

TITLE: "Flying Lessons"

TEXT: John 20:19-29 (NT 115)

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Introduction – What is Jesus' resurrection so important?

Nine-year-old Joey was asked by his mother what he had learned in Sunday School. 'Well, Mom, our teacher told us how God sent Moses behind enemy lines on a rescue mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When he got to the Red Sea, he had his army build a pontoon bridge and all the people walked across safely. Then he radioed headquarters for reinforcements. They sent bombers to blow up the bridge and all the Egyptians were killed and all the Israelites were saved.'

His Mother asked 'Now, Joey, is that really what your teacher taught you?'

'Well, no, Mom. But, if I told it the way the teacher did, you'd never believe it!'

That's the way it is with the resurrection of Jesus. When people hear it the way the BIBLE tells it, many people simply do not believe it. So this morning I want to consider the reliability of the account of the resurrection of Jesus. ...Why IS the resurrection of Jesus so crucial? Because it proves 3 facts vital to Christian faith:

- 1) Jesus IS the divine Son of God.
- 2) Jesus IS with us right now.
- 3) Those who have faith in Jesus Christ WILL be resurrected just as Jesus was.

1. Jesus is the divine Son of God

Let's examine the biblical account of the resurrection. When the Jewish leaders learned that the body of Jesus was missing from the tomb, they invented the lie that his disciples came and took it so they could SAY that he had risen. ...Is it possible that the disciples were so caught up in their beliefs that they invented the resurrection so that they could convince others to follow them?

Let me ask you a question. Would you die for a hoax you created yourself? Ten of the eleven disciples were executed for their faith. Some were crucified. Would you allow yourself to be nailed to a cross, beheaded or stoned for a ruse that you simply made up? ...I just don't think so.

--Some people believe that Jesus did not actually DIE on the cross. Let us examine this supposition. First Jesus was flogged. This was a horrible ordeal where a person is whipped with a leather flog of leather ribbons into which were fastened pieces of metal and bone. The person was whipped 49 times and their backs were shredded down to the bone. Many people died after being flogged.

Then Jesus was crucified. In crucifixion, a person was nailed to a cross wooden cross member with two 8 inch spikes, one through each wrist. Then he was hoisted up on the permanent vertical post of the cross and his ankles were nailed through with an 8 inch spike. To prove he was dead, Jesus' body was skewered by a Roman spear.

Crucifixions were carried out by soldiers who had done this dozens if not hundreds of times. These soldiers had plenty of experience and they knew whether or not a crucified person was dead. Besides, if they let a person down from a cross before he was dead, they would be executed.

But let's say for a moment that they WERE mistaken. Let's say Jesus didn't die, that he only fainted on the cross and was placed in the tomb. A couple days later he appeared to the disciples. Do you think someone who has been flogged, crucified and skewered by a spear a couple days before could come into a room full of people and say, "Peace be with you?" Do you think he would say to Thomas, "Put your finger here in my spear wound and in the nail holes in my wrists?" ...I don't THINK so.

--Besides that, the hope of all the early followers of Jesus was that they would be resurrected like Jesus. Christians were torn apart by wild animals in Roman arenas, crucified, beheaded and stoned because they believed that they would be resurrected like Jesus. Do you think they would have done this if all they had seen was a wounded and almost dead man crawling around with his back laid bare by a whip, nail holes in his wrists and ankles and a spear wound in his side? ...I don't think so.

What we say in the apostle's Creed is absolutely true. Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, DEAD, and buried. ...the third day he rose again from the dead." And this confirms the fact that Jesus is who he said he is: The divine Son of God.

2. Jesus is with us right now

A Sunday school teacher said to her children, "We have been learning how powerful KINGS and QUEENS were in Bible times. But there is a higher power. Can any of you tell me what it is? One little girl blurted out, "Aces!"

The fact that Jesus did actually rise from the dead, means that Jesus IS more powerful than any king, queen, president or military leader. It means that Jesus is God, just as God is God and the Holy Spirit is God.

The resurrection also means that Jesus is still alive, that he is still around and, in fact, Jesus is right here with us this morning. ...What is Jesus DOING? As I mentioned in last week's sermon, Jesus is busy transforming us AND guiding us so that we can transform our church, our community and our world.

One of the ways I know that Jesus IS real is because Jesus has begun the transformation process in me. I have a long way to go. I realize that. But I can identify with the person who said, "I am not the man I could be or should be, but thank God I am not the man I was." Amen to that. However, knowing Jesus Christ has been the most amazing experience of my life and following Jesus on a daily basis is the most exciting adventure I have ever been on.

Some of you, especially those who have had a similar experience with Jesus, can identify with this. Others cannot. That's OK. Some of you may need intellectual confirmation of the reality of Jesus. Those who know me, KNOW I am not a scholar. I did get good grades in college and in seminary, but studying, translating, researching never did really captivate me. Some of you are scholars and you know I am not going to convince you of the reality of Jesus intellectually.

I am not a scientist. Some of you are. And those who are, KNOW that there is no way I could convince you of the reality of Jesus Christ through any rational process, because that process is foreign to me.

But there ARE people out there who ARE qualified in both areas. I just finished a book titled *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel. Lee was the award winning legal editor of the *Chicago Tribune* for many years. He was a spiritual skeptic until he met the Lord in 1981. In this book, he interviews some of the top scholars and scientists in the world to determine if there is intellectual and scientific justification for the belief that Jesus IS the Son of God. ...One of the people he interviewed was William Lane Craig who is considered one of the world's foremost experts on the resurrection. Lee Strobel writes:

The first time I saw Bill Craig in action, I was seated behind him as he defended Christianity before a crowd of nearly eight thousand people, with countless others listening on more than a hundred radios across the country.

