

Seeking the Living Christ in Every Generation

Easter Sunday

Luke 24:1-12

Good morning, church! He is risen! (He is risen indeed!) Amen and praise God that the tomb is empty and Jesus is ALIVE!

My name is Pastor Mark and I'm the new Campus Pastor here at our Overland Park campus. We are one church in two locations and our lead Pastor, Jim West, is so sorry he can't be with you this morning. He's across the State Line preaching at our South KC campus.

This is actually only my second full week on the job. So for those of you I haven't had a chance to meet, I want to take this opportunity to introduce myself and welcome you to our church. I don't usually wear a suit and tie to church except on the most special occasions – I think this qualifies.

A little about me: My wife's name is Emily and we have been married for 17 years. She grew up not far from here and was on Summer Staff here for two summers right after the campus opened. Emily and I have four children 10 and under – all boys. You don't need to gasp!

Here's a picture of our family from last summer on the beach in Florida (show normal family pic). If it appears that our youngest son, Micah, was falling from the sky, that's because he was. (show second photoshopped picture).

Some of you are like, "That's such a sweet picture. Your boys are so cute and handsome and well behaved." You can have one of them. I'm just kidding! You can have as many as you want.

While I may be new to this campus, I'm certainly not new to Colonial. I grew up going to our South KC campus. I got baptized there, I went to preschool there, I made a commitment to surrender my life to Jesus there, I met my wife in the youth group there, we eventually got married there. Our kids were delivered on the front pew – just kidding! That would be weird. It was the second pew.

Jokes aside, I am extremely blessed to serve as one of the pastors here at my home church.

This is not a perfect church so please don't get the wrong impression. But this is a church that Prays First, one that believes that Truth Matters, one that Loves Generously, one that is Student Strong. Most of all, this is a church that cares for hurting people in their time of greatest need. I speak from personal experience.

This church is *family* to me, and it can be family to you as well. So if you don't have a church home, welcome home! We invite you to stick around and "come and see" what God is doing here. I think you'll be surprised and encouraged by what you discover.

Speaking of being surprised and encouraged by what you discover, let's stand and read our Scripture for today which comes from Luke 24:1-12.

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. ⁵ And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." ⁸ And they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, ¹¹ but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹² But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

Thank you. Please be seated. Let's pray.

I hope you're up for a little crowd participation because I'm going to ask you to raise your hand and do something that might make you feel a bit uncomfortable – I'm going to ask you to share your age bracket followed by your deepest, darkest sin. See, now the age bracket thing doesn't seem so bad, right? In a crowd this size we have at least six generations represented.

I want to show you a chart that reflects the different generations. (show A Rough Guide to Generations picture and leave it up for a few minutes).

First, I want to see if we have anyone in their mid 90s or older worshipping with us today. If so, raise your hand (Greatest Generation). It's ok - they wouldn't be able to hear me anyway. Love the Greatest Generation. In many ways we owe our freedoms to the sacrifices of this great generation, don't we?

What about those of you born between 1927 and 1946? You are part of the Silent Generation also known as Traditionalists. You love the old hymns and you hate it when people say, "Amen!" in church. Can I get an amen?

What about those of you born between 1947 and 1964? Raise your hand. You are my Baby Boomers. Ya'll are my favorite. You all let my generation spend hours and hours playing with our friends in the creek by ourselves. You let us play football in the middle of the street, and ride in the back seat of your station wagon without us ever feeling the restriction of a five-point harness booster seat. Half the time you just drove around with us on your lap. The good news is most of us survived.

Boomers, like the Silent Generation and the Greatest Generation, grew up in an era of modernity that was focused on scientific evidence and the pursuit of logic, rationality, and knowledge. Many of you are intent on teaching the younger generation apologetics because it's super important to you to defend absolute Truth.

What about my Gen Xers? Where are you at? Gen Xers were the first postmodern generation. They were skeptical of the data because they were convinced the people compiling the data had an agenda. No one and nothing could be trusted. Everyone has an inherent bias and the truth was all-too-often used as a tool of oppression. While suspicious, you're also innovative and adaptive. You're simply searching for what's real, authentic, genuine.... Especially when it comes to one's faith.

