

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon series: Snapshots of a Savior

The THING that Changes Every THING

(Matthew 28)

Study #6

Introduction: Oh, well THAT changes everything...

On June 16, 1979 I had a “*that changes everything*” moment when Kathy and I exchanged our “I do’s” with each other. Through thick and thin, better and worse, richer and poorer, sickness and health, life has never the same since that day that we became husband and wife. It has been a wonderful nearly thirty five year journey!

Then, on June 5, 1983, September 3, 1985, and January 31, 1988, our children Ben, Zach, and Erin were born. Those dates mark “*that changes everything*” moments. Their entrance into our lives changed everything, very much for the richer.

I have had a few “*that changes everything*” conversations with a few people and have even watched a few “*that changes everything*” events on the world stage.

President Kennedy is assassinated. The Berlin Wall falls. Iraq is attacked. Planes fly into the World Trade Center Towers on September 11, 2001 and we think to ourselves, “*Well, that changes everything.*”

This Easter Sunday morning, as we consider the historical heart of our faith, we’ll see the event that changed everything, forever, for good.

We begin by re-capping the story of Jesus we have been tracking throughout this long weekend. On Friday, Jesus was put to death by crucifixion by the Romans.

The Scene at the Cross

The Torturous Death of Jesus (27:33-54)

Of course, the crucifixion itself was torturous. But so were the hours leading up to His death torturous.

He endured betrayal and denial by trusted friends, false accusations from strangers, and sham trials by His own people. The Jews found Him guilty of blasphemy and delivered Him to the Romans who condemned Him to death for treason.

He was brutally beaten and marched to Golgotha, the place of crucifixion.

He was nailed to the cross in the morning and died in the middle of the afternoon on what we call “Good Friday” - a terrible and wonderful day. It was terrible because of its cruelty to Him; wonderful because of what it did for us.

Everything Jesus experienced on the cross, He experienced to honor the Father and to bring us to God.

Listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah as he describes what Jesus suffered, six centuries before the fact.

***[53:4] Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
and our sorrows He carried...***

***[5] He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities.***

By His scourging we are healed.

After Jesus yielded up His spirit and died, Joseph of Arimathea courageously offered up his tomb for Jesus’ burial.¹

¹ Joseph had requested the body of Jesus quickly so that the land would not have been guilty of having a body hanging after dark on a Sabbath. “***A hanged man is accused by God; you shall not defile your land which the Lord your God gives you.***” (Dt. 21:23). The poor were buried in the ground or in natural caves. Burial in artificial caves was reserved for the rich

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, handed over the mangled body of Jesus, and His body was laid in Joseph' tomb late on Friday afternoon.²

Every year we have our choice of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John to guide us through the story.

This morning we're following Matthew's lead and Matthew tells us that Jesus' enemies wanted to ensure that Jesus' body was secure and that the tomb was tamper-proof.

The Protective Burial of Jesus (27:57-66)

So, referring to Jesus only as *“that deceiver”* the chief priests and Pharisees approached Pilate to request an official Roman guard in front of the tomb in addition to the Jewish Temple guard that was already in place.

Pilate seemed to agree with the need for caution and gave them the guard they requested.

So, at the end of the day, in addition to the tamper-proof seal and the heavy stone that had been rolled in front of the tomb, there were now two sets of guards - Roman and Jewish - to ensure that nobody could steal Jesus' body.

From the vantage point of His enemies, there was no telling to what lengths those disciples might go to promote faith in Jesus. But, honestly, the disciples were in no mood to try anything tricky.

In a state of shocked grief, they had seen their most fervently held convictions die when Jesus was arrested and then crucified. The cohesion of the apostolic band was shattered by Judas' betrayal, and then further crushed by Peter's denials.

Jesus' death was a *“that changes everything”* event for the disciples. Their hope died on Friday afternoon.³

² Notice that Matthew says nothing about Jesus' body having been prepared with spices.

³ This quote from Chuck Colson, “I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once

There is no energy in the soul of the one whose hope has died to pretend or to fake it. There was no danger that the disciples were going to try some sleight of hand to make people think that the Jesus they knew was dead was alive. The idea of “body-jacking” would have never occurred to the disciples.

Friday was awful. If possible, Saturday was even worse, because the disciples were all scared out of their wits at the possibility of being arrested for having been associated with Jesus.

But, by the final chapter of Matthew's Gospel, we have moved past Saturday. Now it's Sunday morning.

