

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *The Color of Redemption*, No. 7

Gold

April 17 (Easter), 2022

Matthew 28 (NIV)

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.

⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

¹¹ While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹² When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³ telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'" ¹⁴ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." ¹⁵ So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Through these Sundays of Lent – the weeks leading up to today, Resurrection Day – I've talked about the different colors of redemption, which, I'll admit, has been sort of a sneaky way to study some of the declarations that Jesus made about Himself.

You may have heard them referred to as Jesus' "I am" statements. There are seven of them in all, sprinkled through John's gospel, and here's the thing about them: any truly honest person cannot just ignore them.

The things Jesus said about Himself – the things He, Himself, claimed *to be* – are so *significant*, so *big* and so *dramatic*, no intellectually honest person can learn of them and *not* be moved to respond in some way.

For example, Jesus said that He is the *bread of life*. He said that He is the only one who can feed us the spiritual food we really need.

He said that He is the *light of the world*.

Jesus said He is the *gate*: He's the *only way* for people to get to God the Father.

Jesus said that He is the *resurrection* and the *life*: He is the only way to escape the death which we will all experience.

Jesus claimed that He is the *truth*.

And several other things, too. He made claims about Himself that are so *big*, so *brazen* and *grandiose*, that you *can't* just hear that stuff and conclude, "Oh that Jesus – what a great guy."

Jesus can't be *merely* a great guy, you see? A guy that says that sort of stuff about himself *cannot* just be a great guy. He has to be either much less than that, or much more.

That's why Jesus, by saying these things, pushes us to respond.

Actually, we have to answer the very same question that Jesus asked His disciples in the eighth chapter of Mark, where He asked them, "*So, who do you say that I am?*"¹

That is the defining question of every person's life. Who is Jesus to us?

And there are only, really, a few answers possible; I mentioned them a couple weeks ago.

Taking into consideration this stuff that Jesus claimed about Himself, we have to either:

Dismiss Him as a liar, an intentionally, diabolically dishonest person.

Or, we have to declare Him insane, delusional, crazy.

(And, by the way, if we choose either of those, we are utterly wasting our time sitting here on this beautiful Sunday morning.)

The only other option we have is to actually believe what Jesus said about who He is, and if we do that, well then, just sitting here this morning is fine, but it's far from enough.

Because, if we're admitting that this Jesus really is the *truth*, the *life*, and the *one and only way* to God the Father, well, that makes a difference in who *we* are then, doesn't it?

If Jesus is right about who He is, then that makes a difference in how you and I think.

In how we act.

In how we live.

In what we value.

It has to, or we're just not being honest with ourselves!

I mean, you can hardly be introduced to the King of the World, and then just ignore Him and live as if He doesn't exist.

At best, that would make utterly no sense.

And at worst, it would be tremendously dangerous.

¹ Mark 8:29

And yet, it seems to me that there are many people in our world today who know just enough about Jesus:

- to know what to say and sing on Sunday;
- to do just enough good to feel better about themselves;
- to have memorized enough out-of-context Scripture verses to convince themselves they are fine;
- and who would quickly check the “Christian” box if asked.

But in truth, their eyes do not really see Jesus for who He says He is, and their ears do not really hear His voice, because they never take the time to look or listen for Him.

And so, their lives and choices and values look nothing like *His* life and choices and values.

There seem to be lots of people today who say they love Jesus, but not quite enough to really embrace His own words about who He is.

And please believe me, there is an eternity of difference between *knowing something about* Jesus and about really *knowing Him* and *believing* Him and *following* Him.

And those Jewish chief priests and religious leaders of Jesus’ day are the perfect example of this difference.

You see, they knew quite a lot about Jesus.

They knew where He was from, how old He was, who His parents were.

They knew where He was at any given time; they kept pretty good tabs on Him.

They knew who His friends were, who His disciples were, and who His enemies were.

Those guys knew all about Jesus, yet in their hearts, they would not believe that He was who He said He was, and look at the terrible place that their resistance to Jesus took them.

Understand that these guys were considered to be the most ethical, moral, honest, respectable people in their culture. They followed the laws of God to a “T.”

But when it came to believing or resisting Jesus, look what they did!

For three years:

- they hounded Him like a dog;
- they rejected His excellent answers to their barrage of questions;
- they insulted Him, called Him every name they could think of;
- they undermined His integrity;
- and they intentionally spread dishonesty about Him.

And then, at the end:

- they used treachery to arrest Jesus;
- they used illegality to try Him;
- and they used slander to charge Him.

They actually seemed to enjoy the cruelty that was heaped upon Him, and they encouraged the crowds on in their abuse.

Look at what their resistance to Jesus caused them to do—and to become!

Now of course, we’re here today because Jesus not only overcame all their best efforts to destroy Him, but God the Father even raised Jesus from death itself.

But these guys were supposed to be the good guys, the guys you could trust with your eternity!

What happened to them? How did they get to where they were? Why did they resist so strongly? Why wouldn’t they believe Jesus?

Somewhere around the year 1514, a Polish fellow named Nicolaus Copernicus first shared his evidence and conviction that our earth and other planets revolved around the sun.

This was an absolutely revolutionary thought, because up until then, everyone—*everyone*—believed that the sun and the other planets and everything else out there revolved around the earth.

