

**He's Not Here!**  
(Luke 24:1-12)

"I know why you are here. You're looking for Jesus, aren't you – the one they crucified outside Jerusalem last Friday. Well my friends he's not here. Come on in, take a look around. See with your own eyes. He's not here. This place is empty except for us.

"Come in and see for yourselves. Don't be afraid. There is nothing to fear. You see, you've just come to the wrong place. He's not here. He's been raised up, just like he told you all many times before. I know it seems unreal, but it's true. He's not here.

"Now that you have seen for yourselves you should be on your way. Go on, get out of here. You will find him among the living, not here among the dead. Go on now, get out of this place. It's for the dead. Go tell his friends that he lives. Go on now. He's not here." Please pray with me:

Redeemer God – Risen Christ – we have come to the tomb and found it empty. He's not there. You have come among us with the promise of certain salvation. All too often we fail to be aware of your presence. But none-the-less, your spirit is with us all the days of our lives, always leading us. Open our hearts and minds to the good news of the Easter message. Amen.

He's not here! This we can plainly see when we peak inside the tomb on Easter morning. He's not here! That's a fact we can clearly get our arms around – that's something we can

clearly see. And the men inside the empty tomb reassure us that he's not here because he's someplace else – someplace we normally wouldn't think to look after the events of Friday. He's not here among the dead! He's among the living.

That he is alive – now that's something we can't see with our eyes or rationalize with our minds. That he is somewhere else is something we can't touch or feel, like we can inspect the cold empty tomb. The resurrection is not something that makes sense to us from a human or scientific perspective. Frederick Buechner reminds us that resurrection is something "entirely unnatural."<sup>1</sup>

The Resurrection is entirely unnatural. It's not something we can see with our eyes or capture on our digital cameras. Carl Sagan was an American astronomer, astrophysicist, author, and cosmologist. In his many works, he advocated skeptical inquiry and emphasized scientific methodology. Carl Sagan was also fascinated by the phenomenon that educated adults, with the wonders of science all around them, could cling to beliefs based on the unverifiable testimony of observers that have been dead for two thousand years.

"You're so smart, why do you believe in God?" he once remarked to Joan Brown Campbell, a noted clergy person. She found this a surprising question coming from someone who

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Buechner. *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC* (Harper Collins copyright © 1973, 1993 by Frederick Buechner), page 51.

had no trouble accepting the existence of black holes, which he had never observed firsthand. "You're so smart, why don't *you* believe in God?" she responded.

Sagan never wavered in his agnosticism and pessimism. Ann Druyan, his wife, once said, "There was no deathbed conversion. No appeals to God, no hope for an afterlife, no pretending that he and I, who had been inseparable for 20 years, were not saying goodbye forever." "Didn't he want to believe?" she was asked. "Carl never wanted to believe," she replied. "He wanted to *know*."<sup>2</sup>

That story was published in the March 31, 1997, edition of *Newsweek* magazine. It has come to be known as the "hopeless death of Carl Sagan." From Sagan's scientific point of view if we can't see him he must not be here. If you can't provide an eyewitness, it must not have happened. Actually, when we pause to think about it, the story of Easter – the essence of the gospel message – is too good to be true. It's just too hard to believe that someone – even God – could love us so much that he would give up his life for a bunch of sinners. Trust me sisters and brothers, for many people it is too good to be true.

The real truth of the matter is the gospel is "unbelievably" good. There once was a Christian missionary in a far off country. For many years the government of this country had taught its people that God didn't exist. The missionary had the opportunity to interact on a regular basis with a nonbeliever of that country who was a highly educated professional.

After cultivating a friendship with this man, the missionary shared the gospel story with him. The missionary was shocked by the man's response: "What you have told me cannot be true. If it were true, it is such good news that someone would have told this to me before."

The Easter story is unbelievably good news, too good to be true. Carl Sagan sought understanding through the hard facts of science and mathematics. As Christians, we don't see it that way. We seek understanding through faith – faith in the sure and certain hope that there is life beyond the empty tomb. We don't know this – we believe it because it is "unbelievably good news."

The empty tomb on Easter Sunday is unbelievably good news because the Resurrection closes the door on the powers and principalities of this world. The empty tomb emphasizes that Jesus is Lord and those powers and principalities are not! Perhaps the most important aspect of the Resurrection is that Jesus "is the once-for-all sacrifice who brings an end to the law as the basis for the divine-human relationship."<sup>3</sup> We are saved by grace, not by a system of requirements or laws. "*Jesus died for our sins* means the abolition of the system of requirements, not the establishment of a new system of requirements."<sup>4</sup> This opens the door to the divine-human relationship. This is God's incredibly awesome love for us, the children of God. That is too good to be true, without the Resurrection. But through the Resurrection God becomes immediately accessible and accepts us

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<sup>2</sup> From *Perfect Illustrations*, edited by David P. Barrett, pages 13-14, citation by Jerry Adler.

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<sup>3</sup> Marcus J. Borg and N.T. Wright. *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (Harper Collins copyright © 1999 by Marcus J. Borg and N.T. Wright), page 142.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, page 141.

for who we are, just as we are, in spite of all our human shortcomings. That's too good to be true. We can't be so bad as to lose our salvation. And we can never be so good as to deserve it. It's simply that good, God's incredibly awesome gift of unmerited and unconditional love.

The narrator in our gospel reading this morning is quite right in telling the women at the tomb that, "He's not here." He's not in the tomb because

he is here with us now and has been with us since the day of that first Resurrection. While the Resurrection was a kingdom moment that occurred in a particular place at a particular time in history, it cannot be defined or confined by space and time. The Resurrection moves unrestricted through time giving us continuous hope for the future, the promise of eternal life! And that is why He's not in the tomb!