



BelPres Church

Easter Sunday

Speaker: Scott Dudley

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Amen, amen. So good to see all of you here. Wanna say happy Easter to those of you in this room, those of you watching online, those of you in the sanctuary.

So glad to have you here for Easter Sunday. Thank you for being here. All the men in my family, we have a terrible time trying to find anything, even when we can be looking right at it and we don't see it.

There was one time my wife and I were at one of our son's swim meets in Toppenish in Eastern Washington, and my parents had joined us. And my dad went to get something from his car, but he came back and said, I couldn't find my car.

I don't remember where I parked it. I'm having a senior moment. And I said, you've been this way your whole life. That's not it. So I went to help him find the car and he said, I've looked everywhere. Okay, it's Toppenish.

There's like three streets there. And so we keep looking in finally said, well, I thought I parked it over there by that red car that looks like ours. And I said, dad, that is your car. And he said, are you going to put this in a sermon? And I said, absolutely, probably multiple times. I'm just as bad.

My son is just as bad. I can't see things even when I'm looking right at them. One of the things that is interesting about the accounts of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, that first Easter, is how many people miss it.

On seven different occasions, even his own followers don't recognize him when he's been raised from the dead. They look at him, but they don't recognize him.

And they're staring at the most hopeful thing in all of history, right? Like death has been conquered, and not only that, but his resurrection power brings dead things back to life, us back to life if we know him.

Dead hopes, dead dreams, dead marriages, schools, workplaces, can all be made new through the power of Jesus. And in the Bible, people are looking right at him, and they don't recognize him, and they don't see the hope that is right in front of them. Where do you need hope right now? Maybe it's a health problem or relationship issue, school, career, financial problem. Maybe it's just what you see in the world, and it just is discouraging and depressing, and you don't see any hope in it.

Or probably a lot of you here are, your life is going great right now. Everything, you're firing on all cylinders. It's up and to the right. And maybe you don't feel a need for Jesus' hope in your life. Maybe you're only here because someone invited slash dragged you here, much against your will.

And your main hope right now is this sermon doesn't last too long, so that you can get out of here and go to brunch. But even when our lives are going great, no matter how good our lives are, Jesus always makes them better, bigger, richer, deeper.

But sometimes we don't see his hope, even when we're looking right at it. We can miss it. Now, some of that is understandable. I mean, it's hard to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. That doesn't seem possible. But God made the entire universe, so he is more than capable of bringing someone back from the dead.

And as we do every Easter, we put a document on our home page of our website, called Reasons to Believe, that lists some of the historical and empirical reasons that convinced me back when I was an atheist that Jesus really, and a lot of other people as well, that Jesus really was raised from the dead in history as a fact. And I'd encourage you to read that document on our website. But there are other reasons that some of the people in the Bible miss Jesus' resurrection hope, even when they're looking at it. And they're similar to the reasons we sometimes miss Jesus' hope in our lives and can't see it.

But the good news is that Jesus knocks down every barrier that keeps us from seeing his hope to get to us and bring us his hope. So there's a story in the Bible where, after Jesus has been raised from the dead, that morning, two of his followers are talking, and Jesus joins them, but they don't recognize him. And that story starts out.

It says two of them were going to a village called Emmaus about seven miles from Jerusalem. So here's one reason that we sometimes don't see Jesus' hope in our lives. And that is, we're looking in the wrong place.

We're looking in the wrong places. Jesus was raised from the dead back in Jerusalem. These two are going the opposite direction, away from where Jesus' hope is. We often look for hope in the wrong places, careers or relationships or approval of others, but that's a flimsy hope, easily destroyed by an economic downturn or a broken relationship or something like that. The story continues.

As they were walking, it says, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them, but they were kept from recognizing him. And the text doesn't say what kept them from recognizing him. Some people say, well, it must have been God.

The text does not say that. And given that other people in the Bible don't recognize the risen Jesus either, I don't think it's God. I think it's something else.

And I think it's what happens next that is part of why they can't recognize him. Jesus asked them what they're talking about. And they say, Jesus, who was a prophet, powerful in word and deed, but the chief priest crucified him.

But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. There is so much hurt and disappointment in that phrase, but we had hoped. Sometimes what keeps us from seeing Jesus' hope is our hurt and our disappointment.

