

Series: CROSSROADS – When Jesus Went Over the Line
April 12, 2009

DEATH AT THE CROSSROAD
Luke 24:13-34

I. INTRO

- A. It was a very solemn scene. Most of us were crying. It was the first time we'd visited Lori's Mom's grave since she'd died a number of years before. The grave marker was somewhat overgrown, so I found a screwdriver and a scraper—and began cleaning away the sod and dirt. Suddenly this little voice pipes up out of the background, "Mommy, is Daddy trying to get Nana out of there?" And through our tears, we laughed.

-Sometimes kids don't understand, I guess, that death is permanent. Once someone's in the grave—that's it. Grieve. Remember them. And then move on. Thinking people, mature people, smart people **get** that.

1. Today, Easter Sunday, we celebrate the fact that Jesus, who had been crucified three days before, walked out of the tomb he'd been placed in—**alive**. There's a part of every person—whether or not they would call themselves followers of Jesus—that thinks, "Do I **dare** believe that?"

-Death, by its very nature, is permanent. **Very** permanent. There's a skeptical side of us that thinks, "You know—maybe Jesus followers were well-meaning—but naïve. Since then, we've built computers, traveled in space, transplanted organs, figured out DNA--and found a way to get plastic toys inside the Kinder Surprise Eggs. They didn't know what we know!"

2. Would it surprise you to know that most of Jesus own followers didn't believe that Jesus had come out of the tomb alive? They didn't have some of the technology and knowledge we do—but they **did** know that dead people stay dead. Always! Without exception!

-But something changed their minds about that. In fact, whatever it was that happened that day transformed them from a depressed, scared little group of people—cowering in a back room—to a group of people whose faith and life **changed** the world forever.

- B. I don't know about you, but ever since the stock-market turned upside down last year—along with everything else going on--it feels like fear runs the world. It's like everything is up for grabs. Who will the terrorists bomb next? Is there some rogue virus out there lying in wait to annihilate everyone? Is some stupid nation going to fire a missile that will throw the whole world into a mess?

1. As if there isn't enough fear and uncertainty every day? Am I loved? Will I always be loved? Will the people I love be safe?
2. If you can hear it, this morning, the message of Easter is a message of hope. And life. That there **is** a plan—and a Master Planner. And that, while life has never been safe—and never will be—we don't have to live in fear.

3. So this morning I'm going to do my **very** best to show you how death and fear and despair ran into Jesus at the cross roads of history—and **lost**. And then you'll have to choose where you will place your faith. And then we'll go home. How's that?

II. MESSIAH'S ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO DIE!

- A. To understand the Easter story, you have to understand that at the core were people who, when Easter morning dawned, were about as low and discouraged and hopeless as people on this planet could get. They had laid **everything** on the line to follow Jesus. And now they felt like fools. Fools whose **lives** were in danger.

-If that day, to follow someone you believed was the Messiah—and then have him end up on a Roman cross? That was not a good thing. Roman crosses had a way of pointing out your leader was a fake. To be a Jew was to believe that Messiah's don't die—and they **certainly** don't die on crosses at the hands of a foreign government. Jesus' followers were devastated. They were filled with grief and disappointment and total confusion.

1. I mean, how could they possibly explain the miracles they'd seen—apart from the power of God? Calming the sea with a simple command, feeding 5000 families with a single lunch. Healing people with devastating illnesses. And raising the dead. They'd **watched** it happen!

-His teaching burned into their hearts—pure and true and clear. They'd seen his courage—exposing the hypocrisy of the religious systems. And **they** had experienced the power of God working through them—healing illnesses, casting out demons. How could **anyone** explain something like that—apart from God?

-And they'd watched his life. Jesus had lived a flawless life. They never even saw him so much as twitch in the wrong direction.

-They didn't believe all at once. But over time their doubts were all but erased. And **now** the doubts had returned. This journey they were on wasn't supposed to end in death.

2. My point is that these followers of Jesus weren't feeling victorious. Ready to declare a victory—even if they had to hide Jesus' body themselves. They were puzzled and **thoroughly** disillusioned. And they were **petrified** with fear—even with the news trickling back to them that Jesus was not in the grave. And that's where we pick up the story in Luke's account.

That same day two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. But God kept them from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?" They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days." "What things?" Jesus asked. "The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth," they said.

