

# **FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH**

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**SERMON:** *That's Life*  
**SERIES:** *Easter*  
**SCRIPTURES:** *John 20:1-18*  
**SPEAKER:** *Shaun Kipe*  
**DATE:** *4 - 21 - 2019*

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*\*Credit to NT Wright, Rachel Held Evans, Scott Scruggs for valuable insight on this sermon.*

Well, good morning and happy Easter, its so great worship with you.

I was reading story this week about a pastor and a taxi driver both died on Easter and went to heaven. St. Peter was at the Pearly gates waiting for them.

'Come with me,' said St. Peter to the taxi driver.

The taxi driver did as he was told and followed St Peter to a mansion. It had everything you could imagine from a bowling alley to an Olympic size pool.

'Oh my word, thank you,' said the taxi driver.

Next, St. Peter led the pastor to a rough old shack with a bunk bed and a little old television set.

'Wait, I think you are a little mixed up,' said the pastor. 'Shouldn't I be the one who gets the mansion? After all I was a priest, went to church every day, and preached God's word. Told the Easter story every year.'

'Yes, that's true.' St Peter said, 'But during your Easter sermons people slept. When the taxi driver drove, everyone prayed.'

We're coming to the end of our Easter sermon series this morning. Our series is called "Once and for all" (**Series Title Slide**). The resurrection was a once in a life time event, but it was for all people.

If you're just joining us this morning, I'll just catch you up to speed. We have spent the past 3 weeks looking at how the Easter story impacted some of the characters, around the time of Jesus death and resurrection. Barabbas, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, the Palm Sunday crowds.

And we've been thinking about how each of their experiences at Easter is related to our own experience.

This morning we're gonna look at the impact that Easter had on **Mary Magdalene**.

Jesus was crucified, he was then removed from the cross and placed in a tomb. According to one of Jesus followers, a disciple named John...here's what happened next...

**John 20:1-10 - Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. <sup>2</sup> So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"**

**<sup>3</sup> So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. <sup>4</sup> Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of**

**linen lying there, <sup>7</sup> as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. <sup>8</sup> Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. <sup>9</sup> (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.**

Now this is really fascinating. Think for a minute about what's going on here. Mary, tracks down these two disciples with some distressing news...

**“They have taken the Lord.”**

For the Jews, as is the case in many cultures, burial is kind of a big deal. Funerals are pretty sacred and reverent ceremonies. Treating the body of your loved one with respect is of utmost important. Jews took great care to prepare the body for the tomb. The spices, the oil. A lost or stolen body is not a good thing.

So when the disciples find out “they have taken the body.” They run to the tomb to see if it's true...and of course, the body is gone.

But what's fascinating, is what they do next. Did you catch this...what do the disciples do when they discover the empty tomb?

**They went back to where they were staying.**

According to John, they went home. They don't investigate. They don't ask questions. They don't go to the authorities. It's almost like they are resigned to the fact that

## **I. That's Life**

And so they just head back home.

What makes this even more surprising, is that Jesus had been giving them hints this was gonna happen.

**Luke 9:22 - Jesus said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."**

But, they saw the empty tomb and figured...that's life. They have seen this story before. Other Messiahs. All on Roman crosses. All suffer the same fate.

*"There were many messianic movements in the first century. In every case, the would-be Messiah got crucified by Rome as Jesus did. In not one single case do we hear the slightest mention of the disappointed followers claiming their hero had been raised from the dead. They knew better." (NT WRIGHT – Surprised by Hope)*

Even in the ancient world, everybody knows that when someone dies, that's it. The end. That's life. (Or death.) End of story.

It got me thinking, isn't that how so many of us experience life today?

There are certain cycles, patterns, categories...that become so normal...we become resigned to the fact, that that's just the way things are. That's how it works.

Death & taxes. (By the way if you didn't do your taxes, you're now late!)

Bills keep coming. Tomorrow morning, you will get up and head for work, whether you like it not, that's life.

My kids know this is true. At 8:00 it's bedtime, no questions ask. That's life.

It can happen with certain habits you are trying to break. You've tried different things, but eventually you just begin to accept it as part of your life.

It can happen with your relationships. That's just the way my kids are. My husband. My co-worker.

There are some women in our world who just become resigned to the fact that abuse is just going to be normal part of life. (That's just the way men are. It even becomes acceptable, excused behavior. That's life. Nobody's perfect.)

Maybe you look around this world and you see terrorism and violence, you see refugees and starving children...at times you become resigned to "that's life."

Maybe when you went to the doctor, "I'm afraid he's not going to make it." "You are going to need surgery." "It is cancer."

That's life.

The tomb is empty. For those disciples that means someone must have stolen the body. That's just life. And so the disciples pack up and head for home. And truth is if the story ended there, there would be nothing left to tell. It's a story like all of the other stories. It's kind of depressing and hopeless. It's not a story worth retelling.