How about those of you born between 1982 and 2000? You are my Millennials! We were spoiled, weren't we? Where Gen X felt criticized, we were praised. We were the center of our homes and our parents' lives. They tried their best not to pass their trauma onto us.... How'd that go? Millennials are optimistic and a little narcissistic if I'm being completely honest. We desire to save the world and work toward the common good.

Next we have Generation Z, which were those born between about 2000 and 2012. Raise your hand if you are part of Gen Z! Generally speaking, many of you feel overshadowed and overprotected. You seek inclusivity, charity, and equity for all. You are looking for what's beautiful because you believe if something is beautiful, it can be trusted.

And finally, not listed here is our current generation of kids, Generation Alpha, which includes everyone 10 and under. Let's hear it for our elementary kids in the audience today.

So what does this have to do with the Easter story? In a word, everything. It's important to realize that the predominant questions of our generation echo the predominant questions that permeated the Greco-Roman culture in which Jesus was crucified and resurrected. So what exactly are those questions?

Four predominant generational questions:

- I. What is true? (Baby Boomers and older)
- II. What is real? (Gen X)
- III. What is good? (Millennials)
- IV. What is beautiful? (Gen Z and younger)

I have to admit that I didn't come up with these questions. I stole them from a book I read recently called, "Real Life: A Christianity Worth Living Out" by James Choung (show image of the cover).

Again, these are not new questions. These questions are as old as time. The four big questions of our day were rooted in Greek philosophy, especially in Plato's Universals which was written a

few hundred years before Christ. For Plato, these four questions were all interrelated and pointed to what he referred to as one supreme Universal, called “the One” or “the Absolute.”

Let’s unpack these questions a bit further as we see how they relate to the Easter story.

I. What is true?

Remember back in John’s gospel when Jesus was arrested and brought before Pilate for questioning? Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews? Your own nation and chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” And Jesus responds with, “My Kingdom is not of this world.” Pilate then mockingly asks, “So you are a king?”

Listen how Jesus responds:

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

-John 18:37-38

See what happened there? Jesus was speaking in absolutes while Pilate was placating to the cultural relativism of the day.

“You say you bear witness to the truth, but what is truth? Can truth truly be defined? There is no absolute truth! It’s all relative. Truth is the mere perception of one’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It’s unknowable, obscure, and fleeting.” This was Pilate’s worldview.

But Jesus’ disciples knew better. They believed that Jesus’ words were true and that He embodied Truth with a capital T. Jesus had just gotten done telling them that He was going to His Father’s house to prepare a room for them. Two which Thomas asked, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” So Jesus responded by saying, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me.”

See, Jesus’ disciples had believed Jesus’ promises – they believed that He was who He said he was – the way, the truth, and the life! But from dusk on Friday to dawn on Sunday they were overcome with immense grief because they had just witnessed their Lord and friend hanging lifeless on a Roman cross.

From the disciples’ perspective, what was true was that Jesus had lived a completely sinless and selfless life of devotion to the Father; He performed miracles that could’ve only come from God Himself; He taught them everything they needed to know about the Kingdom of heaven; and He ushered in the hope of religious liberation from socio-political oppression.... Only to then become unjustly arrested, crucified, and buried right before their very eyes. Everything that the disciples believed to be true was suddenly stolen from them.

Their answer to the question, “What’s true?” was that their Teacher and Lord had been unjustly killed, causing them to feel lost, lonely, hurting, and hopeless. And there was nothing they could do about it.

This leads me to our second big generational question:

II. What is real?

Luke’s gospel says that several women went to the tomb at early dawn with spices to complete the burial process and when they arrived they found the stone rolled away from its entrance. Then they went in, but Jesus’ body was gone, which caused them to be perplexed, or puzzled... Simply put, they were at a loss.

What was real in their minds was the fact that in that moment, Jesus was not where they expected Him to be. Have you ever had that experience? Have you ever counted on Jesus to be somewhere, but you couldn’t find Him there?

Jesus, I came looking for you when I was grieving. Jesus, I came looking for you when my loved one was diagnosed with cancer. Jesus, I came looking for you when marriage was struggling. Jesus, I came looking for you when a school shooter was on the loose. I came looking for you when I was battling to overcome my addiction. I trusted you to be right where I expected you to be, right where I needed you to be, and you were nowhere to be found. Where were you, Jesus?

