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 Date: March 23, 2008 – Easter Sunday
 Title: The Joy of the Cross
 Text: John 20:1-10
 Theme: Jesus considered it joy to endure the cross in the obeying of His Father for the securing of His people from their sins.

BIG PICTURE:

“Why I Need a Savior”

- John the Baptist – John 1 - “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”
- Nicodemus – John 3 - “You must be born again”
- **The Woman at the Well – John 4 - “Sir, give me this water”**

Our Savior’s Passion

- The Sign of the Cross – John 13
- The Humiliation of the Cross – John 19
- **The Joy of the Cross – John 20**
- The Power of the Cross – John 21

Today I want us to celebrate the joy of His cross and the power of His resurrection.

Introduction:

As I prepare to teach this remarkable narrative, I am mindful of the various accounts given in the previous Gospels. There is tremendous movement and perhaps a hint of confusion, yet can we blame those who, in recording the event, are stunned by their surroundings. Some would call us blind and foolish, but I willingly align myself by faith with the validity of this passage. “Easter is a moment of celebration in which faith bursts the normal bounds of report and memory.”

Christianity is bound by two non-negotiable truths, both of which are miraculous in nature. First, that God would become man and die through an incarnation and secondly, that this same God would arise from the dead in a powerful and public resurrection. Miracles override finite explanation. They are non-repeatable acts of God whereby He makes Himself known. This morning, in faith, we have gathered to powerfully and publicly proclaim that He is risen, He is risen indeed!

“By His resurrection from the dead He was openly declared to be the Son of God in power. His incarnation was as much a part of the process of manifestation as His incarnation. Indeed, the real Christ has not become known in His essential glory, until He is known no longer after the flesh, but as the risen, exalted Christ, the conqueror of death and sin.” (James M. Campbell. *The Heart of the Gospel: A Popular Exposition of the Doctrine of the Atonement*. Fleming H. Revell Co. 1907. pg. 137)

“The resurrection is the fulcrum of faith. The resurrection is the axis, the center, the core, the pivot point of faith for a Christian. If there is no resurrection of Jesus, then Christianity is just another ancient religion with its own particular form of spirituality and morality. The truth of Christianity hinges on the resurrection. Either Christ was raised from the dead by the powers of God or not.”

http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/easter_mary_magdalene_at_the_tomb_GA.htm

"The Resurrection is the central theme in every Christian sermon reports in the Acts. The Resurrection, and its consequences were the "gospel" or good news which the Christian brought. The miracles of the Resurrection, and the theology of that miracle, comes first. The first fact in the history of Christendom is a number of people who say they have seen the Resurrection." (C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*. pgs. 143,144).

I have entitled this Sunday's study, "The joy of the cross." There are two passages that compliment this passage as it relates to His redemptive activity. The first is Hebrews 12:2 and then Isaiah 53:10, 11.

"fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, **who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame**, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

¹⁰ "But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. ¹¹ **As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied;** By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities" (Isa. 53:10, 11).

It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead that enables us to embrace with joy the cross. Today I desire for us to be swept up in the joy of His cross.

Its Eternal Value:

"Belief in the resurrection is not an appendage to the Christian faith. It is the Christian faith." (George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury, *London Times*, 1992-APR-19).

The Present Danger:

May 15, 2006 - (Ventura, CA) - Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, has sold more copies than any other fictional work in U.S. history. With the release of the movie adaptation on May 19, interest in this controversial tale has risen substantially.

Broad Reach:

According to the Barna research, *The Da Vinci Code* has been read "cover to cover" by roughly 45 million adults in the U.S. - that's one out of every five adults (20%). That makes it the most widely read book with a spiritual theme, other than the Bible, to have penetrated American homes.

Perceived Value of the Content:

Among the adults who have read the entire book, one out of every four (24%) said the book was either "extremely," "very," or "somewhat" helpful in relation to their "personal spiritual growth or understanding." That translates to about 11 million adults who consider *The Da Vinci Code* to have been a helpful spiritual document.