But thankfully the story does not end there. Those two disciples are not the only ones in this story. There was a young lady named Mary Magdalene. Here's what happened...

**<sup>11</sup> Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb <sup>12</sup> and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.**

**<sup>13</sup> They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"**

**“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”** <sup>14</sup> **At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.**

<sup>15</sup> **He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”**

**Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”**

One of the reasons I love this story is because of that line right there. Remember the two disciples. Found the empty tomb and went home.

But Mary, Mary hangs around that tomb a little longer. In the face of her distress, she’s willing to fight a little harder. Mary, has some grit. *“Tell me where you put him. I’ll go get him.”*

I’ll just tell you I think this is one of the primary marks of Christian faith. We do not have a faith filled with “the luxuries of life and simple answers.” Ours is a faith that is willing to fight a little harder, to persevere with a little grit in the face of distress or doubt or uncertainty.

That’s Mary. She a woman of grit and toughness. And it’s because she hangs in there that she is the first to experience hope beyond belief. Look at what happens.

<sup>16</sup> **Jesus said to her, “Mary.”**

**She turned toward him and cried out “Teacher”.**

Now don’t you wonder what this moment must have been like? He was dead. Mary knew he was dead. She saw it all. She turns around and there he is alive. Kind of

makes you wonder what all Jesus said in that moment. You know, I mean we get at least the important parts of the conversation, but when you do something like this...

In fact I've always believed that laughter is one of God's greatest gifts to humanity and so I've always kind of thought Jesus must have had a great sense of humor.

I was reading a story about a Sunday school teacher who was teaching some children about the death and resurrection of Jesus. And at one point she asked the children, "And what do you think Jesus first words were when he came out of the tomb." One little girl in the back shot up her hand. Teacher called on her. She quickly jumped up, shouting as she placed both hands in the air... "Ta-da"! I thought yep, I can picture Jesus jumping out in front of Mary. Ta-da!

And I just want to say this. I think sometimes when it comes to the story of the resurrection as church people. We can get a little bit flippant and why don't people just believe? I'll just tell you, the reason is because this is a category change.

It does not fit within our minds, experiences, senses. In the resurrection, Jesus says, *"There's a new pattern, a new category, new life!"*

In the resurrection the unthinkable, the impossible happens. It creates a kind of **cognitive dissonance**. Dead people don't come back to life.

The Baltimore Orioles playing a meaningful game in October. It's impossible. Cognitive dissonance.

We need to be patient and gracious in how we share this story with others.

But here's why this category change is so important for you and me. In this moment, the resurrection, the Easter story changes from "that's life" to

## II. What if...

When someone dies that's it, that's life? But what if one person came back to life. See that changes everything, then there's a whole new pattern...that's a story worth telling. That's the kind of story, people remember. It's the kind of story that could start a movement, a following, that could last for thousands of years. It's earth-shattering. What if...

And I'll just tell you those are such powerful words...what if. They are words that express possibility. The possibility that there's more to this life, than just our categories. If a dead man came back to life, there is more to life than just what I can see and hear and touch and smell.

I have been fascinated recently by some of these videos of the new Enchroma glasses. Have you seen these? For certain color blind individuals. Who, when given these glasses are able to "see the full range, vibrancy of colors for the very first time."

### **VIDEO:**

In some ways what's happening here is a category change. These folks have become resigned (accustom) to a certain way of seeing the world...they are resigned to the fact that this is what the world looks like. That's life. But these enchroma glasses open a world of possibility. What if...there are more colors? What if those colors are brighter than I ever imagined? What if...my normal isn't all there is? What if...there is more to this life?

I started thinking more about this "what if" concept. I started thinking that in some ways all great changes, movements that inspire hope and transformation, come about because someone changes "That's life to what if."

Remember Martin Luther King Jr (**PIC OF MLK**). He was living in a world that said racial injustice is the norm...that's life. Get used to it. Deal with it. But he said, in a sense, "what if..." *"I have a dream that one day all people will be seen as equal, because we will not judge others on the basis of skin color, ethnicity, where they come from, the language they speak..."* What if there is a different way to look at other humans. That's a category change. Some would hear that and laugh. But his what if, is changing the world.

For those of us who believe in the resurrection, we have this hope that "there is more to this life". Categories do change. Racial injustice doesn't have to be the norm.

It got me thinking, of Rosa Parks (**PIC OF ROSA**), sitting on a bus, on a cold December evening in 1955. She was tired after spending the day at work as a department store seamstress. She stepped onto the bus for the ride home and sat in the fifth row — the first row of the "Colored Section."

In Montgomery, Alabama, when a bus became full, the seats nearer the front were given to white passengers. Montgomery bus driver James Blake ordered Parks and three other African Americans seated nearby to move to the back of the bus. Three riders complied, because that's life. That's how it works. Rosa did not. She said, "What if I don't."

