



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

April 8, 2018

Pastor Randy Ott

2nd Sunday of Easter

First Lesson: [Acts 26:19-29](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 16](#)

Second Lesson: [1 Corinthians 15:12-22](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 20:19-31](#)

Sermon Text: [Acts 26:19-29](#)

Doubt Is Rolled Away

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

In Christ, our risen and ruling Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

I'm not much of a dog guy, but I have seen dogs like this. Maybe you have too? Tiny, little ankle-biter dogs. When you come in the house of somebody and the dog starts going at you like it thinks it's a wolf and it's about to devour you or something. It's a dog that is really tiny but full of this confidence that makes you think, *Don't you understand that I can flip my ankle and you'll just go flying?* That's not how the dog acts, right? Do you know a dog like that?

Do you know any people like that? People that are so full of confidence that you look at them and go, *Come on, really? You're not everything you think you are.* I wonder if that's what Festus thought when he looked at Paul as Paul is in those chains and he's standing there talking about Jesus rising from the dead? He's talking about all these things with a confidence that just doesn't seem to fit what his eyes are seeing. When Festus looks at Paul, he sees a guy that just about had died except that the Roman soldiers had pulled him out. A riot had started on the temple mount and they wanted to kill him and the soldiers kept it from happening. Then he got arrested for starting the riot with the accusations that were brought against him. Now he is there making his defense before King Agrippa and the Governor Festus and he is kind of talking like a little ankle biter. He is a little too confident for someone that is in prison!

It's kind of interesting to see this in Paul because it wasn't always the case with Paul, right? His name had been Saul. He had been one who had rejected Christianity. He thought the best way he could serve God on one day was to hold people's cloaks so they could wind up to throw stones harder at Stephen when Stephen was killed. So where does this confidence come from? It's not something Saul had born in him.

It all changed when Jesus revealed to him directly on the road to Damascus that the empty tomb was not a lie the disciples made up. They didn't steal his body and then claim a resurrection. Jesus came to him directly and told him, "I'm the one you're persecuting. I died. I rose. I'm going to come again. My life and death paid for the sins of the whole world, including yours, Saul."

So now, obeying the vision like he said to Agrippa and Festus, he told people in Damascus that truth. He proclaimed to them repentance in the name of Jesus and turning away from sins to living in a way that honors Jesus. Then he went to Jerusalem and then in all Judea. Then he made these missionary trips to all different places. Now he had come back. He got arrested. He got thrown in prison. A riot started simply because he was preaching Jesus as the answer to sin.

So where does this confidence then come from for Paul, to stand there and act like he's not the one in chains but they are because they don't know Jesus yet? Where does that come from? It comes from God. It doesn't come from Paul. It never comes from us. It's from understanding that Jesus lived and died in our place, took away our sins, and that the empty tomb assures us heaven is open to us. It assures us that everything God says to us is going to be true because all of his promises are yes in Jesus. The empty tomb is the exclamation mark on that.

One of the things that it does is it rolls away from our hearts the natural doubts that we have. They don't control us at all times. Now we have a part of us that loves our God and wants to serve our God, like Paul was doing.

It's an amazing thing, isn't it? He's in prison for doing nothing except what God had told him to do, and you don't hear him whining about it. I'd want a big old block of cheese if I was in Paul's shoes because I'd probably be doing a lot of whining. "I did what you told me Jesus! Now I'm in jail! This isn't fair! I did what you told me Jesus and now I have chains! This isn't fair!" But that's because I might be more inclined to focus on what I can see instead of focusing on what faith sees.

What faith sees is the empty tomb. What faith sees is that God's strength is greater than anything we'll face. Paul was focused on that truth. So when he is standing there talking to Festus and Agrippa, he sees it as God giving him the opportunity to tell these guys about Jesus. Otherwise, he wouldn't have had that opportunity. So he sees his

chains as a blessing and not something to whine about. I can't fathom that! Too often I live with my eyes on what I can see. Maybe you do too.

But Christ has set us free so that we can roll away these doubts and believe the promises of God. Think about the promise of God that Paul had to believe here. He is standing there and the guy calls him and he tells him he is insane when he is talking about Jesus, and it doesn't stop him. He has to be taking God at his word, the promise that "My word will not return to me empty. It will achieve the purpose for which I sent it" ([Isaiah 55:11](#)). He has to be taking all of the promises given through Moses and the prophets that he referred to seriously. He believes that if he does what God calls him to do, God is the one who produces the results and he's just happy to have the chance to share Jesus with others. Doubt was rolled away because humanly speaking, you're in chains, you're talking to a governor and a king, and you're saying, "You believe this, don't you?" Humanly speaking, that doesn't make a lot of sense. That sounds like an ankle biter. But doubt was rolled away.

Now, for you and me today, when does doubt roll into our hearts? We've been set free from it, but because we are still sinners living on this side of heaven, sometimes we're still going to doubt. Sometimes we're going to focus on what we see instead of the promises of God and we're going to make poor choices. I think sometimes when we limit what God can do because we think, *I'm not going to talk about Jesus to that person because they'll never believe*, the doubt is kind of rolled back in front of the tomb for us, right?

Our calling is to trust God's promises. The fact the grave is empty tells us those promises are yes, in Jesus. So that might be a way we do it. We don't doubt that he is risen, right? It's the Second Sunday of Easter. It's not last Sunday when the place was full. We're the people that are here on the Second Sunday of Easter, so we must believe all the time, right? I think at times we really, really struggle with doubt when we rely on our emotions, or what we think, as opposed to what God says.

What did Paul say? Preaching repentance and showing your repentance by what you do, by doing what God wants you to? Do you and I always believe that promise of God or that command of God? Sometimes our emotions say, *Well, God is love. God must then want me to be happy. And doing THIS is making me happy.* But when THIS that is making you happy is something God has said "Don't do," you're doubting God's promises for you, God's commands for you. When God says "This is what I want you to do or not do" in the Ten Commandments and you say, "I understand that, God, but this makes me happy, so I'm going to keep doing it, and you just keep forgiving me no matter what because I'm going to do what I want," that's doubt! That's not believing and embracing God and his promises. That's saying "I AM GOD and I know what is best!" I'm afraid we do it all the time. Sometimes we do it because we don't really

know what God has said so we decide in our heart, *This must be what God wants me to do*, without looking at what he has said.

Jesus talked directly to Paul, right? But what does he do? He says, "This is what Moses and the prophets said." He points people to an objective truth, which is the Word of God. The objective truth God has laid in front of us. When you and I choose to disregard it and go our own way, that's doubt. We're doubting what God has said, whether we want to admit it or not. It frustrates me when I see other people do it, but it crushes me at times when I see myself do it.

We are sinners. We can make excuses, or we can simply say, "Repentance, in the name of Jesus. Christ, he is the one that took away my sins," and stop excusing them. Then produce the fruits in keeping with repentance because we love the One who loved us.

I can understand my doubts. I can understand your doubts. I can understand when you and I disregard what God says. It might anger me. It might frustrate me. But I can understand it, because we are sinners. However, what I can never really wrap my head around is that even though I get frustrated or angry, God is so incredibly patient and is waiting for us to turn away from relying on our emotions or making our excuses. He's waiting for us to turn back to him in repentance so he can say to us, "Depart in peace. Your sins are forgiven." Why he would do that is beyond me.

That is what the empty tomb assures us of, so don't let the stone of doubt roll back in front of that tomb. Don't rely on your emotions. Don't rely on what seems best to you. Rely on the objective truth of God's Word and the objective truth that God loved you enough to die for you. He longs to assure you of forgiveness through him. Amen.