And it's so deep, we don't see hope anywhere. But I had hoped. I had hoped that this relationship would be the one, but it wasn't.

I had hoped that this job would be fulfilling, but now I'm just bored and I want something bigger in my life. I'm caught in a monotonous routine. We had hoped that this month would be different, but we're not pregnant again.

Maybe for some of you, it's Christians or a church who has disappointed you or hurt you, and you can't see Jesus because of that. And I just want to say, I'm sorry, and that shouldn't have happened. And if you'd like to vent to a pastor today about something like that, just find one of us up in front or with the Ask Me name tags on, and just, we want to hear your story. Just vent to us, and we're going to listen to your story. But I had hoped, disappointment can keep us from seeing Jesus' hope in our lives. The story goes on. Jesus says, didn't the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter into his glory? And then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

And what this shows is another reason we don't see hope, even if it's staring us in the face, is because it's so much bigger than what we want, so much bigger than our desires and our agendas.

When these two say they'd hoped that Jesus would redeem Israel, what they mean is defeat the occupying Roman Empire, kick them out, and restore the nation of Israel back to its glory days. But here's the thing, here's the thing.

If we're only looking for what we want or expect, we can miss the better thing, the bigger hope that Jesus is actually doing. They shrank Jesus down to like fix our political problem. At Easter, Jesus is doing a whole lot more than that, way bigger than their hopes were. He died on a cross to pay the price for our sins that needs to be paid, because a God that overlooks the pain that sin causes is not a God of justice or a God of love. So he comes himself in the person of Jesus, and he dies in our place to pay the price for that sin. And if we make him our leader and forgiver, he frees us from guilt and shame.

And if we know him, we will rise from the dead just like he rose from the dead. Not as disembodied souls floating around on some cloud somewhere which sounds super boring and awful, but raised in a body that will never age or die again, just as Jesus was raised physically in a body.

And through this life, hard things will happen to us. But the promise of Easter is that he will use, Jesus will use even the worst things.

He'll bring good out of them, just like he brought good out of the cross, and he will give us supernatural strength and hope and courage in the middle of any circumstance. That's what's going on at Easter. But it's even bigger than that.

Because the Bible says that Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the first but not the last instance of Jesus making all things new. Restoring you and me and our world to what God always intended it to be. That's what heaven is, this earth resurrected without all the sin and suffering and horrible stuff. Now that process will be complete when Jesus returns, but it begins right now as he unleashes his power through those who follow him to bring good news to the poor and justice to the oppressed and community to the lonely.

And being part of that mission makes our lives, no matter how good they already are, bigger, richer, deeper, better. What's going on at Easter is so much bigger than their agenda of kicking out the Romans.

So much bigger than my agenda where I just want Jesus to give me what I want and make my life easy. Jesus' hope is so much bigger than that, and we can miss it if we're just looking for him to do our agenda.

We can miss the bigger hope he's trying to give us. So the story keeps going. These two reach their destination, the town called Emmaus, and Jesus was going to keep going, and then the text says, but they urged him strongly, stay with us. So here's another reason we sometimes miss Jesus' hope, and that is we don't invite him in. Jesus was not going to force himself on these two people. He waited to be invited. Jesus will not overrule your free will. He will not force you to be in relationship with him. And we miss his hope if we don't invite him in.

Sometimes late at night, I'll be worrying about something, and I just worry and worry and worry and not go to sleep, and sometimes I don't even pray about it. You know, like, why pray when I can worry? Much more effective, right?

And I'm a pastor. I should know better. I don't invite him in. And so a lot of times, I don't see the hope that he wants to give me. We will not see Jesus' power in our lives unless we invite him in. We miss Jesus' hope because we look in the wrong place, because of disappointment and hurt, because it's bigger than our agendas and desires, or we don't invite him in.

But the good news of Easter is Jesus is always walking with us, just like he was walking with these two men, whether we see him there or not, recognize him there or not. So these two guys, they invite Jesus to stay with them for dinner, and then the text says, when he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, and then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.

Jesus here reenacts the Last Supper, which happened just a few days before. And at the Last Supper, the Bible says this is what Jesus did. Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, and said, this is my body, given for you for the remission of your sins.

So Jesus here is reenacting that Last Supper, and in doing that, he's showing these two people, remember what all this Easter stuff is about. Remember this broken bread. This means that I love you so much, I'd rather die than lose you, and so I did.