Copernican heliocentrism: that’s what his idea came to be called, and you know, it took another hundred years of research (from people like Kepler and Galileo and Newton) before Copernicus was proven correct.

During those hundred years though, because of their absolute insistence on protecting the status quo, many, many people (scientists, scholars, professionals) did all they could to discredit Copernicus’ idea.

In response to all his new observations about the movements of the heavens, those naysayers came up with their own explanations that kept things within the bounds of the old system.

And they would do anything, suggest anything, assert anything, rather than admit that the system itself was faulty and needed a radical overhaul.

This is just what some people do when a long-held belief is called into question. They will stop at nothing to keep things from changing.

And this is what happened at the time of Jesus’ resurrection.

When faced with the reality of the empty tomb and all that that meant, the Jewish religious leaders had but few choices.

Of course, they could admit that it did, in fact, happen.

But that would mean subjecting themselves to the ramifications of that reality. And think of what those would be!

A resurrected Jesus would change their *world*, their *power*, their *status*, their *lives* and their *practices*.

A resurrected Jesus would change almost *everything*!

So, no, they could never do that. That was too much to consider, too much to lose, too much to re-think and study and evaluate.

They could never do that.

So what other options did they have?

They could seek some earthly explanation for the empty tomb, which, of course, they would have to prove, and which they surely tried, but were unable to do.

So, what was left, you see, but to lie—to make something up?

That’s why they went to the soldiers, as verse 12 there says, and told them, “*When you’re asked, you say that this fellow’s followers came during the night and stole his body while you were asleep. And if you get into trouble with the governor, we’ll take care of that.*”

The only option they had left to explain Jesus’ empty tomb was to lie.

You see, they used every tool in their arsenal to keep things the way they were, the way that worked for them.

Their answer was to lie—to themselves, to their people, and to the world.

And, to lie with a bribe, besides. Verse 12 there says the lie was bought and paid for with a large sum of money.

Ah, the color of gold.

Through the ages, it has cost people their self-respect, their integrity, their marriages and families, their jobs and careers.

In this case, it cost these religious leaders, and also the guards, their principles. It cost them truth and the ability to sleep peacefully at night, knowing they had acted in honesty and integrity.

It cost them the freedom that truth always offers.

All because they could not, they would not, consider “what if it’s really true?”

What if Jesus really is alive?

What if Jesus really is who He says He is?

What if Jesus really is the life, the way, the truth, and the gate to God?

What if Jesus really is the resurrection and the light of the world?

“Can we survive that sort of shift?” That’s what they wondered.

But the better question is: can we survive without it?

There’s an old Roman proverb that says, *Magna est veritas et praevalabit*.

It means, *Great is the truth, and it will prevail*.

Truth doesn’t need anyone to believe it in order for it to be so.

But for our own good, for our own sakes, for both for now and eternity, we have to face it. Just as those Jewish leaders did, we have to face the truth about Jesus.

Because **truth will be**, no matter what we do with it.

But what we do with it determines our destiny.

Maybe you’re here today to proverbially “tip your hat” to Jesus. If so, may I say to you, in love, that that that will never do.

You don’t just “tip your hat” to the Light of the World.

Maybe you’re one who can come up with all sorts of reasons to deny Jesus, to question this or that about Him. And yet, deep in your heart, you know it’s true: that He was raised up from the tomb, and He’s alive today.

And yet, you just don’t want to admit it because, like those Jewish priests, admitting it would rock your world. You know that admitting that Jesus really is all that He said He is would cost you – in gold.

Please, let me assure you today that denying Him, continuing to ignore Him, and forcing Him to the margins of your life will cost you far more.

Denying Jesus, or keeping Him in life’s background, and just tipping your hat from time to time to the Way, the Truth and the Life will surely cost you your forever. And I promise you that one moment spent in a forever without Jesus would easily convince you to gladly give all the gold you possess to choose differently.

But by then, it will be too late.

Today, though, is not too late.

As long as Jesus lives and you and I live, we can choose Him.

We can choose to believe Him, to follow Him, to trust Him and to walk with Him, with confidence, from Resurrection Day clear to eternity.

The color of redemption is gold, because the forgiveness of our sins and a real, living relationship with Jesus is absolutely the most valuable thing we can ever, ever possess.

And we can possess that, we can possess Him and receive Him as our own, right here today.

Please, don’t stay stuck to old, broken systems.

Don’t deny what has proven true through the ages.

Don’t insist upon preserving a hopeless status quo.

On this day, some 2000 years ago, the world changed, and no amount of money can resist that or cover it up.

Will you, today, receive the truth of Jesus’ resurrection, and will you embrace the changes His empty tomb demands?

Will you let Jesus set you free, because that is always, always what truth does?

And that sort of freedom, for now and forever, is worth all the gold in the world!

Closing Song: *Hallelujah Chorus*

Benediction:

May the celebration of Jesus’ resurrected life bring new hope to us all.

May Jesus’ victory over earthly death turn our eyes to God’s promises of glory.

May the empty tomb help us to leave our sorrows at the foot of the cross.

May we know the truth of Jesus and experience its freedom.

So that God's hope, promises, forgiveness and freedom reign in our lives today, tomorrow and forever.

He is risen! He is risen indeed!

Hallelujah and amen!