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What is the basic premise of the book? The Church has held in secret the truth about Jesus. What actually happened is that Jesus was not resurrected from the dead but

rather was married to Mary Magdalene and had a child. Mary Magdalene was pregnant at the time of the crucifixion.

Questions:

1. In the absence of resurrection, what hope do we have?
2. Have you believed in the only begotten resurrected Son of God?

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know the resurrected Jesus.

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose Him as our only Savior from sin.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of His resurrection and our future hope.

How will they best hear?

All of us have experienced the joy of seeing one of our favorite teams win the ultimate prize. None of us believe that it was pure luck. Somewhere along the line, someone paid a significant price to get them to that point in time. So it is with the cross. The only way for Jesus to be resurrected was for Him to die. Resurrection is always preceded by death.

There are three primary ideas in this passage I desire to consider this morning.

- I. There was significant confusion (vv. 2, 9)

Three aspects contributed to their confusion.

- A. A missing body (vv. 1-7)

Mary was surprised at the removed stone. She fully expected the stone to have remained in place. She did not expect a resurrection from the dead. She attempted to interpret the miraculous by the natural. The world continues to seek explanation for creation, the flood, the fall, Christ, and His resurrection.

The following four erroneous theories of the resurrection account are provided by Josh McDowell in "Evidence for the Resurrection,"

<http://www.leaderu.com/everystudent/easter/articles/josh2.html>

1. They went to the wrong tomb; they got lost and could not find the actual burial site.

A theory propounded by Kirsopp Lake assumes that the women who reported that the body was missing had mistakenly gone to the wrong tomb. If so, then the disciples who went to check up on the women's statement must have also gone to the wrong tomb. We may be certain, however, that Jewish authorities, who asked for a Roman guard to be stationed at the tomb to prevent Jesus' body from being stolen, would not have been mistaken about the location. Nor would the Roman guards, for they were there.

If the resurrection-claim was merely because of a geographical mistake, the Jewish authorities would have lost no time in producing the body from the proper tomb, thus effectively quenching for all time any rumor resurrection.

2. They only imagined it happening. It was all a bad dream.

Another attempted explanation claims that the appearances of Jesus after the resurrection were either illusions or hallucinations. Again, where was the actual body, and why wasn't it produced?

3. Jesus only fainted and later revived.

Another theory, popularized by Venturini several centuries ago, is often quoted today. This is the swoon theory, which says that Jesus didn't die; he merely fainted from exhaustion and loss of blood. Everyone thought Him dead, but later He resuscitated and the disciples thought it to be a resurrection.

4. His body was stolen by his disciples, Rome, or Jewish authorities.

Consider the theory that the body was stolen by the disciples while the guards slept. The depression and cowardice of the disciples provide a hard-hitting argument against their suddenly becoming so brave and daring as to face a detachment of soldiers at the tomb and steal the body. They were in no mood to attempt anything like that.

The theory that the Jewish or Roman authorities moved Christ's body is no more reasonable an explanation for the empty tomb than theft by the disciples. If the authorities had the body in their possession or knew where it was, why, when the disciples were preaching the resurrection in Jerusalem didn't they explain: "Wait! We moved the body, see, He didn't rise from the grave"?

And if such a rebuttal failed, why didn't they explain exactly where Jesus' body lay? If this failed, why didn't they recover the corpse, put it on a cart, and wheel it through the center of Jerusalem? Friend, there is no explanation except, "Immanuel, God with us."

We reject as false any attempt to explain or dismiss the resurrection of our Lord from the dead as anything other than bodily and actual. By faith we believe the record that Jesus Christ arose from the dead and is alive today seated at the Father's right hand interceding for His people.

There are two other thoughts contributing to their confusion.

- B. A misunderstood truth (v. 9)

"Jesus had repeatedly foretold his resurrection, but that was all forgotten in the great sorrow on their hearts. Only the chief priests and Pharisees recalled the words of Jesus

(Mt 27:62). Jesus had put emphasis on both the fact and the necessity of his resurrection which the disciples slowly perceived." (A.T. Robertson's Word Pictures)

C. An angelic witness (v. 12)

On top of everything else there were angelic appearances. In reading the various narratives there is little doubt in my mind that confusion bordering on hysteria was at hand. Yet in the midst of this, God triumphed, faith prevailed.

