’s discrepancies.**

There are minor discrepancies. I mean, how many women went to the tomb? John lists one woman, Mary, as we have read. Mark lists 3 women, Mary Magdalene, Salome and Mary mother of James. Luke lists the same number, as well as a few others.

How many angels exactly? Matthew lists one angel. John says there were two. Luke says there were two as well.

Did the disciples meet Jesus in Jerusalem or in Galilee? Or both?

These apparent discrepancies don’t in my mind discredit the gospel account of the resurrection but simply tell us that something amazing, supernatural happened.

In my mind it tells us just how bewildered these first eyewitnesses were; how mind boggling the resurrection would have been.

If they were making this religion up in order to hide the fact that Jesus didn’t die or that his body was simply stolen you would think they would have done their homework and would have gotten all their facts right before they went public with their story.

All the more this adds to the credibility of the gospel accounts rather than discredit.

The 2nd is Strange for its…

1. **Principal Witnesses.**

Women were the principle witnesses.

Like it or not women were not considered to be credible witnesses in the ancient world.

I find it humorous that Paul in 1 Cor 16 quietly drops the mention of women in the account.

He says, “Christ died for our sins, just as the scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the 3rd day, just as the scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the 12. After that He was seen by more than 500 of his followers.”

Maybe Paul was slightly embarrassed by the presence of women in the gospel accounts.

Evidently Paul had some growing up concerning his view of women. I think we can extend him some grace.

But in the gospel accounts they are front and centre. 1st witnesses. 1st Apostles.

Nobody would have made that up.

Make up a world religion in the ancient world – in a male dominated society – ya, let’s choose women to be the principle witnesses! Ya right.

All the more adds to the credibility of the story.

3rd is Strange for its…

1. **Portrait of Jesus**

You would think that the writers would make Jesus out to be a bit more dazzling – like an angel – bright shining like a star.

Daniel the Prophet in chapter 10 speaks of the Resurrected Christ with a face that flashed like lightening…and a body that looked like a precious gem.

You would think that if they made this up they would have described Jesus a little more like the Old Testament prophesies.

You would think they would have described Jesus a little more like Jesus at his transfiguration in Matthew 17 where Peter says Jesus “appearance was transformed so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.”

But none of the gospel writers describe Jesus this way.

Yet the accounts describe Jesus as something absolutely supernatural; yet real.

There were signs that that Jesus body had been transformed.

It was clearly physical – the tomb was empty – so it is clear that the old body was somehow used. But the body had been transformed – it could walk through locked doors and walls.

It was a body but at times seemed to be unrecognizable.

Mary at first seeing Jesus in the garden doesn’t recognize Jesus. The disciples on the road to Emmaus don’t recognize Jesus until Jesus opens their eyes.

In Luke’s gospel account Jesus cooks the disciples a dinner of broiled fish and eats it with his friends.

So physical that Thomas, as we have read touches his nail pierced hands and wounded side.

Yet in the end Jesus disappears into heaven through the thin curtain separating God and us.

There were no other biblical texts that would have painted it this way. This was all new.

4rth is strange for it’s …

1. **Very Earthy Feel.**

The gospel account never mentions the final hope that those who belong to Jesus will one day be raised from the dead as he had been.

The gospel account doesn’t say, “Jesus is raised, and therefore there is life after death.”

It doesn’t say, Jesus is raised therefore we will all go to heaven when we die.

Yes Jesus says these words in John 11 before he raises Lazarus from the dead.

“I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never die.”

**Paul in 1 Cor. 15:23** says, “Everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when He comes back.”

So we do have this hope.

Death does not have the final say.

But the gospel writers at the time of the resurrection had not yet put all this together. They were still bewildered. Amazed.

Some worshipped; yet some were still reluctant. Didn’t know what was happening and were not yet aware of all the implications of the resurrection.

**What does this tell us?**

Easter is for you and for me. It’s real. Earthy before it’s heavenly.

It matters something to the hear and now. It matters something to you.

It’s relevant.

I heard one university student being confronted with the claims of Christ. His response was “I don’t care what is true, I just want what works.”

The resurrection tells me that the claims of Jesus are true; and “it” does work – but maybe different than we might expect.

**Jesus is raised**, so He is the Messiah and therefore the world’s one true Lord.

**Jesus is raised** – so God’s new creation has begun – is already underway – and we his followers have a job to do.

**Jesus is raised** – so we his followers are called to act as messengers announcing Jesus’ Lordship to the whole world – making His Kingdom come here on earth.

**You want to know why we celebrate Easter the way we do?**

**Because we have this hope.**

**Jesus has begun this new creation work in our hearts.**

Before the Resurrection is eternal and heavenly; it is earthy. It makes a difference in our lives and the creation, in the here and now.

Jesus not only broke into our time and space 2000 years ago in that 1st Century location called Galilee. He has broken into our lives.

Jesus not only transformed those first witnesses, and charged them with a whole new reason for living. He has also transformed us. He’s also given us the same charge.

It’s not some legend written up in order to give us a pseudo historical feel for what was really a private interior experience.

No, it was Earthy. Relevant. So real you could touch it.