As moderator of a debate between Craig and an atheist selected by the national spokesman for American Atheists, Inc., I marveled as Craig politely but powerfully built the case for Christianity while simultaneously dismantling the arguments for atheism. From where I was sitting, I could watch the faces of people as they discovered—many for the first time—that Christianity can stand up to rational analysis and rugged scrutiny.

In the end, there was no contest. Among those who had entered the auditorium that evening as avowed atheists, agnostics, or skeptics, an overwhelmingly 82% walked out concluding that the case for Christianity had been the most compelling. Forty-seven people entered as non-believers and exited as Christians—Craig's arguments for the faith were THAT persuasive, especially compared to the paucity of evidence for atheism. ...Incidentally, nobody became an atheist (p. 206).

I'm NOT Bill Craig. But I KNOW it was not a hoax that changed my life. It was Jesus Christ who IS the Son of God and who IS alive and well and who IS here this morning. Unfortunately, I can't argue persuasively like Bill Craig. What I CAN do is this. I was talking to an atheist a few weeks ago and I said: "So you don't believe Jesus is God?" He said, "No." I said, "And you don't believe that Jesus was raised from the dead and is still with us?" He said, "No." "Then," I said, "I dare you to say this: "Jesus, if you ARE real, come into my life and show me you are real."

If you are skeptical, if you have doubts, that is great! The Lord LOVES skeptical people. Thomas had doubts. He was a rational person. He wasn't going to be persuaded by any tale he heard from others, even if they WERE his best friends. In our text, Jesus wholly and completely resolved Thomas's doubts. And if you give Jesus a chance, he will resolve each and every one of your doubts, too.

3. The faithful will be resurrected, too

A lady went to Agway to buy some plants for her flower garden. Pointing to a blooming flat she asked, "Are these the kind that come back every year?" "No," the clerk responded. They die and *you* come back."

When WE die, how WILL we come back? The hope of Christian faith is not resuscitation. Jesus was NOT resuscitated. Resuscitation is bringing back to life a clinically dead body.

Resurrection is NOT reincarnation! Reincarnation is the belief that, upon the death of the body, the human soul comes back to earth in another physical body or form. The Bible nowhere suggests reincarnation and reincarnation is NOT a Christian doctrine. Jesus was resurrected. Resurrection is the transformation from a physical body with a limited life span into a spiritual body that will live forever. ...What will resurrection be like? We find the answer in I Corinthians 15:35-49:

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" ...What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

When we are resurrected, we will have the same identity, we will be the same unique person that God created us to be, yet the substance of our bodies will be changed. Right now, our bodies are made of the elements of the earth and they have a limited life span as do all living things. When we are resurrected, our bodies will be made of spiritual elements and they will never die.

Here on earth, our body is subject to sin, disease, accident and death. When we are resurrected, we will be free from nagging sin, disease and death.

Here on earth, we have many limitations. When we are resurrected, we will have powers we can't even imagine. We will be able to go anywhere in a blink. We will be able to eat and drink, but will not NEED to eat and drink. We will be able to communicate with everyone without the language restraints we have now. We will be able to chat with Moses, eat with Esther, have a Bible study with Paul and go for a walk with Mary, the mother of Jesus. When we are resurrected, we will be able to enjoy our loved ones who have been resurrected forever and ever.

Conclusion –

Let me close with a story I made up. ...Once there was a sluggish caterpillar who read a book by the Creator that said he would one day go to sleep and when he woke up he would be transformed into a light and beautiful animal that could fly!

He told Mr. Toad and Mr. Toad said, "That is just a STORY, little caterpillar! You can't even HOP. How will YOU ever be able to fly?"

Then the little caterpillar told Mrs. Squirrel the story, and Mrs. Squirrel said, "Don't believe everything you read little caterpillar! You can't even run up a tree. I don't see HOW you will ever fly."

Next he met Mr. Turtle and Mr. Turtle said, "Little caterpillar, you are a religious fanatic and you can't even swim! How will YOU ever be able to fly?"

One day the little caterpillar decided to make a tent. When it was done, he curled up inside and went to sleep. When he woke up, his body was small and light and he had huge colorful wings. For a while, he just looked at his new beautiful body. Then he flew all around the pond and the woods and the meadow.

After a while, he found Mr. Toad, Mrs. Squirrel and Mr. Turtle and he said, "It's me, the little caterpillar!" And they each said, "Wow! Can you show us how we can fly, too?"

And the little caterpillar said, "Only Jesus can teach you to fly."

Amen.

Children's sermon 5-2-10

Once there was a sluggish caterpillar who read a book by the Creator that said he would one day go to sleep, and when he woke up he would be transformed into a light and beautiful animal that could fly!

He told Mr. Toad and Mr. Toad said, "I don't think so, little caterpillar! You can't even HOP. How will YOU ever be able to fly?"

Then the little caterpillar told Mrs. Squirrel the story and Mrs. Squirrel said, "Don't be silly little caterpillar! You can't even run up a tree. I don't see how YOU will ever fly."

Next he met Mr. Turtle and Mr. Turtle said, "Little caterpillar, you can't even swim! How will YOU ever be able to fly?"

One day the little caterpillar decided to make a tent. When it was done, he curled up inside and went to sleep. When he woke up, his body was small and light and he had huge colorful wings. For a while, he just looked at his new beautiful body. Then he flew all around the woods and the pond and the meadow.

After a while, he found Mr. Toad, Mrs. Squirrel and Mr. Turtle and he said, "It's me, the little caterpillar!" And they each said, "Wow! You were RIGHT little caterpillar!"