

“The Journey of Easter - Letting Go”

Scripture: Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9

Graphics: road, milestones, balloon, releasing

Big Truth: The journey of Easter is a journey of death, new life, waiting, releasing, and being given new power. We often think that the journey is about the destination, but it's not. The journey changes us along the way. If we're intentional about the milestones and knowing more about Jesus on the journey of faith, His death, resurrection, adjusting, letting go, and the Spirit all transform us into the faithful disciples we are called to be. This Lent, we will spend time in a process of death, rebirth, and being filled with His power. Then, at Holy Week, we will be ready for Him to Rise in us!

Focus Question: What is Jesus asking me to let go of so He can give me new life and growth?

1. Introduction

A. **PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)**

- B. We are getting closer and closer to Holy Week and Easter - when we'll celebrate the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, we'll spend time at the cross, and we'll celebrate His resurrection - when He walked out of His own tomb!
- C. **But, we aren't there yet.** We're still in Lent, a time to reflect - to look inward and look around us - so that you and I can see what God is seeing. To **TRULY** and **DEEPLY** and **HONESTLY SEE** and ask Jesus to continue the work of changing us more and more into His image...
 - i. So far, this Journey of Easter took us to the Cross, and you asked, “What needs to **die** in me so that new life can come?”
 - ii. Then, at Jesus' empty tomb you asked, “What needs to be **reborn** in me for Jesus and his mission?”
 - iii. On the Road to Emmaus, last week, you asked, “What needs to be adjusted in my life because of Jesus?” Were you eyes opened this week...your heart warmed...your direction changed as you pivoted with Jesus around the boulders in your life? I pray so...
- D. This Journey of Easter has been challenging...but it's growing us!
- E. Today, after Jesus appeared to the disciples and many others for 40 days after the Resurrection, it was time for Him to ascend back to heaven. Those 40 days must've been amazing! “We have Jesus back!” “This is awesome!”
- F. Yet, Jesus said all along that **He wasn't staying**...that He would be going back to be with the Father. And the fact that He was leaving was a **GOOD THING** because if he didn't, He couldn't send the Holy Spirit.
- G. In John 16:7 Jesus said, “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you.”

- H. As amazing and good as it was for the disciples to have Jesus amongst them again for those 40 days, they now needed to let go of Jesus...so that something amazing could happen for them and the church.
- I. So, our question this week is, **“What is Jesus asking me to let go of so He can give me new life and growth?”**
- J. This is a very different question than the one we asked in week 1, “What needs to die in me...?” That question points to something sinful or harmful.
- K. THIS question is about the choice between continuing to hold onto something good that God has done OR releasing it so that something new can happen in me for my growth as a disciple...the next things God wants to use to grow me.
- L. As we turn back to Luke’s gospel, we’ll see how the disciples respond to letting go of the physical presence of Jesus. They trade what was awesome for what is REALLY awesome and powerful, as we’ll see.
- M. Let’s go to Luke 24, starting in verse 50...and read to the end of the gospel...a mere 4 verse today.

2. Scripture

A. **READ Luke 24:50-53**

- B. The end result for the disciples in this whole scene was great joy and worship time, blessing God. But how did they get there?
- C. Last week, we left off with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, adjusting everything to go back to Jerusalem to tell the others that they saw Jesus.
- D. Then, in the section right before today’s, in verses 36-49, Jesus appeared to the disciples and not only had them touch his new body, but he asked for something to eat! He was really alive! That’s cool!
- E. Then, we read in verses 48-49, “You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”
- F. The disciples must’ve been incredibly blessed and excited to see Jesus alive and have him talking to them and teaching them again.
- G. It was just like old times...all the great times of hanging out eating and teaching and healing (remember those healings!). They were remembering and reliving the last three years.
- H. And they were thrilled to have Jesus with them again.
- I. And yet (YET) Jesus TOLD them He wasn’t staying. Jesus said He MUST go away in order for the next KINGDOM step to take place. He was referring, of course, to the coming of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus would send into the lives of the disciples and the church would be born.

- J. Acts 1:6-9 tells us this of the Ascension, “So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.”
- K. The disciples literally couldn’t hold on to Jesus any longer. They had to let go of him, physically. That may have been the easy part.
- L. What Jesus was REALLY asking them to do was to let go of their VISION for the Kingdom that included the physical presence of Jesus...and to begin to take ahold of the new vision that included the presence of Jesus in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit on them.
- M. Jesus told them several times that He was going. He also told them that He would send the Holy Spirit, as promised by the Father. And that Spirit would be POWER and would make them witnesses to the whole world.
- N. So, when the disciples let go of the physical body of Jesus and began to embrace the vision of a Spirit-filled church, it led them to do three things:
 - i. First, they worshiped Jesus for all that had been, including the resurrection. They watch Jesus ascend into the clouds...and he was gone. But He was still Jesus and still alive! Now, I don’t know about you, but I’d be on my knees worshipping as well!
 - ii. Second, they obeyed Jesus and went back to the city...and stayed there until they experienced the power of the Holy Spirit come upon them.
 - a. We’ll take a look at Pentecost next week. But they didn’t JUST return to Jerusalem.
 - b. Luke wrote that they returned, like Jesus commanded, with GREAT JOY. The Greek here is charas magales (χαρᾶς μεγάλης). This is the same reaction the Magi had when they followed the Star to Jesus’ house after he was born. This is the same response the women had when they saw that Jesus was raised from the dead. Charas magales is always a response to something amazing that GOD has done. This is not your run of the mill joy when something goes right on your way to work or with a school exam or basketball game. This is an almost involuntary response to a supernatural event that changes your life.
 - c. The disciples obeyed Jesus with GREAT JOY!
 - iii. And they went to the temple to worship continually, blessing God, as they waited for the new thing to come.

