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Matthew 28:1-10
Jesus 101: An Introduction to the Depth of Jesus
Resurrection Power

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April 12th, 2020
Resurrection Sunday

Well, today is Resurrection Day...Easter! Does it feel like it? It's a little different, that's for sure. I will say this: In one way, our sanctuary feels more Easter-like than it ever has on any previous Easter, because it's as empty as Jesus' tomb. 😊 Worship service elements that are from the Sanctuary were recorded earlier this week. There is no one there today. It's empty.

I would also say this about our current situation: We are actually experiencing Easter much as the first disciples did. After Jesus' death, they isolated themselves because of fear. They gathered back in the room where Jesus had celebrated the Passover meal with them the night before He was crucified, and they were hiding out there because of fear.

And it's into that first-century, fearful, isolation situation that these women bring the news to them that Jesus' tomb is empty; He is risen! And that's the same message we both receive and proclaim today, into a 21st Century version of a similar situation. We're all huddled at home, removed from society, in isolation. Whether we call it "fear" or not, let's be honest: none of us wants to go out and get Covid-19, even if the likelihood is strong that most of us would not die from it. But are you taking any unnecessary chances? I don't think so. That's why you're participating in an Easter service from home, perhaps still dressed in your pajamas! And even without a pandemic, there's plenty of other stuff in our lives that causes fear, anxiety, stress, worry, and more.

And into *that* situation – into your very life and our world – we hear the good news that *the tomb is empty*. In Jesus' resurrection we see the power of God on display: that it's not just power to stop evil from happening...it's not just power to prevent bad situations and circumstances in our lives or in the world...it's not just the power to prevent death...it's the power to completely turn the tide and overcome it all.

Where evil says, "Check" God responds with "Check-mate." That's God's power. And here's the thing: This demonstration of God's power and the

Good News of the empty tomb is not isolated from the rest of Jesus' life. So if you're wondering what the big deal is about Easter, I think one of the key things to understanding is that it's not *only* about Easter. It's about Jesus' *whole life* which was filled with God's power and with Good News. There's a context to Easter that gives it incredible depth.

It's vitally important to understand this. In fact, Jesus' whole life doesn't stand independent and isolated on its own; it's not just a blip on a radar screen that appeared out of the blue. His life is rooted in creation...it's rooted in God's plan of redemption and relationship with humanity; It's rooted in the Jewish religious system. All of history points to, and leads up to, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

So the context of Jesus' life and ministry is established long before it began; and the Good News that Jesus proclaimed, and the power that he displayed, started happening before the Resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is not a socially-distanced, isolated event in his life. It's connected to *everything*. But there are two ways that God's resurrection power impact you and me today.

The first is that through the power of God in Christ, the things in life that are beyond our control but seek to work against us and bring us down do not have the last word. The Resurrection tells us that they don't win the day ultimately. Cancer, disease, poverty, hunger, homelessness, abuse, natural disasters, crashing economies, jobs lost, gossiping co-workers, pay cuts, death of loved ones...these are the kinds of things that make us ask questions like, "What's going on? Why is this happening? Where is God?"

God works powerfully in these kinds of things, and the Resurrection proves it. We see it elsewhere, too, such as in the Old Testament, long before Jesus even. For instance, there's Joseph who was shipped out of Israel to Egypt by his jealous brothers and then falsely accused of sexual misconduct by a high ranking governing official's wife, while he was in Egypt. Or how about David, the king in waiting who is chased and attempted to be killed by the King Saul because of Saul's jealousy. And yet God works through these situations to bless people and display his power: Joseph ends up saving Egypt and then his own family because he gained pharaohs trust and then through

his foresight and planning in advance of a famine; David perseveres and trusts in God who brings him through the threats to his life so that he ascends to the throne and becomes king. The resurrection reminds us that when people undermine us, when pandemic strikes, when disasters happen, that God's power is not thwarted but simply waiting for the right time to be displayed.

You see: God is with us in the midst of these kinds of heavy, gut-wrenching, anxiety-inducing, and injustice kinds of things, or things that are beyond our control, and ultimately works through them for his glory. We see it in Jesus' resurrection, too: In order for Jesus to be resurrected, he had to die first. There's no resurrection without first having death. That's the nature of the power of God, and the Resurrection is proof positive of it. So God's power and presence with us is shown in the midst of these kinds of things, as he is with us in the midst of them and gives us victory over them in the long-run.