“He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago. “Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said.” (Luke 24:13-24 NLT)

3. How many of you think these two sound like two fanatics, ready to go out and start a new faith system based on a dead Messiah? What I see is deep, deep sadness and discouragement. From what I see they're not thinking, ***"I BELIEVE!"*** It's more like, "Frankly, we're not sure **where** to go from here. The one we believed in died a horrible death, his body's gone, and some of our closest friends have turned into nutcases!"

-But Jesus—who for some mysterious reason is not recognized by them at this point— doesn't leave them in the middle of their confusion and sadness and fear. Watch what happens:

Then Jesus said to them, “You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?”

Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey.

Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged him, “Stay the night with us, since it is getting late.” So he went home with them. As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them.

Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared! They said to each other, “Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?”

And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, who said, “The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter.” (Luke 24:25-34 NLT)

4. I'm not sure why these two didn't recognize Jesus when He first began to walk with them. I do know this—and maybe you can relate—there have been times in my life when I have felt **very** much alone. God was there—I just didn't recognize him.

- B. Now, I just want to be blunt and realistic about something. For someone to die and be resurrected sounds unbelievable. Really. And if there was no evidence for it--I wouldn't stake my life or my future on it.

-But it's clear from the narratives of Jesus' life that He did, in fact, stake his whole identity and mission on the fact that He would rise again. In fact, I don't think Jesus ever expected anyone to believe in his resurrection without evidence.

-In his first encounters with his followers, He somehow walks right through a closed, locked door and appears to them. Then he urges them to look at the scars in his hands and feet—and eats a piece of fish in front of them to prove He’s not a ghost.

1. It’s like Jesus is saying, “It’s okay to doubt and be afraid—and wonder if you’re going crazy! If you’re going to be my witnesses—if you’re going to **lay your lives on the line for me** [and they did!]**—you will need to be certain that it’s real—and you will need to know what it *means!*”**

-Of course, the problem for us is that we weren’t there. We have to take someone else’s word for it. But actually, we have to trust what other people say for most of what we know, right?

2. Now, I know that there’s a lot of popular stuff circulating about Jesus—like the Da Vinci Code and The Jesus Seminar that questions whether He really died and so on. Let me just say that it is widely accepted among historians that Jesus was a real person, that he was crucified under Pontius Pilate around 30 AD, that he really **was** dead—that he was buried—and that he went missing from the grave.

-I believe the evidence clearly points toward the resurrection. Two things—don’t take **my** word for it—and don’t just brush it off. Look at the evidence. Doubting is **not** a bad thing.

-What you come to believe about Jesus is critical for how you look at the future. If Jesus and all of his followers were wrong—and nothing really happened that first Easter morning, then death really does win—and nothing matters. Woody Allen is right. He said,

“More than at any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly.” (Woody Allen)

-But if Jesus is alive--well, **everything** matters!

III. WHO GETS THE LAST WORD: DEATH, OR JESUS?

- A. Let’s talk about death...and fear for a few minutes. John Ortberg writes, *“One year in the small cul-de-sac where my family lived in Illinois, three husbands in the four homes around us had heart attacks while still in their forties. This was Illinois, where the state bird is sausage. There were two immediate consequences. One was that my wife wanted to know the details of our life insurance policy. The other was that everyone wanted to know what lies on the other side when the heart stops beating. Questions about God and heaven and meaning and death ceased to be academic.”* (Faith and Doubt, p. 15)

1. There’s no doubt about it. Death was Jesus’ enemy. Some people talk as if it’s this marvelous release from life in the material world. But that’s not what the Bible teaches. In fact, at the very beginning is a creation—and people—who were created, built to live forever. But they hadn’t lived very long when the defiance that God warned about introduced entropy, disappointment and death to the world and the people God had made. God’s plan **ever since** has been to replace death with life.
2. Decay, rust, disintegration and death is so common that it’s become the only thing we expect. The truth is that death process ruins everything. You buy something new

and it wears out and dies. We see the environment—and the effects of our exploitation and greed. It's been disastrous. Greed kills greedy people—and kills the things they touch and exploit.

