

**“The Evidence for Easter” Luke 24:1-12**

Once, there was a young man who worked for an engineering firm. The company sent him halfway across the ocean to Hawaii to work for two years. He gladly accepted that assignment since it would pay him plenty of money and would allow him to marry his long-time girlfriend when he returned home to Tennessee.

While he was away, he wrote her frequently. But she couldn't help but worry about his faithfulness especially given all the pretty girls on the beaches out in Hawaii. When she wrote him about this, the young man admitted that he was sometimes tempted, but that he always fought it and remained faithful.

Soon, the young man received a package in the mail. It was from his girlfriend. And inside that package, there was a harmonica. And with the harmonica, there was a note that said, *“I'm sending you this harmonica so that you can learn to play it and have something to keep your mind off those girls.”*

Soon after that, she received a letter from the young man. *“Thanks for the harmonica,”* he wrote. *“I'm practicing every night and thinking only of you.”*

When the two years were over, the young man quickly got on a plane to Tennessee so that he could be reunited with his girlfriend. Now, they could be married and their dreams could become real.

He ran to meet her at the airport and spread his arms wide to embrace her and give her a big kiss. But she held her hand up to stop him. And she told him in no uncertain terms, *“We're not going to get to any of that stuff until I hear you play that harmonica!”*<sup>1</sup>

She wanted evidence. She wanted proof. She wanted some reason to believe that what this young man was telling her was true.

No harm in that, right? Evidence is necessary when something is very important to us. Proof is valuable when something is not easy to believe.

It is hard to imagine anything *more* important than the Easter story. It is big news, the biggest news in the history of the world. As someone once said, if Jesus was not raised from the dead, then nothing else matters. There is no hope. There is no future. There is no point in anything.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/e/evidence.htm>

**And if Jesus *was* raised from the dead, then nothing else matters. Nothing else has any power over us. There is nothing left to fear. Not death. Not pain. Not illness. Not evil. Nothing in all creation.**

**Yet it is also difficult to think of anything more difficult to believe than this story of resurrection. It has always been hard to swallow.**

**Resurrection was the last thing on the minds of these women as they carried spices to the tomb to anoint Jesus' dead body. And even when they did not find his body, even when they saw that the stone had been rolled away from the mouth of the tomb, they were more confused than excited.**

**And then, when the women told their tale to the Eleven and to all the rest of the disciples, no one believed them. It just couldn't be true. It sounded like crazy talk. It was sheer nonsense.**

**The word for *nonsense* here is where we get the word "*delirious*". They considered these women delirious. They were out of their minds. They were just babbling.**

**The empty tomb wasn't enough evidence for the women. And the women's words were not enough to convince the disciples.**

**No, this is not an easy story to believe. And we have just as hard a time with it as anyone did 2,000 years ago. These disciples knew death. They had seen plenty of evidence of death.**

**They had watched as Jesus was nailed to the cross. They had witnessed the life draining from his body. They had seen death up close.**

**And they had not yet seen the risen Christ. They had not yet seen anyone resurrected from the dead.**

**And we know death too, don't we? We are much better acquainted with death than we are with resurrection. We know what it's like to see someone die. We know what it's like to witness the life drain out of the bodies of people we love.**

**Parents  
Children  
Spouses  
Siblings**

## Friends

We see all around us the evidence of death. But where is the evidence of resurrection? Where is the evidence for Easter?

What was it that compelled Peter to run to the tomb and see for himself what was going on? I suspect that it was not anything that these women had said. It was not the story that they told. I think that it was the women themselves.

These women were prepared for death. They were looking for death. They expected nothing but death.

But something had changed. *They* had been changed. They were now focused on life. They were filled with new life. Something had pulled them away from death. Something had pulled them away from the tomb. And they could not wait to go and tell the other disciples all about it.