"Are you going to stand up?" Blake demanded. Rosa looked straight at him and said, "No." Flustered and not quite sure what to do, Blake responded, "Well, I'm going to have you arrested." And Rosa, still sitting next to the window replied softly, "You may do that."

I'll just give you one category change that happens, on the spot in this story.

### **A. Mary Magdalene**

Watch what happens in this story...

**17 Jesus said...“Mary...Go...to my brothers and tell them.”**

**18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!”  
And she told them that he had said these things to her.**

Now we read that, and we’ve read that a hundred times and the significance of this scene doesn’t strike us the way it did in the ancient world. But you see the thing is, Mary is woman.

And the reason this should blow your mind is because in the first century, there were laws restricting women from testifying as eyewitnesses in a Jewish court of law. It’s like if there’s one thing a woman can’t be, it’s an eyewitness.

*Josephus, Jewish historian said that even the witness of multiple women was not acceptable “because of the levity and boldness of their sex.”*

*Celsus, the second-century critic of Christianity, mocked the idea of Mary Magdalene as an alleged resurrection witness, referring to her as a “hysterical female . . . deluded by . . . sorcery.”*

(Ortberg)

John, knows all of this. And yet, there you have it...Mary is the very first eyewitness to the resurrected Messiah.

By the way NT Wright, New Testament scholar says this is a significant indicator of the historical accuracy of the resurrection accounts. If John was making this up, and wanting people to actually believe his story...he’s not gonna have Mary Magdalene as the primary eyewitness.

This is a category change.

*“The first person to be commissioned to take the news of the resurrection of Jesus to others is Mary Magdalene. Now, that is so counter-intuitive in the ancient world, in the ancient Jewish world, in the ancient pagan world!*

*... And this is... God choosing what is weak (according to social standards of that day) to shame the strong. And it seems to me that in the resurrection there is a radical re-evaluation of the role of women.”*

The resurrection of Jesus begins changing categories on the spot. The kingdom of the resurrected Messiah turns the system and patterns of this world on its head. There’s a new kingdom at work, new rules, new categories.

It makes Jesus different than anyone who ever lived. It makes what he said and taught more important than what anyone else ever said or taught.

The resurrection invites us into a “what if” kind of story. What if the resurrection happened? What if Jesus did actually come back to life? What does that mean? What if there is a new category? What if it’s like “seeing the full range of colors for the very first time? What if death & taxes is not all there is?

Starts to change the categories in the real world. Because of the resurrection, your life, my life can be different. Transformation, change can actually happen.

This is why we’re taking time this year to study the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus words in this sermon are filled with category change about how we do life as people who believe in the resurrection.

### **III. Category change for you and me:**

“You have heard it said, do not murder. (That’s life.) But I say, do not be angry.” In my kingdom anger problems, abuse, can change.

“You have heard it said, do not commit adultery. (That’s life.) But I say, do not lust.” In my kingdom, you can have a pure heart.

“You have heard it said, Eye for eye (that’s life), but I say if someone slaps your right cheek, turn your other cheek also.

“You have heard it said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy (that’s life). But I say, love your enemies.”

In this Kingdom, you do unto others as you would have them do to you. The first will be last and the last will be first. It is better to give than to receive. Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink or wear...because you are living in the Kingdom of the resurrected Messiah.

Your life is now no longer controlled by the categories and patterns of this world. We believe miracles can happen. Blind people see, sick people are healed. Relationships can be restored. Temptations are defeated. Racial injustice is overcome, cancer does not get the final word. Death is not the end.

In the face of brokenness, we say because of the resurrection... *“There is more to this life.”*

This moment, Mary seeing the resurrected Jesus, is the reason you and I are sitting here today. I mean have you thought about that. How do we end up in this room together? There is one thing that brought us together, it’s that 2,000 years ago a dead man came back to life. It was so life-altering, earth-shattering, category-destroying, there are people getting together today to continue retelling that story. That’s why we’re here, that’s what Easter is!

The resurrection is a “what if” kind of story that changes our normal categories for thinking about life. This category change is the heart of Christianity.

I don't what your life is like. Maybe in so many ways you have become resigned to that's life. Maybe life has left you feeling, its never changes, I'm going home. I don't know if hope seems far away. I don't know if joy seems to have passed you by.

But I want you to know, we believe there's a different story. A story that we tell most plainly at Easter that says, "What if there's more to life." We believe hope and change are possible and that as a little community of believers in the resurrection each week we show up here, with a little bit of grit, perseverance, to wrestle with and following Jesus...cause we want to be around when he shows up again and says... "Ta-da."

I want you to know, you are welcome here at Five Forks next week. Week after that, week after that.

In fact, you should really come next week. Its youth Sunday and we'll be celebrating and honoring our students next week. There's a group of people who need to know that "there's more to this life." Statics on student depression, drug use, suicide is just heart-breaking. We have young people who want to know, there is more to this life, than this. I can make a difference in the world, things do change, I am part of a much bigger story. Wow, come on out next week and help us celebrate our young people!