- iv. In some ways, this is about what HAS BEEN, what IS, and what WILL BE. That's the essence of letting go so that the greater thing can begin.
- O. What is Jesus asking me to let go of so He can give me new life and growth?
- P. For the disciples, it was letting go of the kingdom view that Jesus was here ministering to the world and they were helping him. They needed to let go of that vision, as incredible as it had been, so that they could embrace the new vision of the coming of the Holy Spirit...and the power that would then grow them to be the witnesses and preachers and proclaimers of the Good News and healers of the sick and lame.
- Q. All that stuff began to happen after Pentecost, in Acts 2.

3. Application

- A. So, "What is Jesus asking you to let go of so He can give you new life and growth?"
- B. I saw a short film one time about a toddler who had a white-knuckled grip on a helium-filled balloon.
 - i. If you've had a toddler in your life, you know how precarious that situation can be. If the toddler has the balloon, life is good and they are smiling and laughing at the thought of having this precious and magical gift. Yet, they're still a toddler...and they don't fully understand the physics involved in holding onto a balloon. If they let it go, and watch it fly up into the sky like Jesus on Ascension Day, there's rarely charas magales. There are almost certainly great tears and wailing!
 - ii. There's no chance that toddler is letting go of that balloon intentionally, right? Well, in this short film, there was one way. Candy! Now, candy isn't necessarily better than a helium-filled balloon, but to a toddler, candy ranks right up there with a shiny balloon.
 - iii. If you offer the candy to the toddler in the hand that is holding the balloon, that toddler has a very hard decision to make. Hold onto the balloon and forego the candy, or let go of the balloon, letting it free into the sky, only to grab the candy and enjoy that. You get the idea.
- C. That's a very simple example, but I bet there've been times in your life when you wanted to hold onto something good that God had done.
- D. We reminisce about the good old days...high school football games or college friends. We sometimes LOVE to hang on to those memories because they were GREAT TIMES...times of life and vitality. It happens in the church, too. We hear all the time that it was great back in the day. In our faith journey, we hang onto those mountain top experiences with Jesus. We often want to recreate those moments, oftentimes finding that God has moved us to a new place and the same shiny balloon is less shiny and less inflated.

- E. And, listen, there's nothing wrong with embracing the past...we just can't hold onto it so tightly that there's no room to grow. If God is clearly wanting to make room for new life and growth in some area, and holding onto whatever it is is taking up space that God wants to use, you have to let go.
- F. Sometimes, God asks us to let go of something good in order to make room for something incredible...something that will grow you as a follower of Jesus, which is the whole point of following Jesus.
- G. And, like I said, letting go is very different from letting something die. Letting something die is the confession that there's something wrong - sinful - in me that needs to die forever. Letting something GO is a conscious effort to release something that God has done so that God can do the new thing, the thing that will bring you more growth in discipleship.
- H. And you don't release things simply for the sake of getting rid of the past and embracing a different future. This is about growth and spiritual maturity, as you anticipate the next building block God has for your life as a disciple.
- I. Because we're still in the messy middle with the disciples, here are three things that can help us let go and embrace the next things God has for us:
 - i. First, **celebrate what God has done so far in our life.**
 - a. Celebrate the person that led you to Christ. If that person is alive, call them and celebrate that!
 - b. Celebrate our traditions and church history. For us, here, that's our rich Wesleyan Methodist tradition and history...it's who we are! We lean into and learn from all the faithful believers that have come before us. We CAN celebrate, "The way we've done things." as long as we don't expect those to be the only way we always do things.
 - c. Celebrate the mountaintop experiences you've had with Jesus.
 - d. While you're at it, celebrate health and youth and vitality!
 - e. The disciples worshipped Jesus for who he was and is...remembering everything he told them and all he did.
 - f. But, in that moment of ascension, they needed to let go, even as they celebrated the past and what was happening because of it.
 - ii. Second, **look to the future with patient hope.**
 - a. You've heard the phrase, when it comes to investing our money, "Past performance doesn't guarantee future results."
 - b. That may be true with money, but because of everything Jesus has done in your life, you can confidently look to the future with patient hope in the next amazing things Jesus will do!

- c. The most quoted phrase in all the bible in Jeremiah 29:11, “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” I think that’s the most-quoted verse because we crave hope...we crave knowing that God has everything in control...we crave a future in which you and I experience more Jesus and less of the world.
 - d. When you let go of the things that God has used well in your life, you can embrace the next step, and you’ll look to the future with hope!
- iii. Then, **keep finding new ways to grow in discipleship and advance the Kingdom.**
- a. The disciples had work to do! They needed to wait for the Holy Spirit and then get out there to spread holiness and the Good News.
 - b. You have work to do to grow as a disciple - in worship, building community, obeying and being open to the Spirit, serving others and sharing what you have been given. I’ve just described our church’s intentional discipleship process. How are you doing with that growth?
 - c. Let go of the things that got you here today but that aren’t the best ways to grow you in the future. Embrace bigger ways to pray, lead, worship, serve, share...don’t become stagnant, even though that’s comfortable.
 - d. And then get out there and share the gospel of Jesus to more people, different people...go deeper with those who are ready to receive the Good News about this Jesus.

4. Conclusion

- A. What is Jesus asking me to let go of so He can give me new life and growth?
- B. The balloon in your hand has served you well. It’s a reminder of the incredible things that God has done and is maybe still doing. There will come a time, when God will offer to you something else...the next step for growth and passion as a disciple...I pray that’s today.
- C. Let go and let God keep growing you in faith...in love...and, yes, in JOY. Celebrate! Look to the future with patient hope! Keep growing and sharing your faith.
- D. And, get ready! The power is coming!
- E. Let’s pray...