Matthew traces the steps of two faithful women who had been the last to leave the tomb on Friday, two women both named Mary.⁴

The Scene at the Tomb (vv. 1-10)

The Angel's Message (vv. 1-8)

The Marys' startling discovery at the tomb! (vv. 1-4)

They arrived at the tomb where Jesus had been buried right about sunrise,⁵ and the scene that greeted them was chaotic.

They could see the effects of an overnight earthquake.⁶ Among the effects was a rolled away stone, which left the entrance to Jesus' tomb wide open.

denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world-and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.”

⁴ There were several Marys associated with Jesus. It is not at all clear who this second Mary was.

⁵ Mark tells us specifically that they had already come to embalm the body of Jesus, and that they had waited until after the Sabbath to purchase the necessary spices.

⁶ “The earth, which trembled with sorrow at the death of Christ, as it were leaped for joy at His resurrection.” (Cornelius a' Lapide)

They also saw an angel, clothed in blazing white garments. The Bible tells us that **“his appearance was like lightning.”**

Have you ever stopped to consider what that phrase - **“his appearance was like lightning”** - means?

Lightning is fast. Was the angel darting back and forth at lightning speed? Lightning is hot (~50,000 degrees Fahrenheit, roughly 5x the heat of the surface of the sun).⁷ Was the angel white hot?

We don't know in what respect the angel's appearance was like lightning. But his appearance was sufficient to undo the Roman and Jewish soldiers who had been assigned to guard the tomb.

They were there when the women walked up to the tomb. They were there, but not really. Matthew says that they **“shook for fear and became like dead men.”**

They were comatose. They had fainted dead away. Catatonic.

The angel's words (vv. 5-7)

The two Marys took in the scene - catatonic soldiers, a rolled away stone, an angel blazing like lightning - and heard these words:

[5]...“DO NOT BE AFRAID...”

...to which we say, *“Yeah, right!”* How could they NOT be afraid with all this going on!?

The angel continued with a thinly veiled reproof.

[5]...“I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified.”

These two faithful women had come to embalm Jesus' dead body. They should have known better. The angel reminded them of what Jesus had said.

[6] “He is not here, for He has risen, JUST AS HE SAID. Come, see the place where He was lying.”

They entered the tomb and found it vacated. Jesus was gone. The grave clothes they had lovingly wrapped Him in on Friday were empty.

And in finding an empty tomb and vacated grave clothes they were getting their first taste of a *“that changes everything”* reality.

The angel's final words to the women take the form of a commission.

[7] Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you.”

The women went quickly,⁸ but we should notice what Matthew says about their emotional state as they ran away from the garden tomb.

The race to tell the disciples (v. 8)

[8] And they left the tomb quickly with FEAR and GREAT JOY and ran to report it to His disciples.”

I love this! It is so true to life. Conflicting emotions, mixed feelings. Ambivalence. There is space in the human heart for more than one feeling at a time.

What expectant mother doesn't know a mix of eagerness and fear? What college graduate doesn't know relief and anxiety?

On that first Easter Sunday morning FEAR gripped the hearts of these women despite the angel's *“Fear not!”*

They were in the presence of the unknown, of the holy, of something greater than they had ever known - and they were scared!

⁸ When an angel says **“Go quickly!”** - you go quickly! And the original language implies that they ran as fast as they could.

⁷ So the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

AND they were filled with JOY beyond anything they had ever known. Jesus is alive! His resurrection changed everything.

So they backed away from the tomb and started running back to the disciples (who were still in the city), armed with the incredible news. As they rushed out of the cemetery, they ran into Jesus Himself!

The Lord's Message (vv. 9-10)

[9] And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them.⁹ And they came up and took hold of His feet¹⁰ and worshiped Him. [10] Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me."¹¹

Galilee was the region where Jesus had grown up. It was in Galilee that His ministry launched. Most of Jesus' disciples were from Galilee.¹²

Jesus is now ordering the whole crew back to Galilee to receive their final marching orders.

The women did what Jesus commanded. They told the disciples to head north. So, they all left Jerusalem and landed in Galilee. The meeting between Jesus and the disciples is recorded for us in the final verses of Matthew's Gospel.

By the time we arrive at Matthew 28:16, the scenery has changed dramatically.

We are no longer in the big city of Jerusalem, but in the country. No longer are we in a place of conflict and stress and danger. We are now at a safe and familiar mountaintop. Now the disciples are on their own home turf.

⁹ This appearance of Jesus to the women is recorded only by Matthew.

¹⁰ Clinging to His feet was a greeting familiar in the ancient near east by subjects to their lords.

¹¹ This doesn't mean that Jesus was instructing them to have the disciples leave immediately for Galilee. We know that they didn't because of the appearances recorded in John while they were still in Jerusalem.