And the second way we see the power of God in Christ is when Jesus gives his mission statement in Luke 19:10, "The Son of Man (referencing himself) came to seek and to save what was lost." What does it mean to be lost? It means not being in relationship with God; not going through life connected to your Creator. And simply put: it means that sin – which comes in all kinds of shapes and sizes – has led us away from our Creator and has also broken relationship with the people in our lives, too. This is true at the individual level and the societal level. We may not like the word "sin" but what else do you want to call Pride, greed, materialism, addictions, labeling of others, hatred, and other such things? These are all ways that sin creeps into our lives and pulls us away from other people and away from God. And when we try and do life apart from God, we are – in Jesus' words – lost.

And Jesus is seeking you out to find you. Jesus wants to make sure you are no longer lost. This matters so much to him that He came from heaven, walked the face of the earth, displayed the character of God in all that he did, laid his life down for us on the cross because of our sin, and just when it seemed that evil had gained the upper hand and won with a power play, God raised Jesus back from the dead. The tomb is empty! He is risen!

So God's power is worked out in our lives to overcome our sin and transform us – both here and now, and in eternity in his Holy presence! God has the power to transform from death to life, from addiction to freedom, from hatred to love, from lies to truth. Sometimes that transformation comes out much differently than we think it will. Sometimes it takes a long time; sometimes it's instantaneous.

For instance, maybe you're struggling to "love your enemies" as Jesus commands us to. You can turn to God in prayer, and say, "Dear God, I struggle to love those who oppose me and work against me and the causes you've called me to. So Lord, help me to see where they're coming from, learn from them, and love them as you do. Amen." And God will over time, and maybe instantaneously, transform your heart to love those people. (WSU clothes suddenly appear on me.) Crud! I said (looking up into the heavens), God can transform your *heart* to love them, not your clothes! We Huskies can love those Cougars without dressing like them! Sheesh...be careful what you pray about, right? And after you turn to God like that, be looking for Him to move in your life, perhaps in mysterious ways: His answer to your prayers may not be what you're expecting!

(Back to regular clothes) But this kind of transformative power is what the Resurrection of Jesus backs up. It's proof positive that Jesus' claims about who he is and the transformative effect he can have on our lives now and eternally is true and real. And this is good news. This is God's resurrection power. Praise God for that: Whatever you're facing – whether it's your sin or someone else's that's impacting you, or something just beyond anyone's control – God can get you through it.

- Whether you're facing a Pandemic or caught up in pornography: Jesus' resurrection power is enough to get you through it.
- Whether you're facing a divorce or struggling with drugs: Jesus' resurrection power is enough to get you through it.
- Whether you're prideful and arrogant or abused and broken: Jesus' resurrection power is enough to get you through it.

- Whether you've lost a loved one and are grieving or can't muster compassion for others: Jesus' resurrection power is enough to get you through it.
- Whether you are caught up in greed and materialism or you are stuck in poverty: Jesus' resurrection power is enough to get you through it.
- Whatever troubles you face in this world, whatever sin you're caught up in, Jesus' resurrection power is enough to get you through it.

That's what Jesus' resurrection means. That's the good news we celebrate this day. That's the full depth of God's power. It's a power that once those fearful, huddled, isolating disciples heard it, they were transformed and swept into a whole new way of living: from huddling together in fear and isolation to boldly proclaiming that Jesus was risen. That was the transformative power of the Resurrection in their lives. And that same power is offered to you and me, as well.

I pray that you would know this resurrection power in your life. Many of you already do, and undoubtedly you have experiences of that power. If you want to encourage others in their journey of faith, I'd ask you to share how God has worked in your life in the comments below, whether you're watching on FB or YouTube.

And if you don't know Jesus and the resurrection power he has, then there's no time like the present to turn from your sin, turn from your brokenness, and turn to God. Why live in an ongoing Good Friday, when the Easter resurrection power of God is available? There's no time like the present to begin experiencing that power. It will change your life, and begins when we have a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. May you know the depth of God's resurrection power in your life today and always, because indeed, "Christ is risen!" Let's pray...Amen.