

Jesus rose from the dead. So what?

Message for Sunday, April 21, 2019
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Luke 24:1-11

I'd like to plant some seeds in these pots. Then, over the next few weeks, as we see them growing, they will remind us of the new life which Jesus brings.

Get out the pots of soil, the watering can, and the seed packet. Shake the seed packet so those close by at least can hear the rattle of the seeds inside. Tear the top off the seed packet, and tip it over to carefully pour some seeds into the soil.

BUT —surprise! —no seeds come out. [I tampered with the packet earlier, so the seeds won't come out.] Look inside, and try to shake the seeds out, and look confused.

They're in there, alright. I can hear them rattling together. But they won't come out. — What's that?! *Looking astonished and perplexed.* You don't **want** to come out? **What** did you say? *Hold the packet up to my ear to "hear" them better.*

(Repeat their side of the conversation for the congregation to hear.)

That's right. We don't want to come out.

What do you mean, "you don't want to come out"? Who ever heard of such nonsense?! You come out of there right now!

We don't want to get all dirty. It's nice and clean in here.

Look, this is ridiculous! You're seeds. It's your job to come out and go in the dirt.

We're going on strike.

Strike????! I'll strike you, if you don't hurry up and get out here.

You don't scare us. There are a hundred of us and only one of you.

Roll my eyes, throw my hands up in frustration, try to say something but I'm speechless. I can't believe I'm arguing with a bunch of seeds! This is so stupid! *Turn to some of the children.* How about

you? Can you try talking to them, see if you can persuade them to come out?

[Let a few children try it. They can only talk. They can't rip the packet open and make them come out.]

Hey, I just had an idea. Can I try talking with them again, please?

Hi, it's Bruce again. Listen, I'm not going to hurt you, I promise.

How do we know we can trust you?

You'll just have to get to know me. Can I just talk with you a bit more?

OK, go ahead. But no funny stuff.

I've never met seeds that didn't want to get planted. What's the problem?

We're afraid.

Afraid? What on earth are you afraid of?

Not "on" the earth. "Under the earth. We don't want to get buried. We don't want to die.

That's it? You're afraid of dying?

Yes. We've seen it happen to all our friends. They get buried, and that's the end. We never see them again.

But you *did* see them again! The plants that sprouted up in those spots—those were your friends.

It sure didn't look like them!

That's because they had new bodies. The old body died, but it came to life in a new body.

Wow! Do we get to do that, too?

Well, I think those seeds might be willing to come out after all. No wonder they were afraid: no one ever told them the good news about the new life.

Sometimes people are also afraid of getting buried in the ground, afraid of dying. Like those seeds, they're afraid because they don't know what it's

like. They've seen their friends go and never come back. It sounds scary.

All that changes when people come to know Jesus Christ. He died, the same as everyone else has to die sometime. But that wasn't the end. Jesus rose to life again! Even more, Jesus has promised that we will follow after him. We too will rise to life again, to live with him forever.

Message "Jesus rose from the dead. So what?" Earlier in the service, I asked what it would take to change your plans for the future. Then we read the Bible passage about the women coming to the tomb, to give Jesus a proper burial. They got the surprise of their lives when they got there: Jesus was alive again!

What would it take to change your plans? What if Jesus were to walk through that door, right now? (*I arranged to have someone actually do this, right on cue!*)

Surprise! It isn't Jesus after all.

The truth is, Jesus *is* here, right now! The message of Easter is *not* that Jesus has risen from the dead. The message of Easter is that Jesus *is* risen from the dead. We're talking both about something which happened 2,000 years ago, and about something which is happening right here, right now.

In some past messages, I've tried to demonstrate the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. I've taken the arguments why people say they don't think it really happened, and compared them with the historical evidence. We found that after ruling out all the other explanations, there was only one left: that Jesus really and truly did rise from the dead.

But some surveys have shown that most Canadians—even those who aren't part of a church—already believe that Jesus rose from the dead. That's not the question tugging at their heart.