¹² The lone exception was (the now dead) Judas Iscariot, who was from a town in Judea.

To this day we don't know which mountain they climbed to be with Jesus. The important thing is that they knew the mountain Jesus had spoken to the women about. And there Jesus met with His disciples.

Resurrection Impact - Then and Now (Matthew 28:16-20)

On the Mountain with the Disciples (vv. 16-17)

I think it is possible that there were others besides the eleven apostles with Jesus on the mountain.¹³

The women who supported Jesus and the apostles might have been there. Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, Zaccheus and others might have been there. The two Marys might have been there.

But the only ones we KNOW were there were the eleven. Listen as Matthew describes the scene.

[16] But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. [17] When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful.

There is that strange mix of emotions again. Earlier it was the women who were **FEARFUL** and **JOYFUL**. Now, some of the eleven apostles are **WORSHIPFUL** and **DOUBTFUL**.

Doesn't that seem weird? Don't you wonder what in the world they would have been doubting with the resurrected Jesus standing right in front of them?

Some of the commentators on this passage have come to the rescue of the doubters, suggesting that they were only "initially doubtful." (although I have yet to find the word "initially" in any of the Greek manuscripts ☺)

Others have assured us that the "doubters" were not the eleven. The doubters, they say, were the great mass of *other* followers. Surely it wasn't the apostles who doubted.

¹³ The group of twelve apostles had become eleven, as Judas, filled with self-reproach for having betrayed Jesus, took his own life.

Frankly, I think it highly likely that some of the eleven doubted. So, what did they doubt?

- Did they doubt the reality of what they were seeing, questioning their own senses? Perhaps.
- Could they even now have doubted Jesus Himself at this moment when He stood before them? Possibly.
- Did they doubt their own abilities to faithfully follow Him now, having failed so miserably in their first real test only a few days earlier? No doubt.

So here's an Easter Sunday morning thought for you: The Bible tells us that *some* of the eleven disciples of Jesus were standing in the presence of resurrected Deity - AND knew it! - AND doubted.

If you have come to this morning's worship service with skepticisms and wonderings and doubts, please know that you are in great company! Doubts and disciples have walked arm in arm since the beginning.

But notice something else.

Matthew tells us that *SOME* of the disciples doubted. He doesn't tell us that *SOME* of them worshiped. They *ALL* worshiped, even those who doubted. It is possible to worship Jesus while doubting.

That's fantastic news for any of us this morning who may have doubts. Doubts need not stop our worship. To doubt doesn't mean that you're not a disciple.

For most of us, doubts are hurdles we leap on the way to a deeper faith. Doubt is something we work through, reason through, think through, pray through, and fight through.

Those disciples on the mountain were saved, redeemed, true-blue believers. If they had not been, they never would have gone to Galilee and climbed the mountain to meet Jesus in the first place.

God welcomes the doubts of His faithful people. And to those worshipful, doubting disciples the resurrected Jesus gave marching orders.

He gave them a commission, and this commission is every bit as much given to us as it was to them.

We've come together on the morning that reminds us of a "*that changed everything*" event. And we're ending with a laser focus on Jesus' Great Commission.

Jesus begins by asserting His sovereignty.

Jesus' GREAT Commission (vv. 18-20)

Jesus asserts His sovereignty (v. 18)

[18] And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth..."

Jesus is Lord. That is the two thousand year confession of the church.¹⁴

Matthew's Gospel **BEGAN** with the claim that Jesus, being of the royal lineage of David, was the true King of Israel. It **ENDS** here with Him confirmed as the One who reigns as King over all creation.

At the beginning of His ministry, Satan suggested that Jesus take a short-cut, by-pass the road of service, avoid the agony of the cross.

It was a diabolical suggestion Jesus didn't fall for. And because He rejected Satan's offer, remained loyal to His Father, and went the way of the cross, Jesus now bears the title LORD.

Before we hear Jesus issue marching orders, it is important to remember who He is. He is over every earthly lord, prince, king, president, or boss - Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

¹⁴ The apostle Paul would later write, **[Philippians 2:9] For this reason also** (because Jesus gave Himself in loving, humble sacrifice on the cross), **God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

Jesus' words also include assurance. Jump down to the end and you'll see that He, the Sovereign Lord, gave the disciples the promise of His presence.

Jesus gives assurance of His presence (v. 20)

[20]...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Jesus speaks not only as a Master to subjects. He also speaks as a Friend.

Jesus conquers our fear of alienation and isolation and aloneness. In Christ, we are never alone. The Sovereign Lord Jesus always graces us with His presence.

