

## The Gathering Church

Dan's message:

4/5/26

### Easter Sunday: The Empty Tomb

#### The Power of Three

What would a life look like if it was built on **predictable** outcomes and **repeatable** experiences?

Illustration: When you do the right things, you always get the same result,  
The money you make always pays for what you need,  
Gas prices and grocery prices never go up,  
Your health is good and steady,  
You have energy when you wake up,  
You get good sleep when you lay down for the night.  
Sounds pretty good, huh?

This is one of the reasons I love math because it's **predictable** and **repeatable** every time.  $A + B = C$ , and in the Pythagorean Theorem for a right triangle:  $A^2 + B^2 = C^2$ .

**But faith doesn't always work like math. It's not predictable and many times it's not repeatable.** There is a mystery when we walk with God. Jesus' death and resurrection was not predictable and repeatable. Jesus predicted it but none of his disciples could fathom what was going to happen when they were walking with Jesus.

The story we share today is an incredibly hope-filled story. One that is worth repeating over and over again. Jesus the perfect lamb of God came and lived among, then died for us on the cross. He carried the weight of our sins upon his shoulder and 3 days after he took his last breath he came out of the tomb and appeared to his disciples.

Although Jesus had hinted to the disciples of what was going to happen, his closest companion's response to His death was grief and confusion. His disciples, confused at His arrest fled in fear; worried their lives would be next on the line.

**Far from predictable, The Disciples of Jesus had no choice but to live in mystery waiting for God to reveal His plan and purposes.**

Paul said, *"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known."* (1 Corinthians 15:12)

If you are living in mystery right now in any area of your life, be encouraged, you are in good company with the disciples, and the light of Jesus might be right around the corner.

For the last month as a church, we have been talking about **Jesus' Last words on the cross**. Today, Sonia and I are going to share a few of the First words of Jesus after he was resurrected and appeared to his followers and to those He will entrust with the Gospel.

Paul tells us that Jesus “was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,<sup>5</sup> and that He appeared to Cephas (Simon Peter), then to the twelve.<sup>6</sup> After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now;<sup>7</sup> then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;<sup>8</sup> and last of all, He appeared to me also.” I Corinthians 15:3-8

**So, if he appeared to all these people what did he say?**

And just like his last words, his first words be important for us to consider today?

We know from the Gospel of John that one of the phrases he said **three times** when appearing to those witnesses was **“Peace Be With You.”**

As I was reading and studying through the Passion Narrative, I was fascinated this year by how many times things happened in 3s. To name a few:

**3** years the disciples followed Jesus

**3** times Jesus prayed “if it be your will let this cup pass from me.” (Matthew 20:22, 26:39, 26:42)

**After Jesus is arrested,**

**3** times Peter denied that he was a follower of Jesus.

**3** Days the lifeless body of Jesus was laid in the tomb.

On the **3rd** day he was resurrected!!

**3’s** are all over the story.

In Jewish theology and tradition, the number 3 often represents **completeness, strength, and confirmation.**

And this Greeting of Jesus (“Peace be with you”) appears 3 times.

Early on the first day of the week (the 3rd day after the burial of Jesus), Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb and finds the stone rolled away. She runs to tell Peter and John, who race to the tomb and discover the linen wrappings of Jesus lying there and still they don’t fully understand that Jesus has risen. After they leave, Mary remains, weeping outside the tomb. She encounters two angels, and then Jesus Himself. He calls her by name; she is the first to realize it is the risen Lord. She is told to go and proclaim the news that she has seen Him.

**John 20:19-23** <sup>19</sup> So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, **“Peace be with you.”** <sup>20</sup> And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> So Jesus said to them again, **“Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”**

<sup>22</sup> And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, **“Receive the Holy Spirit.”**

The phrase Jesus uses when he comes in the room is rooted in the word **“shalom”** — which is more than a greeting: It means:

- Wholeness
- Restoration
- Right relationship with God
- Inner and outer peace

May you know the wholeness that comes from being in right relationship with Me. A peace that is not only in your innermost being but flows out in the way you interact with the world.

Why this greeting of Shalom? And why did they need peace?

We get a clue when it says in v. 19 *“they were hiding, doors shut for fear of Jews.”*

We are not so unfamiliar with Fear. Fear is a real thing in this life. Bad things are happening in our world and there is much to fear.

**Why did the Disciples need peace?**

- Their leader and shepherd Jesus had been violently executed.
- They had just heard from Mary that he was not in the tomb, and they started to put the story together.

*Jesus said, “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (Matthew 12:40)*

- Then he said, *“You will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.” (John 16:16)*
- Hope started to fill that room where they were gathered to wonder. Will we see him again?
- But another emotion as strong as hope worked against them: **Fear**. They were afraid: afraid of arrest, afraid of being blamed, afraid of what would happen next. So, they hid.

So, when Jesus entered the room his voice was reassuring and calm, knowing that they would be filled with questions, doubts fears and on the other side excitement and anticipation. He immediately speaks into the atmosphere. He shows them his hands and side and they “rejoiced.” And shalom filled the room.

But one Person was missing and Jesus knew. I imagine in the room He might have inquired about where Thomas was and why he wasn’t with them.

<sup>24</sup> **But Thomas**, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.  
<sup>25</sup> So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." (John 20:24-25)

There's a pattern we often see in spiritual growth: order, disorder, and reorder. It's really the story of Scripture: Creation - Fall - Redemption.

### **(Personal Challenge)**

Maybe you know a Thomas right now or maybe the "Thomas" is you. This person believed but life sent them a curve ball and now they struggle. Their story is not over; neither was Thomas'.

He once had order — he believed, he followed Jesus.

But then everything fell apart - Jesus died. Hope was gone.

Thomas' life fell into disorder.

He couldn't believe anymore — no matter what his friends told him.

But then... day eight came.

### **A new beginning.**

And Jesus met him right there.

Right in his doubt.

Right in his questions.

Right in his struggle.

And that's what Jesus does — He brings Re-order. By coming close.

<sup>26</sup> After **eight days** His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. (John 20:26)

Day 8. Eight is significant. Especially when you think about a week. Day 8 is the beginning of the new week. It's a new beginning. It's a do-over. It's a "begin again" moment for Thomas.

..... <sup>26</sup> Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "**Peace be with you.**" <sup>27</sup> Then He \*said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." **28** Thomas answered and said to Him, "**My Lord and my God!**" **29** Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see and yet believed."

I wonder who here today would long for a new beginning like Thomas. The good news of the Gospel, the cross and resurrection of Jesus, means that you can have a new beginning. Christ died for you to be able to bring your sins to him and because of the shed blood of Jesus Christ you can start over.

I love that Jesus doesn't come with condemnation, questioning his lack of loyalty to Him. But the third time he says, "Peace Be with you", He is speaking to the lost sheep who has lost his way. But He sees something deeper than Thomas' doubts and says come and let me show you that I am truly the one you have walked with for 3 years.

I think why I am mysteriously attracted to this story of the resurrection is that the story of Thomas gives me hope for all those who feel like God has abandoned them; like God has given them the short end of the stick. That all that they once believed is slipping through their hands. I imagine it took a long time (eight days) for Thomas to come back into that room amongst friends who were trying to convince him of Jesus' resurrection.

But in an instant, Thomas goes from not Believing to Believing Again. From a strong "I won't believe" to now saying "My Lord My God."

**A word of faith changed a life, and it can change yours too.**

*"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (Romans 10:8)*

That is, the word of faith which we are preaching,

*<sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; <sup>10</sup> for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.  
(1 John 1:7)*

**God Re-ordered Thomas' Life and He can re-order yours with a belief and a confession.**