-And death and disintegration and disappointment has a huge effect on our lives in one way or another, doesn't it. It affects our relational world and the lives and bodies of people we love. And it affects us! I mean, I'm not trying to be depressing here—but bodies and physiques advance to a certain point—everything's looking up and getting better. But, **man!** We're at that peak for such a short time—and then everything starts heading for the floor! You can start getting nips and tucks—and get your face lifted so many times that when you raise your eyebrows, you pull up your socks. But gravity, friends, **wins!**

-The only time death seems to be tolerable is when life only prolongs the agony of someone who is already dying.

3. All that to say—death is the enemy of all you know, all the people you love, all the things you enjoy. Death is the thief that is **never** satisfied until it has taken **everything**: possessions, friendships, health, freedom, mobility—**everything!**
-That is **not** what God intended...and **that** is why Jesus came to kill it off once for all. And it happened in a way **no** one would have **every** suspected! It happened in a **tomb** of all places. Death died at the cross—and it stayed in the tomb when Jesus walked out of it!

- B. And that's why all these people who followed Jesus—and were eyewitnesses to his Resurrection, over 500 of them, were willing to **die** for their testimony that Jesus is **alive!** When you've seen someone walk out of a grave—alive—the only one in history to do that—it pretty much indicates that what they've said about life and reality is true. Torture and slaughter and imprisonment can make people miserable, but it **can't** stop truth.

1. And what **is** that truth? The truth is that this awesome God who created everything we see has been at work ever since sin spoiled what He had made and called **good!**

-The story of Jesus is that this Creator God came back to what He had made—not to kill it off for good—but to **redeem** it. When something we create and love gets destroyed—we haul it off to the junkyard. Not God. He, through his Son, **paid with his life** for it to all be made new.

2. It's like death—the slow death of all things and every person—was on a collision course with Jesus, Son of God—and when He shouted from the cross, **It is finished!**—it was over. When the dust settled three days later—Jesus had won.

-The hardest thing for us to get is that death—no matter what form it takes--is no match for God. The two main establishments of this world--power and religion—put Jesus to death. It **looked** like they had won, but they didn't. Life won. Love won. Hate, evil, decay, rust, pollution—**DEATH**—lost.

- C. What does that mean today, Easter Sunday, 2009—in a world that is largely confused and in pain? Well, as bad as the news may be in your world right now—the news from Easter is all good. Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, is Lord. Not just Lord of those who believe and

pledge their loyalty—but Lord of those who don't. In the narrative of Jesus' life written by one of his closest followers, John, we find out that Jesus, the Word, was the One who created everything. And as Creator, He came back to his creation to make ***all things new!*** That's the plan.

1. The most amazing truth about this whole thing is that the One who made everything and is Lord of everything can best be described with the word ***Love!*** His love for His Creation never stopped. He prepared the way—and then stepped back into the whole thing to not just renew human beings and transform ***their*** lives—but to ultimately renew and transform ***everything.***

-And this Creator of all—who could've nuked us all as a bunch of screw-ups, chose instead to humble himself and die at our hands. His plan is to start with people—people who will believe in Him—and trust Him. He paid for our sin so we could start a new relationship with Him—a relationship of love. But love—to actually ***be*** love—means that we have to choose His love. And when we do—His Spirit takes up residence in us—and He gives us power for whatever we face.

-His plan is to re-create ***everything***—and ***everyone!*** The only ones who get left out are those who say, “Sorry! I have a better plan. I'm gonna do this on my own without you, so please stay away.”

-And the question is—will you just receive the gift of forgiveness and life Jesus died to give you? Jesus' resurrection proved that He, the Jewish Messiah, is Lord of ***everything—Caesar, Herod, every piece of land, every star in the sky—out to the farthest reaches of the universe and beyond.*** Will you let Him be ***your*** Lord—and lead you to a life that's ***really*** life? Will you let Him set you free from the stuff that hurts Him, hurts you, and hurts others?

2. Jesus' resurrection means something else—whatever you may be facing right now that has somehow filled your life with fear—doesn't have to. I know—that may sound crazy to you. You're thinking, “Ken, you have ***no*** idea what you're talking about—and what I'm facing right now.” You're right. I don't know. But I do know that fear is caused by death.

-In reality, this fear we feel is the ***fear of death.*** You may be thinking, “I'm not afraid to die!” Well, that's because you don't think you're ***going*** to! Actually, this fear of death expresses itself in the fear of ***loss.*** And ***most*** people can relate to that fear.

