

Mar 31 – Leaders’ Guide - Luke 24:1-12 “Easter: Morning”

Ernest Becker, cultural anthropologist, spoke of western culture as the first truly secular culture. Secular meaning lifespan, the belief that this lifespan is all there is. As a result, we believe we must cram all of our significance, all of our happiness into this one lifespan.

1. In what ways do we seek significance and happiness as a culture?
What impact does this have on ourselves, our relationships, our world?

We often seek our significance, our happiness in sex, money and power. Such things have been important in every culture at every time, but in our culture, we are obsessed with such things. As a result, we are the most materialistic culture that has ever existed.

As these things are ultimate, we tend to root our sense of self our identity in such things. Pride when we have them, despair when we do not.

We often approach relationships functionally. How does this relationship help serve my sense of significance, my happiness?

Our insatiable consumption as we pursue a significance, a happiness rooted in things has often ravaged our planet contributing to deep income disparity and practices that remove resources from poorer countries.

Read Luke 24:1-12; 1 Corinthians 15:1-5, 12-26

2. Paul makes the point that if not for the reality of the resurrection we are still in our sins, our faith is futile, and we are to be most pitied. What evidence do we find for the resurrection in these two passages? What do you find the most compelling and why?

Empty tomb. While an empty tomb alone does not prove resurrection it does demand an explanation. If it was stolen by enemies, why wouldn't they produce it to crush a growing movement? If it was taken by followers, why would they die to protect a lie?

Eyewitnesses. Although the portion we read only includes Cephas (Peter) and the twelve, Paul goes on to mention many other eyewitnesses including 500 at one time. At the time of Paul's writing, twenty years after the actual events, those eyewitnesses would still be alive. It takes then the form of a challenge. Don't believe this? Just ask these people.

Faith. If not for resurrection how do you account for the explosive growth of the Christian movement.

Christian belief in resurrection is rooted in historical fact. Take time to discuss these and other "proofs" of resurrection but give space for the other questions. As Paul does in his writing to the Corinthians seeking to engage his readers in the reality of resurrection is second to the implications of resurrection.

The angelic messengers want to remind the women that Jesus said he *must* be delivered over, *must* be crucified, *must* rise again.

3. In the sermon Tim spoke about what message the Romans were seeking to "preach" by their use of the cross. In light of that context how are we meant to hear the message of the empty tomb?

The following is an unedited section of the sermon to support your discussion of this question.

When anyone in that world saw a cross, they knew exactly what message was being preached.

About 100 years before Jesus - Spartacus led a slave revolt - seeking to unseat their Roman overlords - they were defeated in a final battle - in the aftermath the Romans took 6000 of Spartacus' followers and crucified every last one of them - along a 130 mile stretch of the Appian way - the major trade route south - would be like lining the 401 from here to London - with a cross - a crucified body - every 40 yds.

Scholars estimate that about 20% of the Roman empire were enslaved - many would have dreamed of freedom - of revolt - but as they travelled that stretch of highway these grotesque billboards preached the cross - seared into their minds the message it was meant to convey - this is what happens if you ever consider going up against the might of Rome - yes your life is brutal - but likely better than this - you think your better than your position in life - you want to be high and lifted up - we'll give you high and lifted up alright - that was the message of the cross.

When the Romans crucified Jesus - when the Jewish religious leaders push the Romans to crucify - they were wanting the message of the cross preached - you think your something - you're nothing - you think you're high and lifted up - we'll give you high and lifted up - as Jesus is crucified between two brigands - those caught up in insurrection against Rome - the message of the cross is preached - when your kingdom of God ideology of

justice – mercy – love and forgiveness and Rome meet – Rome wins – the message of the cross is preached – affirming every action that led to his execution – the lies – the injustice – the manipulation – the power plays – the message of the cross is preached – in the end injustice wins – power wins – position wins – oppression wins – violence wins – wickedness wins – that was the message of the cross.