Their state of feeling utterly perplexed quickly turned to indescribable fear when they saw two angels dressed in dazzling apparel standing before them. Based on the women’s reaction, these angels were anything but imaginary or fictional. They were just as real if not more real than anything they’d ever experienced in the earthly realm.

Upon encountering the angels, the women reacted by instantly falling to their knees and bowing their faces on the ground, partly out of fear, and partly because their eyes needed to be shielded from the light.

Then the angels proceeded to ask them a very pointed and powerful question: “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”

The angels were basically saying, “If you want to encounter the living Jesus, stop acting as though he’s still buried in the tomb. You’re searching for Him in the wrong place! If you want to find Jesus, stop seeking to find Him in the middle of the cemetery.”

See, Jesus isn’t like all the other religious leaders or philosophers or emperors. He’s different.

Truthfully, if you dig deep enough, you will find the corpse of Herod buried among the dead. And you will find the corpse of Caesar Augustus buried among the dead. And you will find the

corpses of Muhammed, and Ghandhi, and Joseph Smith buried among the dead. You may even find statues of Buddha buried among the dead. But you will never find Jesus' decaying body buried among the dead! You can look day and night; But no matter how hard you try, You will NEVER find Jesus in a cemetery, mortuary, or morgue because Jesus is not dead.... He is alive!

You can be as cynical or skeptical as you want, but that doesn't take away the fact that for the women who were there – according to the gospel writers – the empty tomb was as real as it gets.

Their answer to the question, "What's real," was that Jesus' tomb was empty.

This leads me to our third big generational question:

III. What is good?

After the angels informed the women that Jesus had indeed risen, they reminded them of exactly what Jesus had told them back in Galilee -- that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and on the third day rise. And when the angels uttered this, the women remembered Jesus' words. It clicked.

This is like the biggest, "I told ya' so" moment in human history. Jesus told them He would rise from the grave, and He backed it up with His actions. For all my Gen Zers: Jesus' promise to rise again was "no cap." Did I do that right? I'm afraid I'm about two years too late with that one.

See, Jesus had told them what was going to happen, but they didn't hear Him. I mean they heard Him, but they weren't really listening. Do you hear what I'm saying?

Hearing and *hearing* are two different things, aren't they? In order to truly hear, our hearts and minds need to be open to receive it. I learned that from my marriage counselor, who also happens to be my wife.

Now, we might find it odd that none of Jesus' closest friends or followers expected Him to rise on that Easter Sunday. In hindsight, it seems so obvious to us based on historical evidence and fulfilled prophecy including prophetic words that came from the mouth of Jesus Himself. But their religious paradigm didn't make room for the possibility that Jesus could have actually risen on the third day as He had promised. Why?

It's not that Jesus hadn't spoken about His resurrection. Because He had done so a number of times. But in the disciples' minds, resurrection would occur during a large-scale event in a future age. It was what God would do in the end for all the righteous dead including Jesus as well as people like Abraham and Moses and John the Baptist. They thought it would be a singular, vast raising up of dry bones (Ezekiel 37) after Israel's great and final suffering when God's people would be given new bodies and new life.

According to New Testament scholar NT Wright:

“It wasn’t just a lack of faith that had stopped them understanding what Jesus had said in Galilee about his rising again. It was simply that nobody had ever dreamed that one single living person would be killed stone dead and then raised to a new sort of bodily life the other side of the grave, while the rest of the world carried on as before.”¹

This is why Jesus’ resurrection was so surprising and perplexing: because Jesus’ resurrection stands alone in history. It happened much sooner and in a different manner than any of them had expected. This is what Jesus does. When things are at their worst, He surprises us with the hope of His resurrection.

You see, their answer to their question of, “What is good?” was God’s perfect plan of salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Moreover, it’s the fact that Jesus offers us surprising hope by not only sacrificing Himself for our sins, but also by overcoming the power of sin and death once-and-for-all so that we can be reconciled to God and to one another! Praise be to God!

This brings me to our fourth and final generational question:

IV. What is beautiful?

After their encounter with the angel, Luke’s gospel says that the women left the tomb and told the eleven disciples what they had discovered. But the eleven didn’t believe them because again, their hearts and minds were not open to the possibility of Jesus raising from the dead on the third day.