**You know what the resurrection story does in us?**

**It poses a question?**

I agree with what **NT Wright** who says.

“What these stories do, and what the whole existence of the Church does, from the very first days onward is it poses a huge question.”

If there was an empty tomb. And there were really eyewitness sightings of the transformed resurrected Jesus, what are you going to do with Him?

Whether you have been walking with Jesus for years, or you are just now exploring His claims; the question is the same, for all of us.

**What are you going to do with Jesus?**

**You can’t escape it; or side step it.**

I don’t know if I believe in the bible. OK, that’s fine. But what are you going to do with Jesus?

Look at how the church over the centuries has committed so many injustices. The Crusades etc.

I agree. But the question is still before you. What are you going to do with Jesus? This resurrected Jesus who knows you by name.

Did you hear about that church in the US – so racist, so bigoted? Terrible. I don’t think I could be part of something like that.

Me neither. But the question is still before you. What are you going to do with Jesus?

**History poses the question – and I think the Christian faith answers it.**

**You might be asking, simply put, what is the gospel? Gospel means Good News.**

**Read 2 Cor 8:9**

“You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though He was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.”

Paul is peaking to a people who had experienced first hand the generous grace of Jesus.

**Grace** – being given what we don’t deserve.

**Karma or Religion** would be all about getting what’s coming to you. Do bad, you’ll pay for it. Do well, you will be rewarded.

Grace turns the tables on this. Grace means undeserved merit.

If you think to yourself “I don’t deserve this grace”, you’re an eligible recipient.

I love how **Philip Yancey** puts it in his best seller “What’s So Amazing About Grace?”

*“The proof of spiritual maturity is not how ‘pure’ you are but awareness of your impurity. That very awareness opens the door to grace.”*

It was a gift of God’s grace that Jesus left the riches of heaven – rich beyond telling – and came to earth and took on our humanity.

In his preexistent life in heaven, enjoying the glory and riches; Christ willingly became desperately poor in comparison.

Over and over, the gospels tell us that Jesus had no place to lay his head. He was poor for his whole life on earth.

The writer of Philippians says Jesus became a servant. A slave.

Did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many.

**John 13** Jesus stoops down and washes His disciples feet. Taking on the position of a slave, showing us how we too are to live.

But it isn’t just this physical poverty that brings you and I life; it’s the poverty Jesus experienced on the cross that makes us rich.

History tells us that Jesus was stripped bare before being nailed to the cross; absolute poverty. Empty. Broken.

This is a mirror for you and I, our spiritual poverty without Jesus.

Jesus willingly went to the cross to take on my poverty, my own brokenness, and my own sin – absorbing it into Himself; taking it on so I would never have to.

Indeed He became poor, a physical and spiritual poverty that paradoxically brought you and I spiritual enrichment.

Forgiveness. The Old is gone, the new has come. The gift of peace with God. The hope of heaven. A new blueprint to do life. Power to do life the way it was intended to live right from the beginning.

What does this whole new way of living look like?

**Martin Luther King Jr** paints this picture.

“Forgiveness is not just an occasional act: it’s a permanent attitude,” said Luther. “What greater gift could Christians give to the world than the forming of a culture that upholds grace and forgiveness.”

This is what the riches Jesus’ resurrection promises us and calls us to.

Not just the hope of heaven, new resurrected bodies one day. It means new life in the here and now.

From death to life. The old has gone, the new has come.

Tyranny, injustice, betrayal, abuse, abandonment, death doesn’t have the last word. That was Friday, this is now Sunday.

**The resurrection brings the potential riches of faith, hope and love for all of us.**

But maybe you don’t know how to get there. Maybe for you faith seems strangely out of reach.

**You’re not alone. Thomas is a beautiful parable of all this.**

The disciples tell Thomas that they have seen Jesus but he replies I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, and my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.”

Thomas like a good historian, like a good scientist wants to see and touch.

He refuses to believe in hearsay. Other eye witness accounts.

Like you and I, He has to see for himself.

I love the words of the poem NT Wright wrote putting Thomas’ journey to music.

He calls it his Easter Oratorio.

The beginning begins with Thomas’ doubt.

The sea is too deep

The heaven’s too high

I cannot swim

I cannot fly

I must stay here

Here where I know

How can I know?

Here where I know

What can I know?

Maybe you too want to believe in Jesus; want to trust in Jesus, but feel resigned to what you know.

The chasm between you and faith just too great.

Thankfully we don’t have to stay there. Thankfully that is not the end of the road.

8 days later all the disciples were together again, and Jesus is suddenly with them.

Announces “Peace be with you.”

**Then he looks at Thomas.**

It’s like he came just for Thomas. He knew him. He knew his struggle. Didn’t condemn where he was at; just pursued him.

Jesus looks at Thomas and says, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!”

Suddenly the way is made open.

You can almost sense the anticipation. Thomas’ excitement at this new possibility made available to him.

The Oratorio continues with Thomas’ response.