In light of the already known message of the cross – we now hear the message of an empty tomb – no no no – when the kingdom of God and Rome meet – when the kingdom of God and any earthly kingdom meet – the kingdom of God remains – no no no violence – sin – oppression – injustice – power – death – wickedness – do not have the last word – they have been swallowed up – they have been brought down to death – they have no future

4. What are the results of resurrection according to these two passages?

Sin is taken away. If Jesus bore our sins on the cross than his resurrection affirms that our sin has been dealt with.

We will be raised with him. We are in Christ meaning that everything that happens to Jesus happens to us. We too will be bodily raised from the dead.

A new creation. He will deliver the Kingdom of the father having defeated every rule, every authority and every power. Luke expresses this by opening the Easter story with the words – on the first day of the week. On the first day of a new creation, the first day of a new future.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:58.

5. Paul speaks of a work that is rooted in the reality of the resurrection. How do the women invite us into the work of a resurrection people?

Here is an unedited section of the sermon to help with this question.

Luke is very particular with his details – inside the tomb – two angels – standing by the slab where Jesus had been laid – the bloodied bands of cloth that had been wound around his body – set there by themselves – John's gospel tells us that one angel was at the head – the other at the feet.

Strikingly there is one other time in the scriptures where such an arrangement of angels is given – right at the heart of the Jewish tabernacle – the holy of holies – was the ark of the covenant – a gold box where the 10

commandments were kept – carved into the lid were two angels – one at the head – the other at the feet – and God said to his people - here is where I will meet you – between the two angels – the mercy seat – the meeting place of heaven and earth – of God and humanity.

Each year – only the high priest would enter that holiest of places – on the holiest of days - the day of atonement – Yom Kippur - to make atonement for the sins of the people – sprinkling sacrificial blood on the mercy seat – between the angels - so that God’s presence could dwell with his people

The priest would then exit the holy of holies to share the good news with the people that their sins had been carried away.

The women as it were - enter the holy of holies – the blood of Jesus sprinkled on the mercy seat – between two angels – they exit and share the good news – sins grip broken – a new future insured.

In this moment these women take the place of priest – revealing what each and every one of us is called to – saved for – to be – as the new testament puts it – a kingdom of priests – mediators between God and humanity – heaven and earth.

In his book – the day the revolution began – N.T. Wright invites us to embody that calling and likens it to being a mirror – that as kingdom of priests we’re meant in worship to orient our lives as a mirror toward Jesus in praise – extolling his goodness – love – kindness – mercy - justice – and then reflect that image out into the world – as a kingdom of priests – mediator between heaven and earth - we are meant to orient our lives as a mirror to the coming kingdom of heaven – the new Jerusalem – and then reflect the way of that coming kingdom out into the world by the ways in which we live

6. What is Luke telling us in giving us the details of first witnesses who are also the first citizens of a kingdom of priests? (Read Luke 8:1-3 for context)

That each and every one of us is called to be a citizen of a Kingdom of priests regardless of our background, our history, our understanding.

First they are women and not men – revolutionary in their culture.

These women cover the spectrum. Joanna, the wife of Herod's administrator. A woman of power, wealth, prestige. A woman who was patron to Jesus' ministry.

Mary Magdalene, or Mary of Magdala. Jesus cast from her 7 demons. She is from the city of Magdala, the resort town on the shores of Lake Gallilee. A town known for luxury, corruption, and immorality. This was the sin city, the las Vegas of the ancient world. To be called a Magdalene was not a compliment.

Mary, mother of James likely represents somewhere smack dab in the middle of them.

7. We are surrounded by a culture that lives in the shadow of death, lives as if this life is all there is. How can we by the way that we live, the way that we die, point to the hope of new creation?

This is a personal reflection question. The key here is to speak about how the hope of new creation makes us look different from those around us.

How can we participate in a culture of death – building our sense of significance and happiness from sex, money and power? How will we build our sense of significance, our happiness in light of that new creation?

If our hope is in new creation, how will they face death? How will those who remain acknowledge that reality in the practices surrounding / marking our death. Perhaps talk about what funeral practices will be important for one whose hope is in resurrection / new creation.