This isn't theology, this is getting personal. And when they invite him in, and when he gets personal in their lives, that's when they recognize him. Their eyes are open and he recognizes them.

It's similar to another story in the Bible about another disciple named Thomas, who wasn't with all the other disciples when Jesus first appeared to them, like we read in that text, which I think raises an important question, like, what was so important that Thomas wasn't with them to see the resurrected Jesus? Like, did he have a dentist appointment or something? Like, what was he doing? See, sometimes we miss Jesus' hope because we're too busy to even notice it.

So, when they told Thomas Jesus had been raised from the dead, he said, unless I put my finger where the nails were, the holes in Jesus' hand from the crucifixion, and put my hand into his side where Jesus was stabbed, I will not believe, which earned him the nickname Doubting Thomas. Okay, is that fair? Like he has one little moment of doubt, and for 2,000 years he's known as Doubting Thomas.

I prefer to think of him as legitimately questioning Thomas, asking smart questions, Thomas, that makes sense, Thomas. But then later on, Jesus appears to him and says, put your finger here, see my hands, reach out your hand and put it into my side. Okay, am I the only one here that thinks this is a little uncomfortably gross? Like isn't that just a little kind of weird?

Like if someone said to you, here, touch my wounds, right, you'd be like, whoa, no, too personal, I don't know you that well yet. Too personal. And that's the point. Jesus gets real personal with us. Jesus gets real personal with us. He is not asking us to give intellectual assent to a set of truth claims.

And he certainly doesn't want to make us religious. He wants a relationship. And he says, I know everything about you. Or even that. Even that thing that you don't want anyone else to know. I know everything.

I know that secret, too. And I know and I still love you so much that I died for you because he gets uncomfortably close to us. Uncomfortably personal because he knows that the only thing that sets us free from guilt and shame is to be fully known and fully loved anyway. And that's what he does.

And when he does that for Thomas, when he does that for the two men on the road to Emmaus, when he does that for us, we see his hope when he gets personal, not abstract theological. And Thomas says, My Lord and my God.

Intellectual truth claims don't give anybody hope. A relationship with Jesus does. A while back, I heard a man named Mark, who grew up in a church-growing family, and when his parents were out in public, they always pretended to be the perfect family. But then when they got home, they were vicious to each other.

So Mark grew up viewing them as hypocrites. And when he was in high school, his parents ended up getting a divorce. And Mark thought, okay, if this is what Christianity is, if this is what it gets me, I don't want to have anything to do with it. He was disappointed and hurt by Christians, and he couldn't see Jesus because of it. So he started drinking and using cocaine to kind of numb out the pain and put some sense of adventure and some kind of excitement into his life.

And this continued for a lot of years, well into his mid to late 20s. But all along, he felt Jesus tugging at his heart. And he kept thinking, that's odd, because I'm about as far from Jesus as you could possibly be.

But Jesus was there walking with him, even though he wasn't recognizing it, acknowledging it. And his Christian friends, including his sister, would call him to say they loved him, they missed him, that God loved him as well, right?

And he would just cuss at them and hang up the phone. Well, one night he was at a party and passed out, and all the people he was partying with eventually left. And so he woke up the next morning alone and felt completely abandoned the same way he felt when his parents split up and got a divorce.

And all he could think about was the people who had consistently called him for years to tell him that they loved him, that Jesus loved him. That's all he could think about, laying there on the bathroom floor all alone. So he decided to go visit his sister in Oklahoma for a couple of weeks, and she started taking him to her Bible studies, which he hated.

But one night at a prayer meeting, he was sitting in the corner, angry, arms crossed, that sort of attitude, and he looked at his sister and saw his sister, who had gone through her own painful journey, singing worship songs with freedom and joy all over her face. And he thought, well, if Jesus can do that for her, then maybe he can do something for me. So he said, okay, Jesus, if you really love me, and if you're real, and I'm not even sure you are real, but if you are, I'll give you my life.

He invited Jesus in and let Jesus get personal. And then he got a strong sense of Jesus' presence right there with him. And he said it felt like Jesus was reaching into his heart and putting pieces of it back together again.

