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March 27, 2016

11 o'clock service

Community Church of Issaquah
Seattle, Washington

"New Life"

Luke 24:1-12

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. "Let there be light," God said. The first day.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God. In him was life and the life was the light of all people.

In the beginning, early on the morning of the first day, the stone was rolled back from the tomb and a light shone in the darkness. And we saw his glory, the glory as of a father's only son.

Easter is the beginning. The Lord has worked in the darkness, and out of the darkness there has shone a new light. Hallelujah. He has risen.

Easter is the beginning. But Easter is *just* the beginning. This beginning is the end of something old and the start of something definitively NEW.

The story of Easter defies how stories are supposed to be told. The understanding of stories they teach in high school English class just doesn't quite work here. It's supposed to go something like this: Exposition, leading to Rising Action, culminating in a Crisis that leads to a Climax, followed by the Falling Action, which ends in the final Resolution. And at the resurrection we've hit almost all of those plot points! First, a baby is born in a manger. Then Jesus travels around teaching and healing. We clearly hit the crisis when he's handed over to sinners and crucified, and finally, in this morning's reading, the climax when the tomb is found empty.

But now here's where things get interesting. According to our high school English class, a story's climax should take place right about at

the end. Romeo and Juliet take the poison, their families find them dead, and the play ends. Or in the Lord of the Rings, Frodo destroys the ring, sails to the land of the Elves, and the long saga is finished.

But here we are at Easter, the climax of the greatest story ever told and we're not on the edge of the end. We're on *the edge of beginning!*

This beginning reminds me of the monumental, Nobel Prize-winning discovery of the Higgs boson particle in 2012. Now, I'm way over my head trying to explain physics, but for decades researchers had seen that there were problems in physics that Einstein's best formulas couldn't solve, and so these researchers theorized that there were 17 particles that no one had ever seen that explained the universe more fully. Smaller than atoms, these infinitesimally tiny particles were all slowly verified by experimentation—except for the smallest, most important particle, the Higgs boson particle. When this Higgs boson particle would be found its discovery was going to revolutionize physics.

See, physics was split into two camps over how the universe was designed: the multiverse model and the supersymmetry model. Don't ask me more details about either of those models, but what's important is that finding the Higgs boson particle was going to prove one camp right and the other camp wrong. In fact, if one of these two models had been confirmed, it would have had the potential to explain ALL of physics. As in, everything discoverable in the universe as it relates to physics would have been discovered! Physics as a field of discovery would have been over!

But here's the thing, in 2012 the Higgs boson particle was finally, actually seen and when it was seen, it confirmed *both* theories of the universe, and by confirming both said that physics still had a lot to learn! Finding the Higgs boson particle solved Einstein's old problems, but in doing so swung open the door to a whole new realm of discovery! In fact, finding the Higgs boson particle told researchers that standard physics knowledge needed be turned over and looked at anew!

This is exactly what happens at the empty tomb. All of Scriptures, all of the Jewish tradition, all of Israel's accumulated knowledge about God comes together in Christ. Scriptural motifs of the Davidic king and the suffering servant and the Son of God come together in one person. Like Einstein's problems making sense in light of the Higgs boson particle, puzzling scriptural passages become clear in view of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

But here's the thing. Jesus' resurrection makes sense of the old and in a way completes it. Jesus fulfills the old. But Jesus so surpasses what had been expected that it's as if the resurrection opens up a whole new field of discovery. A whole NEW life. Instead of saying "game over, we've figured it all out" the resurrection says, "continue on, play again, and this time the game is NEW."

This new field of discovery is the new life that pours out of the empty tomb. God's sovereign power to raise the dead and banish the darkness bursts from its rocky abode and sends all of those caught up in its power out across the ends of the earth. Out go the early missionaries across the Roman Empire. Out go the hermits into the desert. Out go the monks begging across medieval Europe. Out go the reformers to their pulpits. Out go countless Christians to serve the poor and the prisoner and the orphan. Out of these three days flow two thousand years of new life.