And now we come to the verb. Now the Sovereign Lord Jesus tells disciples - then and now - to what grand purpose we are to give our lives.

Jesus commissioned His followers: MAKE DISCIPLES! (v. 20)

Speaking to eleven worshiping disciples, some of whom were also doubting, Jesus said,

[19] Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...

From the very beginning of His work, Jesus made it clear that His was a worldwide enterprise. He wants disciples from every tribe, tongue, people and nation.¹⁵ He wants more and more and more people to follow Him, more and more disciples.

And the strategy He devised for growing the ranks of disciples is to charge those who are already disciples to reproduce.

This Great Commission - "***make disciples***" - has been the commission of every generation of disciples from the first one to our own.

To those who aren't yet Jesus' disciples

So, on this Easter Sunday morning, 2014, let me ask you, plain and simple, are you a disciple of Jesus?

Not, "*Are you a perfect disciple?*" (no one is) Not, "*Are you the best disciple you can be?*" (I can't claim that all the time, myself)

The question is, do you self-identify as a card-carrying disciple (= learner, student, follower) of the Lord Jesus Christ?

If you don't, I'm really glad you're here today, because today Jesus is inviting you to become His disciple. He wants you to follow Him.

And today, after what we've seen from Matthew's Gospel, I'm going to invite you to take a spiritual "next step" and start following Jesus.

There are all kinds of great reasons to follow Jesus.

Lots of men and women throughout history have led exemplary lives. Many have taught high ethical standards. Some have sacrificed their lives for those they loved. Some have reportedly performed miracles.

And if those were the only claims to fame for Jesus, He would be one of hundreds of fine men and women who have gone before. We might follow Jesus or Gandhi or Moses or anyone else.

But Jesus is much more than an exemplary teacher and miracle worker and moralist. About no one else do we say, "*Well, he did come back from the dead...*"

Jesus is unique in the claims He made for Himself and in the claims we Christians make for Him. So, you're not a disciple, but you're intrigued.

Now that your interest is piqued, what do you do? What do you do with history's most remarkable Man?

Will you investigate His truth claims? Will you search for evidence that the resurrection did or didn't happen? (And yes, there really is solid evidence for the resurrection!)

¹⁵ Similar statements are made by Jesus in Mark (16:15ff) and Luke (24:44)

If you are interested in beginning that investigation, I've got some great resources I can point you to. Our church and other area churches will provide settings in which you could carry on a serious, unhurried, respectful investigation.

Will you ask questions until you find answers? To begin that exploration is to become a disciple, a learner, a follower.

But please don't let this interest in Jesus die as you leave this place!

Anyone who has been followed and believed in by millions upon millions of people over the last two thousand years, who claimed to have been raised from the dead, and who promises eternal life, forgiveness of sins and abundant life here and now should not be dismissed.

Jesus invites your investigation and your questions. This One who was raised from the dead two thousand years ago changed everything. He changed history - and He can change your story, too.

Begin to learn about Him. Start following Him. Become His disciple and you'll soon find more than enough evidence to place your faith in Him for eternal life.

So, if you are not yet a disciple, today is the day to start. If you are a disciple, today is the day to begin self-identifying as a disciple-maker.

To those who are Jesus' disciples

Every disciple here today is as commissioned to **"make disciples"** as were Peter, Andrew, James and John!

Over the past five Sundays we have looked at Jesus and have seen Him to be a wonderful counselor and a Man who refused a life of safety so that He could bring us to God.

He was a Man of power who used that power to serve. He was the best Friend sinners have ever had and He was and is a king.

This multi-faceted Jesus is the One who calls you to make disciples.

You're just a beginning disciple? Great. You're commissioned. You don't know much about following Jesus? OK. Find someone who knows less and invite them to join you on a journey of discovery. There are no "outs."

You've been a disciple for quite a while, but you've not really gotten into the game? Today is the day to get off the sidelines, dust off Matthew 28:18-20, and decide who you will point to Jesus.

He doesn't call us to invite people to a program. He tells us to point people to Him. Teach about Him and His ways. Let your friends and family see what a wonder He is by the way you live and by what you have to say about Him. That's disciple-making.

The King has invited you to a grand, transcendent purpose in life. As you do the things you do - teach, sweep, cook, create, solve problems, preach, raise children, run things - we disciples are about something else and something greater.

We are entering each conversation with an eye on creating a disciple. Each episode in our lives is an opportunity to lovingly, gently press Jesus into someone's life.

We leave this place "on mission" for Jesus' Great Commission!

He is RISEN!

He is RISEN, indeed!!