So he decided to stay in Oklahoma a little while longer. And an older couple began to mentor him, and they became kind of a mother and father to him, and they showed him what following Jesus was really all about, not the phony faith of his parents. He got into a recovery program. Eventually, he got sober. And then Jesus gave him a mission to use all that he'd been through to help set other people free with similar issues.

So now he mentors young men in their 20s and 30s who have addiction issues to help set them free. And for Mark, to experience Jesus' power flowing through him to restore young men and heal broken marriages and put families back together to be a part of that is way more exhilarating and a much bigger life than he would have ever carved out for himself. But Jesus wasn't done. When his parents saw the changes in Mark, they began to realize that following Jesus wasn't about pretending to be perfect and judging everybody else, go figure.

They figured out that following Jesus is a relationship where he transforms us and then uses us to help set other people free. So his parents started following Jesus for real this time.

And eventually, they got back together and got married again to each other. Now, all of that was ten years in the making. But you had a whole family who couldn't see any hope, but Jesus was walking with them even though they didn't see it a lot of times, walking with them by tugging on Mark's heart, walking with them through those friends that consistently called him to say that they loved him. Jesus was there and brought his hope, even though they didn't see it at first. Jesus brought his hope. And that story covers a lot of ground.

Freedom from addiction, a healed marriage, a reconciled family, and a man who found a much bigger life as Jesus works through him to set other people free. So if you don't know Jesus, I'd invite you to get to know him. You can come back here to this church next week. We are a community of people who are seeking to follow Jesus together, or go to another church, or talk with someone who follows Jesus.

In a couple weeks, we're gonna do something here called Alpha, which is an eight week class with dinner included, to just find out what this Christian thing is all about, what following Jesus is all about, in a zero pressure, zero judgment,

zero pressure environment. And if you're curious at all, I'd encourage you to come to that class. Bring your doubts, bring your questions, bring your frustrations.

And for all of us, whether we know Jesus or not, who sometimes can't see hope in our lives, invite him in. Invite him into your comfort. Invite him into your victories. Invite him into your celebrations. Invite him into your problems, your hurts, your pains, your disappointment, and watch what he can do with them. Just like the two men on the road to Emmaus, we don't see Jesus' power until we invite him in.

But when we do, he begins to knock down everything that comes to steal our hope and steal our joy. I'll close with this.

There was a football player named Mike Collin who played for the Miami Dolphins, and his former football coach from college asked him to help him do some recruiting. And Mike said, Sure, what kind of player are you looking for?

And the coach said, Well, you know, there's that guy, you knock him down and he just stays down. And Mike said, Yeah, yeah, we don't want him. And then the coach said, Yeah, and then there's that guy, you knock him down and he gets back up, but you knock him down again, and he just stays down. And Mike said, Yeah, not him either. And the coach said, Yeah, right.

And then the coach said, But then there's that guy, you knock him down, and no matter how many times you knock him down, he just keeps on getting back up. And Mike said, That's the guy we want.

And the coach said, No, I want you to find the guy who keeps knocking everybody down. Jesus is the guy who knocks down everything. That comes to steal our hope and our joy. Which means we can say to the health crisis, You don't own me, I belong to Jesus, and he's either going to heal me in this world or in the new creation, and in the meantime, give me supernatural courage, hope, and joy, despite my circumstances.

You can't knock me down, he's going to knock you down, so I'm not going to back down. You can say to that financial problem, My God's going to provide. I'm not afraid of you.

He's going to knock you down, so I'm not going to back down. You can say to the problems in our world, which are real, and God calls us to help make them better, but ultimately my hope is not in this politician or that politician or this solution or that solution. My hope is way sturdier than that.

My hope is built on the fact that Jesus Christ has risen, not as a story, not as a myth, not as a fantasy, but risen indeed in history. And resurrection hope flows through us if we know him. And no matter what comes our way, he's gonna knock it down.

So you can charge at me with the gates of hell. But because he lives, I will not back down. Amen. Lord, thank you that you give hope. You are hope. So Lord, when we can't see it, open our eyes, open our hearts, fill us with your hope, your resurrection hope that you make dead things live again.

Lord, help us to be so full of that hope we just pass it on to everyone around us so that a world desperately in need of hope knows that they can find it in you. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What are some key take aways for you?
- How might you respond this week?

Closing Group Prayer:

Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Take the challenging parts of your conversation to Jesus. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement for the week ahead.