Some of you may have heard a song that was very popular a few years ago called *I Can Only Imagine*. It was performed by the Christian band MercyMe and was written by their lead singer Bart Millard. The song tries to imagine what life in heaven might be like and Millard wrote the song while thinking about his father who died when Millard was a senior in high school.

What you may not know is that Millard had a very troubled relationship with his father for much of his life. His father was abusive. And he remembers that his father would take out his own frustrations and disappointments on him.

If his father got cut off in traffic that day, he would come home and beat him. If the Dallas Cowboys lost on Sunday, his father would beat him.

Once, the school sent home a notice that he had made the honor roll. Millard tried to avoid his father when he could so he ended up signing his father's name to the notice. The school found out about it and called his father. The teachers thought it was funny and his father laughed while he was on the phone.

But after he hung up, he waited for his son to come home. And when the boy walked through the door, he felt a razor strap sting the back of his legs. He whipped him for several minutes until it hurt to lay down on the bed. He left huge welts and purple and black bruises on his son's back. "*He's going to kill me,*" the boy thought.

Eventually, the beatings stopped. But their relationship continued to be strained. His father started ignoring him, which Millard said was even worse than the beatings. When he was in 7th grade and got drunk at a party, his father told him, *“Do what you want. I don’t care any more.”*

From that point on, they hardly ever spoke to one another. He would disappear for days at a time and his father never said anything about it.

Millard turned to a local church youth group to fill the void. At first, his father called the youth group a cult. But then, his father was diagnosed with cancer at only 44 years of age.

He started reading the Bible. And he even asked his son to pray with him one evening. They grew closer and his dad became more encouraging. He told his son that he was proud of him. And he set it up so that his son would get \$600 a month for ten years to support his dream of becoming a singer.

Four years after being diagnosed with cancer, Millard’s father died. But Millard says that, for those four years, he finally had the dad he had always wanted. The gospel had changed both of them. The risen Christ had transformed both of them.

Their relationship had been dead. But then, it was alive. He had expected that his father would kill him. But instead, they received new life.<sup>2</sup>

Then, there is the story of Ken Parker. In 2012, Parker joined the Klu Klux Klan and eventually rose to the position of Grand Dragon. However, he says that the Klan was not *“hateful enough”* for him. So he left and became part of a neo-Nazi group. His life was dedicated to hating and fighting against people of different races.

But then, in 2018, he met an African-American man who was having a cookout at his apartment complex. That man turned out to be William McKinnon, the pastor at All Saints Holiness Church.

After talking with Parker, Pastor McKinnon invited him to his church’s Easter service. Parker attended that service. And a few weeks later, he was moved to testify in front of the congregation.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tennessean.com/story/entertainment/music/2018/02/13/bart-millard-mercyme-can-only-imagine-movie-book-father-abuse/320728002/>

He says that their eyes just about popped out of their heads and their jaws hit the floor when he told them that he was a Nazi and a former member of the Klan. But after the service, all of them came up to hug him and shake his hand.

That summer, six years after joining the Klan, Ken Parker was baptized in the Atlantic Ocean by Pastor McKinnon. And now, he has a message for those still in the white supremacist and white nationalist movements: *“Get out. You’re throwing your life away.”*<sup>3</sup>

That is evidence of resurrection. The gospel has changed him. The risen Christ has transformed him. The power of Easter has given him new life.

Death is all around us. But there is also resurrection.

Whenever we are at a dead end and a new way to live opens up.

Whenever drugs or alcohol, fear or depression, hatred and violence, have stolen life from you or someone you love and yet we are given a new life.

Whenever death threatens us or takes someone we love away from us and yet, even as we grieve, we have that peace that passes all understanding.

*There* is the evidence for Easter. *There* is the evidence that Christ has indeed risen and he continues to be at work in this world.

Whenever despair becomes hope.

Whenever hate becomes love.

Whenever fear becomes joy.

Whenever death becomes life.

He lives! So look for him among the living. The evidence is there.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/ex-klk-member-denounces-hate-groups-one-year-after-rallying-n899326>