II. There was enlightened faith (vv. 8, 16)

Here the narrative says, "In seeing they believed." Yet Jesus says, "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 20:26-29). The Christian life is entered by faith and maintained by faith. Although faith is in contrast to sight, faith is neither blind nor ignorant. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 12:1).

God caused their eyes to be opened in order that they might understand the significance of this event. Mary understood who Jesus was because the Holy Spirit opened her eyes to the truth.

III. There was unbridled joy (vv. 11-18 [Luke 24:1-12])

"Mary Magdalene, who followed Christ to the last in his humiliation, met him with the first in his exaltation." (Matthew Henry's Commentary)

Mary is breathless as she shares her joy. It is not the fatigue of spent energy, but of unbridled joy.

Why, because . . .

- A. The sovereign King reigns (John 19:11-22)
- B. The living water flows (John 19:28, 29)
- A. The eternal life lives (John 19:30)

Remember when Jesus healed a blind man in John 9? Remember what he said when questioned as to whom Jesus was? Listen carefully to the following statement uttered by the seeing blind man.

"He then answered, 'Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see'" (John 9:25).

Friend, how God can become man and how He can arise from the dead and live forever is beyond my capacity to explain, but one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see. Our God reigns!

Jesus said, "It is finished." Yet what does this mean? Two thoughts are necessary.

- First, it speaks of submission.

Jesus voluntarily and volitionally gave up His life to the Father as a substitutionary sacrifice to atone for the sins of His people and in so doing restore a severed fellowship between God and man.

- Second, it speaks of completion.

Nothing more was to be done and nothing could be taken away.

ILLUSTRATION:

There has been many a wintry morning when snow fell during the night where my family and I would find ourselves shoveling our driveway. After a long and toilsome labor, I would make one last effort and with exhaustion and joy say, "It is finished." If the truth were told, I did not desire to shovel, but such a task was mine. The saddest part of my particular story is this event was repeated with sickening regularity.

The death Christ died was a "once-for-all" event never to be repeated, ever again.

The idea behind "It is finished" is like . . .

- Leonardo Da Vinci looking at the last stroke of his Mona Lisa and saying, "It is finished."
- Michelangelo striking the stone block containing his immortal David with a finishing blow stepping back or laying down for the last time his brush as he completes the Sistine Chapel Ceiling and saying, "It is finished."

In each of these acts accomplishment, completion has been reached. Yet in the work of God, we must ask ourselves the question, "What is finished"?

- The broken fellowship begun in Genesis 3 has been fully and finally restored forever.
- The sin debt against the slave has been fully and finally paid in full.
- The enmity between a parent and child has been fully and finally reconciled.
- The guilt of the guilty before the bar of God has been fully and finally justified.
- The blinding blasting wrath of an angry God has been fully and finally propitiated (placated).

This is what is meant when the only begotten Son of God said, "It is finished." All that the Tri-unity of God determined, before the foundations of the worlds were poured, has come to its completion in the cross work of Jesus Christ. And it is His resurrection from the dead that confirms and makes certain all the promises of God.

"Now let the heavens be joyful,
Let earth her song begin:
Let the round world keep triumph,
And all that is therein;
Invisible and visible,
Their notes let all things blend,
For Christ the Lord is risen
Our joy that hath no end."
(John of Damascus)

APPLICATION: (What's the NEXT STEP?)

Notice that the central character is in this moving account of His resurrection. It is Mary Magdalene. Both Mark (16:9) and Luke (8:2) describe her as the one from whom seven demons had been cast. Some would seek to argue that she was a woman of ill-repute. I believe it is appropriate and intentional that one who was unclean and separated from man and God now sits as a devoted attendant to the resurrected Christ.

No matter whom you are or what you have done Jesus stands ready to embrace you with forgiveness.

1. Have you bowed your knee to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords?
2. Have you quenched your thirst by drinking from the living water?
3. Have you moved from death to life by receiving the gift of eternal life?