



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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April 20, 2014

Pastor Randy Ott

Easter Festival

First Lesson: [Jonah 2:2-9](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 118](#)

Second Lesson: [Colossians 3:1-4](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 28:1-10](#)

Sermon Text: [John 20:19-20](#)

### **Peace and Life Are Yours!**

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

Did any of you keep count this morning? Did you keep track of how many times you said Happy Easter, or how many times it was said to you? Before both services, I stood in the back and people would come through and say "Good morning. Happy Easter," or "Happy Easter. Good morning," or some variation of the combination. Most of the time I said good morning or Happy Easter back, except probably to those that I didn't hear because my hearing is not so good. So that's a me thing. I wasn't trying to slight you. I just didn't hear you. I'm sorry.

Easter is an interesting holiday in America I think. We are all familiar with the word "Easter," but it's really interesting to see how many people in America really have no clue about Easter. The Barna Research Group did a study recently about Easter in America. They purported that the majority of people knew that Easter had something to do with something spiritual. The majority of Americans they surveyed knew that. Forty-two percent, about 4 out of every 10 people, knew that it had something to do with Jesus dying and then rising again.

That might or might not surprise you. It doesn't surprise me greatly. I think it would probably put a bigger emphasis on things that hop and things that melt than on Jesus at Easter time. But the one that really surprised me when I read it was 2%. Two percent, 2 out of 100 of the people that they surveyed said it's the most important religious festival in their life.

That one shocked me. I would think if you knew that Easter has something to do with Jesus' death and resurrection, you would probably also understand that Easter and Jesus' rising from the dead makes all the difference in the world for you and for me. If your approach to Christianity is just that it has a lot of good things that we can teach and learn and use in this lifetime but it's not about Jesus rising from the dead, you don't have the Christ of the Scriptures. Paul makes it pretty clear. The Holy Spirit led Paul to write to the Corinthians in Chapter 15 of his first letter, "If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then your faith is useless. You are still in your sins."

The empty tomb means everything to you and to me. As we gather together today, we want to see that again... that this empty tomb means peace and joy and life to us even as we look at the cross, because now the cross looks different to us.

Through the season of Lent, we had a cross in front of church and we focused on it. We've looked every week at his cross. See His Cross, that was our theme. We've looked at it with an attitude (I hope) of repentance and seeing what our sins made our Savior suffer and what he had to go through because of our sins. But today the cross that is on the altar is different than the cross that was on the altar the last time there was a cross on the altar, on Maundy Thursday.

If you were here Maundy Thursday and if you can see the cross on the altar through the lilies... the lilies are pretty. They look really cool, but it kind of covers the cross a little bit right now. Can you look at it? Can you see what the difference is? If you were here Maundy Thursday, what is the difference? The cross that we had on the altar on Maundy Thursday had Christ hanging on it. It was the crucifix. The body of Christ was hanging on it. Now the cross that is on our altar is one that is bare.

In many churches, this change is made on Easter because Christ has risen. The cross was not the end for Jesus. He lived in our place. He died in our place to take away our sins. But now he has risen from the dead so we have a bare cross to remind us of that... that Jesus won the victory by rising from the dead. Again, that makes all the difference for us.

I think you can see it in the difference it made for the disciples in what I just read to you, those two short verses. Look at where they were on that early Easter morning. They were behind locked doors because they were scared. Thomas had even said when Jesus said "we're going to go to Jerusalem and I'm going to be betrayed and die," Thomas said to the rest of the disciples at one point, "Well, let's go with him so we can die with him." That morning they probably were thinking it was probably pretty imminent. "They killed Jesus. Our hopes and our dreams now seem to be dashed." So they don't have peace or joy. They have fear. I think they also have a lot of uncertainty in their hearts, don't they?

They had been there on Palm Sunday. They probably thought that was the coolest thing ever when they were coming in and the Palm branches were going down and the cloaks were going down and they were saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David." They probably were thinking, "This is it. We're about to establish the Messiah's kingdom." Because they did believe Jesus was the Messiah. They just were kind of messed up on what the Messiah was there to do. They were looking for that earthly kingdom.

But now, how can he establish the kingdom? He was arrested. He didn't let them fight back. He healed the guy's ear when Peter did try to defend him. Then he was beaten and he was bloodied and he was crucified and he died and now he is in the grave. So they are afraid. Their world has been turned upside down because they think "Hey, did we just waste three years of our life? We followed him and thought he was it and he is

in a grave! What is going on?" I don't think I can begin to understand just how crushed those men must have felt. Those men and those women that were in that Upper Room, that just had to be awful, didn't it?

