

Today is a day of great joy. Jesus has been raised from the dead! What we thought was all loss on Friday has turned out to be a great victory. And so we can say, "Yeah Jesus! Good for you." But we can also say, "But so what?" I mean it's great and all that Jesus didn't stay dead, we're happy for him; but what does it mean for our lives? It would be like if the Buffalo Bills ever actually win the Super Bowl. That'll be great and all. And we'll all celebrate - well, you might. Since I'm a devout Eagle's fan I won't - but so what? Unless you've placed a really big bet on them winning it doesn't have any real tangible effect on your life. And speaking both from the perspective of a sermon and the perspective of the Bill's history in the Super Bowl, I don't recommend making any big bets in their favor!

Yes, the news of Easter is really great. But indeed so what? When the Easter dinner is eaten and the families have all gone home and you put away all the nice Easter clothes, Monday is all too much a reality. Is Easter just a holiday that comes

up and passes or is it somehow linked more firmly into who you are?

The gospel from John is looking into just that sort of question. What does the resurrection of Jesus really mean? What does it do? How does it give meaning to our lives?

There are two major parts to the gospel reading. The first is Peter and the other disciple who experience the empty tomb. The second is Mary Magdalene actually meeting Jesus.

Our gospel writer John does something very interesting with his words in both scenes. In the first he says that when Peter went into the tomb he saw the linen clothes lying there. And the Greek word we translate as "saw," (As in he "saw" the linen clothes) is θεωρει. You can tell by the sound of it that it is the root word of our English word "theory." It means to observe something.

But then when the other disciple went in he too saw, but this time the word for "saw" is not θεωρει. It is the word ειδεν.

That means to not only see something but also to *perceive* or *understand* that thing. This is seeing that is faith.

And so John has set up this interesting scene for us. One disciple goes to the tomb and he sees something but it is just taking notice. It is theory, kind of weak. Another disciple goes to the tomb and sees the exact same thing but he sees and believes. He comprehends. He understands. Something clicks in his heart and mind that did not click in Peter's.

This is the same sort of difference between whether Jesus resurrection is just a cool story about an amazing miracle that happened in the past, or a reality that has an impact on your life for tomorrow.

So, what was different? Why does one disciple just *notice* while the other *comprehends* it? John has an interesting answer for us. Here it is. Are you ready? The reason why the one disciple believed it is because he believed it. The reason why Peter did not was because Peter did not!

Well, now that's a mighty fine biblical answer worth getting all dressed up for on a Sunday morning! It's a perfect Catch 22! It makes no sense!

Before we go on to the second scene in the gospel reading, which actually does give us a response - maybe not an answer, but a response, let's stay here for a moment. Isn't faith often like that Catch 22? You believe because you believe. Or you don't believe because you don't believe. Facts and proofs don't make any difference either way.

(I think it is vitally important to note that the Bible clearly recognizes this problem, and it goes to the bother of addressing it. If the Bible is our ultimate authority for faith and life then realize that, even though it's very old, and it comes from a land far far away, it engages the problems of every age.)

So, for an answer to this catch 22 we go to the second scene. You'll notice that Mary Magdalene who saw the empty tomb first didn't have this **εἶδεν** type of experience either. She was like Peter. She saw but didn't come to any understanding.

You know how the story goes. Peter and the other disciple head home - a strange thing to do in my opinion, but apparently it's what they did. Mary lingers. She looks back in the tomb. She sees two angels. They ask her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She tells them Jesus was taken away and she doesn't know where they laid him. Then she turns around and sees Jesus standing there. Now if ever there would be proof this should be it. Seeing is believing, right? Well, you can probably guess that the Greek word used when she sees Jesus is **θεορει**. In other words, she sees the risen Jesus right there in front of her and she still doesn't get it.

I mean, if you ever thought Peter was slow witted and often clueless, what is this? How thick can you get!?! Jesus even speaks to her and she still doesn't recognize him. She thinks he's the gardener!

The moment of revelation - the moment of belief - is when Jesus calls her by name - Mary. Then comprehension and belief begin to flood into her. Some biblical scholars call this the most poignant scene of delight and grace in the entire Bible.

It is indeed delightful - it's simply playful. But if we want the way out of our catch 22 this isn't the answer. We'd better go one verse farther. In the next verse Jesus says, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" That, believe it or not, is the key to getting out of our little bind.

Jesus has taken the resurrection beyond an empty tomb, a body with life back in it, and facts to be believed or not believed. He has taken all of that and pointed it toward the real issue - a functioning relationship with God.

What was the whole point for Jesus coming to the world? What was the whole point of all that he taught and the miracles that he did? What was the point of the trial, crucifixion and death of Jesus? What was the point of the resurrection? (It was certainly more than to just give us an excuse to put cute little suits on young boys and bonnets on girls in order to come to worship.)

It was the ultimate revelation of God's nature - a nature that is love which has no bounds and knows no ends. The stuff

about Jesus isn't so much a list of events as it is a *look* at *who God is*. It was the revelation of what God is like - and what relationship with God looks like.

Is a relationship with God one that is mean and cruel - or fun and playful? Is it a burden or a joy?

The writer of John's gospel is basically saying to us, "I want to tell you what God is like. And I want to tell you through a story about what God did." And while this story is ultimately a story about God's actions it is also a story about you. It is a story about your hopes and fears, your dreams and failures, your *beliefs and unbeliefs*. It is a story about the questions of what your life means and what purpose do you have.

The catch 22 of belief or unbelief is then not a make or break category of faith. It is just one of many aspects of this relationship with God.

Does the fact that Jesus rises from the dead have any influence on tomorrow? As a historical event all by itself, no. - just like looking into an empty tomb, you just observe it. So what? As the climax of a story revealing *what God is like*, and what *relationship with God* is like, it means everything.

You then live tomorrow and every day, not with a fading fact about an empty tomb, but with a whole picture of what God is like, of what you mean to God, and what God intends for you.

Amen