The sea has parted. Pharaoh’s hosts –

Despair and doubt and fear and pride –

No longer frighten us. We must

Cross over to the other side

The heaven bows down. With wounded hands

Our exiled God, our Lord of shame

Before us, living, breathing, stands;

The Word is near, and calls our name,

New knowing for the doubting mind,

Now seeing out of blindness grows;

New trusting may the skeptic find

New hope through that which faith now knows.”

Thomas takes a deep breath and cries out, “My Lord and my God.”

Maybe for you the sea has now parted.

Despair, doubt, fear and pride no longer seem in the way.

Now there is an irresistible desire to cross over to the other side.

God no longer in exile but standing before you, living, breathing, calling your name.

Maybe it’s time to put your trust in Jesus.

He came to make you His new creation; banish your doubt and fear. Give you a heart of faith and trust. Believing God to be good.

Not wishful thinking

Not blind optimism.

It’s a deep knowing

That new things are possible

That new Creation can happen.

And can happen in you.

**“Though He was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.”**

Thomas was made rich. You too can be made rich.

But Thomas, who represents faith, isn’t the only parable there is in the gospel narrative.

Maybe you relate better to Peter.

A life marked by denial, decay and despair.

After His denial he went back fishing. Maybe he was running? Letting shame get the better of him.

I recognize that if this is you, it takes great risk to come to church.

**Philip Yancey** was prompted to write the book “What’s So Amazing About Grace?” by the comment a prostitute made when asked why she never considered church.

She said this. “Church! Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They’d just make me feel worse.”

Maybe Peter was running for similar reasons.

But just like Thomas. Jesus doesn’t leave him in his despair.

**We’ve heard it being read.**

The defining moment for Peter is now his denial. 3 X openly denying Jesus. Scripture says Peter went away weeping bitterly. And in the end he goes back to fishing.

But Jesus doesn’t want this to be Peter’s defining moment.

I wonder how many of you are carrying shame from your past? For years you have allowed your mistake to define you. That shameful event, that dark circumstance to be your defining moment.

Jesus comes after you in the same way he came after Peter.

Jesus makes a fire on the beach, much like the fire Peter was warming himself by 3 days earlier when he denied Jesus.

Only this is different.

Peter recognizes Jesus and comes running. Immediately Jesus asks Peter this question 3 X.

“Peter, do you love me?”

To which Peter responds 3 X, “Jesus, you know I love you.”

Jesus is redeeming Peter’s darkest moment. He is remaking Peter after his disloyalty and disaster.

No longer is Peter’s denial his defining moment; now his declaration of love is Peter’s defining moment.

That’s what the resurrection of Jesus offers each of us.

A whole new reality – marked by new creation; new life; new beginnings.

A whole new reality that God doesn’t leave us in our denial, depravity and despair.

That the old world of decay and denial doesn’t have the last say.

New life does.

**Love. Ultimately Jesus’ resurrection opens us up to a whole new world of love.**

**Brennan Manning** says this about the resurrection.

“The gospel is absurd and the life of Jesus meaningless unless we believe that he lived, died and rose again with one purpose in mind: to make brand new creation. Not to make people with better morals but to create a community of prophets and professional lovers, men and women who would surrender to the mystery of the fire of the Spirit that burns within, who would live in ever greater fidelity to the omnipresent Word of God, who would enter into the centre of the flames that consumes, purifies, and sets everything aglow with peace, joy, boldness, and extravagant, furious love. This my friend, is what it really means to be a Christian.”

To create a community of professional lovers…everything aglow with peace, joy, boldness, and extravagant, furious love.”

That’s the hope of the resurrection.

It begins with Jesus asking Peter this question.

Peter 3 X “do you love me?”

**Love.**

Unlike the English language, the ancient Scriptures had multiple words for love.

One of these ancient words is the word Eros – which is where we get the idea of erotic love.

The other was this word Feleo love which means the feeling of fondness for one another, friendship and deep liking.

These are very important aspects of love but not the kind of love Jesus is referring to here.

It’s this word “Agape.”

Our world tells us that love is often seen as a need, something we get from others. Agape is the opposite. Agape gives and gives no matter what. It is unconditional love.

Peter knew this first hand because he knew he didn’t deserve Christ’s love. Jesus love for him was unconditional.

I love how **Rob Bell** penned these words in his book Sex God.

“Agape doesn’t love somebody because they’re worthy.

Agape makes them worthy by the strength and power of its love.

Agape doesn’t love somebody because they’re beautiful.

Agape loves in such a way that makes them beautiful.

That’s the thing about Agape. Agape doesn’t need a reason.”

**Brennan Manning** agrees. “God loves for no reason other than for love itself.”

Peter knew this to be true.

“Though He was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.”

That’s the gospel story – the good news of Jesus.

You can know this too.

There’s a beautiful exchange that happens when we embrace the resurrected Jesus and all he has done on our behalf.

He takes our poverty, and makes us rich with his love.

Yes it takes agape love to believe in the resurrection – and it isn’t something we muster up on our own.

1 Jn tells us that we love him because he first loved us.

The writer of Romans says that God by His Holy Spirit pours His love into our hearts.

Maybe it’s time to invite this exchange to take place.

Maybe it’s time to exchange your poverty for the riches only Christ can give.

**Pray.**