



John 20:1-10  
So That You May Believe: John  
“No Dead Ends”

Rev. Brian North  
April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023  
Resurrection Sunday

For 12 of the last 14 months we have been walking through John’s entire biography of Jesus, a few verses at a time every week. And this morning we come to the most crucial event of the entire gospel account: The empty tomb of Jesus the Messiah. Whether you read Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, each of the gospel writers tell of the same miraculous event, and place the same emphasis on this event: that Jesus’ resurrection and his empty tomb is a miracle that changes everything. Let’s read **John 20:1-9**. Pray...Amen.

So, I want to begin with another story about an empty place where someone should have been. It begins with a man who attended a World Cup Soccer Final match. He made his way to his seat just a few rows up from mid-field. He sat down, and noticed that the seat next to him was empty. He leaned across the seat and asked his neighbor if someone would be sitting there. ‘No,’ says the neighbor. ‘The seat is empty.’ ‘This is incredible,’ said the man. ‘Who in their right mind would have a seat like this for the World Cup Final and not use it?’ The neighbor said, ‘Well, actually, the seat belongs to me. I was supposed to come with my wife, but she passed away. This is the first World Cup Final we haven’t been to together since we got married 46 years ago.’ ‘Oh, wow...I’m so sorry to hear that. That’s terrible...But couldn’t you find someone else – a friend, relative or even a neighbor – to take her seat?’ The man shook his head. ‘Unfortunately, no,’ he said. ‘They’re all at the funeral.’ 😊

That may have been an unfortunate empty seat with an easy, if unfortunate, explanation...but in the end it isn’t something that has the possibility of changing the course of a person’s life for eternity. The empty tomb of Jesus does have that possibility, and it’s worth investigating. So: **Is there a good explanation for Jesus’ empty tomb?** Carl Sagan once said that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. People have sought the evidence for Jesus’s resurrection since the empty tomb was discovered.

Look at today’s passage, for example. We see Mary Magdalene going to the tomb the morning after Jesus’ body had been placed in it. All four gospel

writers tell us it was women – either Mary on her own, or Mary with one or two others – who went to the tomb on that morning. And she discovers the tomb to be empty. She takes that message to the disciples, and what do the guys do? **They go investigate the situation themselves.** They want to find out if the message is true. This is a fantastic thing for any one of us to do. I find it amazing how many people either don't believe, or believe, without really looking into what the Bible says. I had a conversation just this week with a bright, college-educated, rational thinking woman, who had some Christian upbringing and exposure to the Gospel in her younger years, but for several years of her life as a young adult, she was an atheist. She completely abandoned the faith and did not believe that God existed at all.

But then when she had the opportunity and the desire to really look into the Christian faith, and bring her objections, questions, and misconceptions into conversations and bring them to the Bible...when she did that, and did the research, she ended up abandoning her atheism, and coming to a place of true faith in Jesus.

**The life of Jesus deserves more than a casual response.** It deserves legitimate investigation – and you owe it to yourself. So, that's what Peter and this other disciple – likely John, the writer – that's what they did. They went to look for themselves. They saw the linen strips that had been wrapped around Jesus' body; they saw the burial cloth that had been around his head – John tells us in verse 7 that it was folded up, set off a bit to the side from the other linens. This is not the work of grave-robbers, who would have had to contend with the Roman soldiers sent to guard the tomb as the other gospel writers tell us.

By the way, Jewish custom when sitting at a table for a meal, particularly at a dinner party where servants would bring the food and clear the table and so forth: if someone got up from the table and left their napkin in a disheveled state on the table, it meant they were finished. But if they got up and left their napkin folded on the table, it meant they weren't finished. The person was going to be coming back. Jesus' folded linen communicates much the same thing: he left intentionally, on his own volition, not hastily, or not the work of pranksters or whatever, and one day he's coming back.

Now, Peter is a little hesitant to go into the tomb. I can't say I blame him, quite frankly. If I went to a cave-like tomb where a dead body had been placed 36 hours earlier or so, and now that body is no longer there, I'd be hesitant to walk in as well. But then this unnamed disciple goes in and gets a closer look. And: **He tells us that he went in, saw, and believed (20:8)**. A bit later near the end of John 20, John very clearly states that he's written the account of Jesus so that whoever reads it, would believe.