So much self doubt. So much guilt. They also had that, didn't they? When he was arrested, they ran. They were afraid for themselves. They took off. One of them ran so fast he left his clothes behind. His cloak fell off and he just ran away with nothing on. That's how scared he was. They had said earlier and later in the night, "We'll do everything for you. We won't run away from you." They ran. So there is guilt. There is uncertainty. There is fear. Think of how upset their stomachs must have been. It just had to be miserable. If Jesus had stayed in that grave, that's how they would have continued until their death.

But all of a sudden, with the doors locked, Jesus was there standing among them. Can you imagine that? Do you think they started looking at each other thinking what in the world is going on? Am I just imagining this? Are you seeing this? Is this real? Is he really here? And then to understand that it is Jesus, Jesus shows them his hands. They see his wounds. They see his side. They can see the cross in those wounds, but now the cross is going to look different to them because Jesus greets them and says, "Peace be with you." Not just the normal greeting. It has a whole new meaning because now there is peace between them and their God, and they are going to understand that more and more as Jesus opens the Scriptures to them and instructs them, as Jesus sends the Spirit so they can understand that all of this had to happen just as Scripture said it would.

They began to see that they were the ones that were all messed up. Jesus always had this under control. It was his plan from the beginning to live perfectly in our place and then to be arrested, be betrayed and to die to take the punishment that our sins deserve. If it was only an angel, and if it was only an empty tomb and folded grave clothes, we still wouldn't know for certain. But the fact that Jesus rose and appeared to them assures us of what Paul later wrote. He was put to death for our sins. He was raised to life for our justification. Good fancy church word, right? Justification. It means that we are declared not guilty.

I don't know, maybe you've run away from God in your life. Maybe you've got guilt for what you've done. Maybe you've tried running away. Maybe you've just tried to ignore it and someone dragged you here this morning against your will. Maybe you don't want to think about what is coming on in the next world. Maybe that's why people don't like to think about the resurrection at Easter.

But here is what Jesus' life, death and resurrection means for you. It means the guilt has been taken away. You don't have to try to numb it anymore with alcohol or with drugs or with something else. You don't have to try to ignore it. You can acknowledge your guilt and know that in Christ it has been taken away completely and absolutely.

You now stand shoulder to shoulder with God and he accepts you because he has made you holy. This is what our God has done for you. This is what Easter means for us. This is a joy that words can't express.

I have to think those guys just looked at each other and couldn't talk for awhile and they just caught flies with open jaws. That had to be what they did because this was such an amazing thing that took place. It's the same amazing thing that is there for you. Your guilt has been removed. Your sins are forgiven.

It means peace between you and God, but not only that. It means life. Jesus' resurrection, the empty cross means life. Jesus was there, same wounds. They could still see the wounds of the cross. They could still see the cross as they looked at Jesus, but now it means something different. It doesn't mean death. It means eternal life because Jesus rose again. When they now look at Jesus and see his cross, they see that the grave couldn't hold him.

There they were, with the doors locked and all of that, and now he is there again in a glorified body. He still has the wounds, but a glorified body in the sense that he now uses his divine power again that he had set aside so that he could pay for our sins. He shows up without knocking on the door. They probably would have fought over who was going to have to answer it because they didn't like to serve each other it seems at times. So instead of knocking, he just shows up in the middle of them and says, "Look. It's me. I'm alive. Peace be with you." Because he lives, we also will live. This is what it means for us. This is why the resurrection is so vital.

To your right, through those windows and across that parking lot, we have a cemetery. We have a lot of people that have died in Christ that are now buried there. Because Jesus lives and rose from the grave, we know that the grave is not their final resting place. One day that grave will be empty, not from decay. But because Jesus will return again and he will raise all the dead and he will give to those who died in Christ a glorified body like his own. Then body and soul reunited, we will spend eternity with God in heaven.

God has never promised to you that he will make everything on this side of heaven perfect. He may at times deliver you. He may at times bless you in many different ways. But he has not promised to make this world perfect. You'll still face difficulty. But he has promised that heaven is yours, where there is no more sorrow, no more suffering, no more tears, no more effects of sin, where everything is perfect, where everything is so perfect I can't begin to imagine it now, but I can't wait.

Think about this. Think about Easter. For some of you, it's chocolate melting in your hands and not in your mouth. For some of you it's ham, turkey, I don't know. It's a full meal and maybe you have to loosen your belt at the end of the meal. If you do, I'm happy for you. That's great. But don't let it just be that. Let that full meal remind you of the full banquet that your Savior has waiting for you in heaven. Mind you, I love food. I'm all for food. But I love my Savior and I love heaven more, and I can't wait because he has given it to us freely. May God bless you with that kind of love also. Amen.