Now I want to pause right here and remind you that if you were going to make this story up, you would not have written for women to be the first to discover the empty tomb, for they were not viewed as credible witnesses. And you certainly wouldn’t have written that the disciples doubted the truth of what occurred. Unless, of course, it actually happened that way.

NT Wright says it this way:

“If Luke had been making this story up a generation or more after the event, as people sometimes suggest, not only would he not have had women going first to the tomb (women were not regarded as credible witnesses in the ancient world, as this story itself bears out); he would have had the apostles believe the story at once, ready to be models of faith and to lead the young church into God’s future. Not so: it seemed to them a silly fantasy, exactly the sort of thing (they will have thought) that you’d expect from a few women crazy with grief and lack of sleep.”²

¹ Tom Wright, [*Luke for Everyone*](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 290.

² Tom Wright, [*Luke for Everyone*](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 290.

Part of what's beautiful about this story is the fact that God chose the most unlikely people to discover the empty tomb and bear witness to the resurrection. And the thing is, He's still choosing the most unlikely people to this day!

Our original campus pastor, Pastor Bob Lehleitner, retired about a year ago. His book recently came out and the title is fitting: "The Most Unlikely" (show book title pic). According to Bob's own admission he was the baby no one wanted. He was raised by two alcoholic parents in a poor non-Christian home; He was a shy kid who struggled mightily in school. But after giving his life to Jesus, Bob has spent the past 50 years sharing the gospel with more people than just about anyone in Kansas City. The point is if God chose the likes of Mary Magdalene and Bob Lehleitner, He will choose you, too.

Circling back to our Scripture, even though the disciples doubted the women's testimony, Peter rose and ran to the tomb to see for himself. When he got there, he looked in and saw the linen cloths lying there by themselves, and he went home marveling at what had happened.

The simple rumor of Jesus rising from the dead caused Peter's spirits to rise too. Peter not only rose – he rose, ran, stooped, looked, and saw -- all action words. Does the news of Jesus' resurrection cause you the same level of urgent action as it did for Peter? Or, are you more like the other disciples, who stayed behind with dismissive attitudes and disbelieving hearts?

While examining Peter's actions, we must ask ourselves, "What kind of hope causes one to rise and run to see for himself?" The answer is *gospel* hope. The hope of the resurrected Christ.

The answer to the question, "What is beautiful?" is the hope that comes from the risen Christ. You see, the true beauty of the resurrection is that it allows us to become a people who are addicted to hope. As Christians, hope is always our default state of being – at least it should be. Like Peter, we, too, are left to simply marvel at God's love, His grace, His power, and His healing. And we are eager to share this hope with those around us.

No matter how difficult our circumstances get or how quickly the culture around us crumbles, we will always revert back to hope, for we will continue to seek out the living Christ in every generation for ever and ever.

The truth is, no matter which generational question you're asking, the answer is always the risen Jesus! He is the most true, real, good, and beautiful expression of sacrificial love and redemptive power throughout all of human history. And He wants to know you personally. He wants you to entrust your life to Him.

Are you seeking the Living Christ?

The Bible says that if we ask, we will receive, and if we seek, we will find. To the one who knocks, the door will be opened (Matt 7:8).

There is nothing you can do to earn your salvation apart from what Christ has already done except to merely confess your sins and invite Jesus Christ to be your Savior and King. That is, telling God you are genuinely sorry – and surrendering your life to Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life...

Jesus, the one who came to earth to dwell, or reside, among us.

Jesus, the one who lived the perfect life, then was unjustly crucified, dead and buried.

Jesus, the one who rose again on the third day, defeating sin and death once and for all, appearing to more than 500 men and women in bodily form after His resurrection.

Jesus, the one who said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you, but instead I will send for you a helper, Holy Spirit, to live inside of you."

Jesus, the one who said, "One day I will return and make all things new; and there will no longer be anything accursed."

Jesus, the one who said, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms."

Jesus, the one who said, "You have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."

Jesus, the one who will return to wipe away every tear from our eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

No matter what theological or philosophical question you're asking, the answer is, "Jesus." He is the healer of your pain. He is the power over your addiction. He is the redeemer of your trauma. He is the answer to your doubts. He is the remover of your skepticism. He is the reconciler of your marriage. If you genuinely seek Him, you will find Him.

For there is nothing as true, real, good, or beautiful as Jesus.

Amen. Let's pray.