Here we see this unnamed disciple coming out of the tomb, believing. It's the same theme. Almost certainly this is the disciple John; and it is because of what he saw, and the belief that he has, that he writes this biography of the life of Jesus, so that you and I might believe. That is his intent, and his belief is grounded in the resurrection of Jesus.

**This resurrection message is the message that gets preached in the early church** (we see it in other parts of the New Testament) **and carries forth still to this day**. The only viable answer for *them* in that moment, for why the tomb was empty, is that Jesus was raised from the dead. Could it have been a conspiracy amongst the disciples? Given that the disciples lost their lives because of their faith, it's not likely they would have died for a cause they knew wasn't true. People cave in and spill the beans. Could it have been made up others? If so, the gospel writers never would have had women be the ones to discover the empty tomb because the testimony of women – like in a court of law – wasn't considered valid in their day.

Who would make up a story like this so that people would believe it, but then have it hinge on the testimony of women? The only explanation for the empty tomb that actually makes sense is the message that the Christian Church has been proclaiming since day 1: That Jesus Christ was raised from the dead.

So, if that's the answer to the question of "is there a good explanation for the empty tomb?" (and I know there are other things to consider and I'm happy to get together if you'd like) it leads us to another question: **What does Jesus' resurrection mean for us today?** And in a phrase, I would say that:

**His resurrection means there are no dead ends.** The supernatural, resurrection power of God, that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, can do a resurrection work in your life, even today. Whatever you're facing, whatever you're struggling with, God can bring you through it to something glorious. Hold that thought for a moment.

Unless you really, really don't follow Seattle sports, you know that about a year ago, Russell Wilson was traded to the Denver Broncos. You probably also know that Seattle played Denver in the opening game of this last year's football season. And Geno Smith, a second-string quarterback the previous 6 years, suddenly found himself as the starter in Seattle, facing Russell Wilson and the Denver Broncos. You probably know what happened – they beat the Broncos, went on to have a surprisingly good season, Geno was one of the top QB's in the league, and Russell had his worst year ever. Here's a little from a Seattle Times article the day after that stunning victory over Denver:

“When Smith led the Seahawks to their season-opening win over Russell Wilson and the Broncos, he was asked about being written off after going six full seasons as a backup. **Geno's impromptu response was memorable enough to be trademarked: “They wrote me off, but I ain't write back.”** – **Geno Smith, Seahawks' starting QB**

In other words, Geno Smith didn't acknowledge his critics who said he was done; didn't give in to their claims that he wasn't good enough or couldn't succeed. Geno, who is a strong Christian, by the way, believed a resurrected career was possible. He knows that with God, there are no dead ends, and that's true not just in this life, but the life to come. Why? Because the tomb was empty; Jesus Christ is resurrected. Jesus, in a certain way, didn't acknowledge his critics either. They wrote him off, but he didn't write back. He proved all the doubters wrong with his resurrection. This claim stands the test of inquiry and inquisition, of doubt and questioning, and is solid truth that you can build your life on. And when you come to that place of faith, you stand on the solid foundation of Jesus, knowing that one day, you will also be resurrected in Christ, and spend eternithy with him.

So: **Are you facing what seems like a dead end in life?** Is your loved one slipping away – emotionally, relationally, or physically? Is your career or your schooling going nowhere? Is your marriage on the rocks, or is divorced life stealing your joy? Are your kids struggling? Does pornography, alcohol, or your phone have a grip on you? Has life just kind of devolved into being about stuff and experiences and making memories that won't last forever and leave you looking for the next new thing? Does Facebook, Instagram, Youtube or the newest season of 18 different shows on 8 different streaming platforms...is that what your life has become all about? **God can give you a do-over, a new mission, a new lease on life, reconciled relationships, a renewed sense of purpose in life, and plans and hope for the future, because in Jesus there are no dead ends!**

Even more importantly: when you're facing your final breath...when life on earth looks like it might be nearing the end for you: you can trust in Jesus' resurrection. When you pair that with the forgiveness of the cross...the price that Jesus paid so that God would not hold our sins against us...When you confess your sin, receive his forgiveness, and trust in Jesus: then you can rest in peace, knowing that a resurrected life will be yours. Through Christ Jesus, with all thanks, praise, and glory to God the Father, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, there are no dead ends in this life or the life to come...because: **Pastor: Christ is risen! Congregation: *He is risen indeed!***