In fact, there is no question tugging at many people's hearts. Their response is, "Yeah, Jesus rose

from the dead. I have no problem with that. So what?"

Today I'm going to try to answer the "So what?" question.

1) Jesus speaks the truth; we can trust him

Honesty is very important. I've seen marriages survive alcoholism, reckless spending, adultery and even spouse abuse. But when one of the couple says, "I don't think you are telling me the truth," their relationship has just about had it. All those other things can be forgiven and overcome, if there is enough trust. But if they don't believe the other person, there is no foundation on which to build a relationship.

The Gospel of Matthew records 30 times when Jesus begins speaking with the words, "I tell you the truth." Can we trust him?

The Gospel of Matthew records four separate occasions¹ when Jesus predicted that he would be killed, and come back to life on the third day. Here is one of them.

Matthew 16:21, New Living Translation:

From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that he had to go to Jerusalem, and he told them what would happen to him there. He would suffer at the hands of the leaders and the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, and he would be raised on the third day.

I don't know about you, but that sounds pretty wild to me. Dead people don't normally come back to life.

The Department of Social Services in Greenville County, South Carolina, sent the following letter to one of its clients:

Your food stamps will be stopped, effective immediately because we received notice that you passed away. May God bless you. You may reapply if there is a change in your circumstances.

¹ Matthew 12:40; 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18

Dead people don't usually have changes in their circumstances. Dead people usually stay dead. When Jesus talked about rising from the dead, the responses he got ranged from laughter to scorn to confusion. The last thing it did was inspire faith in his followers.

But it happened. He was killed on a Friday. The second day was Saturday. The third day was Sunday. And that's when he rose again from the dead. Just like he said he would.

Jesus speaks the truth. We *can* trust him.

2) Jesus forgives sin and gives new life

John 3:16-17, New Living Translation:

[Jesus said,] "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it."

Jesus came to be our Saviour. He came to offer forgiveness for all the wrong that we've done in our lives. He came to give us a new life.

Colossians 2:13-14, New Living Translation:

You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins. He cancelled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross.

Janet Wolf was the pastor of a church in inner city Nashville, Tennessee. They have all kinds of drug addicts and street people attending their church. One gang member who had recently become a Christian was being baptized. He confessed to Janet, "Can God really forgive me? I've done a lot of bad stuff to people." Janet assured him that Jesus had promised it, and he could stake his life on it. So he went forward with the baptism ceremony. In part of it he promised to "turn away from the forces of evil and renounce their power."

Two days later there was a man with a gun waiting for him inside his apartment. It was one of his old gang. "I've come to get you. Jerry needs you to go to court as a witness for him. You need to say that you were with him on such and such a night."

The new Christian replied, "I can't do that. I've been baptized."

"What?!"

"You heard me. I quit the old life. I've been baptized."

"You see this gun? You come with me right now, or I'll kill you. It's as simple as that."

"You do what you have to do. I just know that I can't do it."

The guy with the gun left him, but as he walked down the hall, with the gun still in his hand, he was muttering out loud, "He's been baptized! He's been baptized! What is the world coming to?"

Would you like to know that all the wrong things you've ever done have been forgiven by God? Would you like to be able to live without being full of fear and worry over your past—and your future? That's why Jesus came: to be our Saviour.

Would you like to have a new life: a life based on love and hope and living for God, instead of living to just get by, living from day to day? That's also why Jesus came: to be our Lord.

You can ask him right now to do that in your life. I invite you to pray with me.

God, I'm asking you to forgive all the wrong things I've done with my life. I'm asking you to do this in Jesus' name; he gave his life for me on the cross.

I now turn away from anything in my life that is wrong, and I turn to you. I want to live for you now.

I ask you to fill me with your Holy Spirit, to give me the power that I need to keep the commitment that I'm making here today.

Amen.

Next Steps:

- Pray: Ask God to do all these things. If you're not ready right now, hold on to this. Come back to it later.
- Tell someone. Life is not meant to be lived alone. Especially the Christian life. Encourage one another.