Think back to that high school English class. According to high school English, we're supposed to be in the days of "the falling action" where all the strings are supposed to get tied up, but just look! The strings that flow out of the empty tomb are so brightly colored and weaving a pattern so intricate and perfect that two thousand years haven't been enough to finish the story.

Easter is a story like no other story. The resurrection was so fundamentally new to human history that it was not always easy to recognize what was going on. In fact, if we had kept on read in the Gospel of Luke this morning, we would have read the story of the road to Emmaus and would have seen that eternal life staring you in the face apparently isn't all that easy to see! Apparently, it's easy to have a walking, talking miracle in front of you, the risen Lord, and think "Oh it's just another man on the road to Emmaus." Apparently, it's easy to have an entire conversation with a man has just been clothed with immortality and eternal life and not once to see the glory shine off of him.

It's hard to put into words how new what God did in Jesus when he was raised to new life. It's like history had been plodding along for millennia after millennia. The author of Ecclesiastes is right to say "There is nothing new under the sun." There wasn't. The same cycles of summer, fall, winter and spring. The same family routines and squabbles. The same rise and fall of politicians and kings. The same. And then there is this. This which is completely baffling. Baffling because in a world of same-old, same-old here is something NEW. People had come back to life before. Lazarus had been raised from the dead. But look around us! Lazarus isn't here anymore. Lazarus eventually died again. He was simply resuscitated, not resurrected. But *Jesus*, *Jesus* we say was resurrected. Resurrected to a life that can never die.

The resurrection is like software that is too much for the existing human hardware. It blows a circuit. Things short out. Connections that should be made aren't. Because it doesn't make logical sense when looked at from the standpoint of that poor old hardware! It's system overload! Here two thousand years later, after celebrating the Good Friday and Easter two thousand times over, the resurrection makes sense. But it was baffling to those first followers standing around trying to understand why the body was in the tomb like it was supposed to be. All of Jesus' intimations of the resurrection, all of the Old Testament's hints of what was to come turned out to be not enough for the disciples to catch on quickly to what was going on. The only thing that could prepare you for the resurrection... is the resurrection! A people of the resurrection are a people who are constantly looking back saying, "I had no IDEA that this would mean that."

It's not like Jesus didn't prepare them. Right before the Transfiguration, Jesus makes it clear: "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." You can't get much more straightforward.

In fact, even after the resurrection Jesus is trying to help the disciples understand. On the road to Emmaus, when the two disciples go discussing what the women had reported to them about the empty tomb, not recognizing that the former occupant of the tomb is walking right beside them, Jesus begins with Moses and all the prophets and goes right through Scripture showing the disciples how Scripture had had signs all along to way of who the Messiah was going to be. Scripture told the story of what God was going to do. The newness of the resurrection answers the old, but in doing so opens up a whole new world. A world that is astounding and at first difficult to understand.

You think that people would recognize Jesus immediately and respond with understanding and obedience but instead there is perplexity, cynicism, unbelief and astonishment. We think back and go, well they didn't understand, but we would have understood. But here's the thing, we are looking back with the proclamation of two thousand years of Easters. We have two thousand years of people going back through the Old Testament and pulling out for us how Jesus was the expected one, and how the resurrection makes sense. We have two thousand years to stand on in understanding the resurrection!

But there is a wonderful this about the perplexity and astonishment of the early disciples. This perplexity and astonishment turns out to be the hinge that swings open a door into a room unseen before. It's the discovery that proves not to shut down new life, but open up life that has never been seen before.

Their perplexity and astonishment send them into a life of awe that doesn't end. Unlike Romeo and Juliet who take the poison, whose families find them and whose story ends, the climax of God's story in Jesus starts the story all over again. It is the end that begins again, the end that starts us off in new life, life eternal and incorruptible.

Easter is our beginning. Hallelujah and amen. We celebrate Easter this Sunday so that we might remember it all Sundays. We celebrate it today so that we might live in resurrection life every day. Jesus has given us the new life. New life that pours out of the empty tomb, across time and space, into all of the nooks and crannies of our lives.

So Easter people, people who have been called to the resurrection, let us proclaim together:

He has risen! 3x