-It's interesting. Know what the most frequent command in the Bible is—and what the most frequent command is that Jesus gave after his resurrection?

*How many of you think it's, “Be holy! Be perfect?”

*How many of you think it's, “Don't sin! Don't lead an immoral life?” Actually, it's ***Don't be afraid!***

-This command to not be afraid breaks into a world where we eat, sleep and breathe fear. We get shoved from the warmth and quiet of the womb into a cold, noisy and scary world—and we're afraid of being unloved, or abandoned. When we mix with others, we're afraid of looking stupid, of being left behind in the race everyone seems

to have signed up for. We're afraid of failing in school, failing at jobs—that we may never find the right person, and—if we do—that it might end in a marital train wreck. We're afraid the financial mess in our world will get worse—and we'll run out of money. We look at all the chaos in our world—and we're afraid of the future. We think of our children, our parents, our friends, our jobs—and we imagine catastrophe and loss and betrayal—and living an unloved life that just disappears off the screen with a little 'blip!' What if...? What if...? What if...? **We're afraid!**

-In speaking of the significance of Jesus' life, death and resurrection the author of a book in the Bible, simply called, **Hebrews**, says:

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (Hebrews 2:14-15 TNIV)

-Because Jesus defeated all forms of death and loss we don't have to live terrified, small lives. Do bad things still happen? Do we still suffer loss and betrayal and pain and sadness and confusion? Of **course** we do—Jesus said we would. But we don't face it alone.

And Jesus promises that **all** authority has been given to Him—in Heaven and on Earth; that we will **never** be alone! The point of Calvary is that God can work in the **worst** of circumstances—and ultimately redeem them.

-You don't **have** to live in terror. You can live with courage. Jesus says, "**Don't be afraid!**" His followers have been some of the bravest, most normal and wise and loving people who have ever lived. Religion can't do that—but the power of Jesus can!

3. The story of Jesus—Son of God—coming to show us in flesh and blood what God looks like, and then giving his life on a cross to defeat death once for all—and reclaim all creation—has been called the **Good News** by His Followers. **Whenever** we hear about anything that seems so far reaching—and so incredibly powerful that it can bring life to all it touches—we usually have two reactions. The first is to doubt.

One of Jesus' disciples doubted the resurrection for a full week. He said, in essence, "You're all crazy! I'm not going to believe until I can stick my fingers in the holes in his hands. Then he met Jesus—and had his chance, but actually turned it down. Doubt is a **very** natural reaction!

-And then the reaction, sometimes—is **How?** If this is really true—and this power Jesus brought really is life-changing, and if it does have the power to bring forgiveness and hope and help me deal with fear and brokenness and sadness—**how** do I do that?

The answer is surprisingly simple. **Believe!** It's not just hooking onto some creed about Jesus—it's truly believing that Jesus was right, that He is making all things new—including people—including you—and turning away from the old way you've lived. And then inviting the Spirit of God to give you power and life to live in Jesus'

way. And ultimately it means going public. Being willing to identify yourself with Jesus, His leadership—and those who follow him. But the best word is...**believe**.

-After writing about Jesus' resurrection, John—one of the main witnesses to everything, wrote:

...These are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name. (John 20:31 NLT)

There are only two choices; to believe. Or...to **not** believe. I think it makes sense to believe—but that's something you have to decide!

-I would not minimize **anyone's** fear or pain this morning.

I would not promise you that—if you believe enough—God will take away all fear, pain, cancer—and nuke your problems and your enemies. That all you have to do is smile...and believe! But I **would** assure you that—at the crossroad where Jesus faced death—**death lost!**

IV. CLOSING

- A. I was talking to a friend last week who recently lost a parent. His pain is still fresh—and he cried as he talked about what his Dad meant to him. I told him, I know—I cry too. Last Father's Day, Lori gave me a picture she'd restored of my Mom and Dad—young and in love—and I cried. Death, friends, is a **nasty** enemy! I know that as young and as buff as I look now (!) one day I'll be old and sick—and death will take me down too. Death takes down relationships, the beauty of our world—bleaches the color out of our hair, makes our cheeks sag.
- B. The fantastic news this morning is that Jesus is alive, He's making **all** things new, solidly at work bringing life to everything and everyone who will come. And death has lost for good! Will you **believe?**