

“Resurrection: Believe the Unbelievable!”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for FUMC Grand Junction, Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ

website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/sermons/>

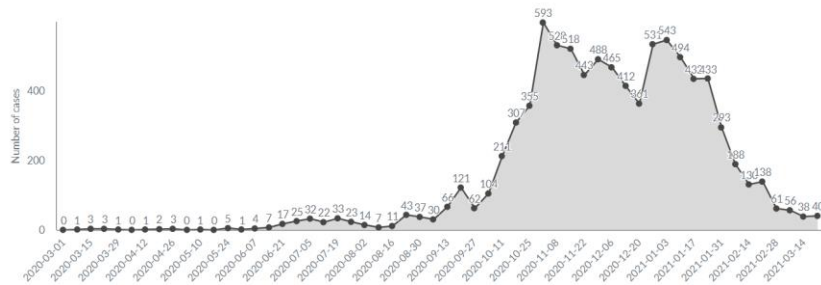
Scripture Text:

Luke 24:1-12 [NRSV]

OPENING

Cases of COVID-19 by Week of Illness Onset

Inset graph does not include individuals who were asymptomatic, didn't participate in contact tracing, or are currently under investigation.



(*A series of Pptx slides showing the “unbelievable” trajectory of COVID cases since March 1, 2020 in Mesa County alone, ending with data 3/14/21.*)

We have just come through an *unbelievable* year, haven't we? Let me give you a graphical representation by just one measure.

At almost any point in the graph of the past year looking back, we could have said, “That is *unbelievable!*” And if we stood at the beginning of 2020 and looked into a “crystal ball” displaying this graph, we'd have said the same thing.

Imagine the same kind of graphical depiction of:

- job loss,
- or school performance,
- or unemployment applications,
- or social activity indicators over the same time periods,

and we'd come away with the same reaction:

Unbelievable!

Now, as tragic a story as the coronavirus pandemic tells – and as unbelievable a position we find ourselves in today due to the development of not just one but three(!) vaccines only a year out from the pandemic's onset – it is trivial compared to the impact of the story of the risen Christ on first His followers and then the rest of the world.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

24:5b *Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen. Unbelievable!*

We “seek the living among the dead” b/c we don't expect resurrection – in our experience, the dead stay dead! We don't seek the living in a graveyard. [Prof. Craig Koester, Luther Seminary, *Working Preacher* podcast for NL339, recorded 3/27/21]

The Easter message in the Gospels causes us to “doubt our doubts” / “question our questions”. (*Ibid.*)

⁹ ... *returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.*

¹¹ *But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they (the male disciples) did not believe them (Mary*

Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them). **Unbelievable!**

Too hard to believe: the men's response to the women who come with the news of resurrection.

Let's not be too smug or judgmental toward those struggling to believe today: the response that first Easter Sunday was not an immediate "Hallelujah!", either. Even for the firsthand witnesses to this, it was **unbelievable!**

¹² But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Unbelievable!

(*“So, what?” questions...Getting past the unbelievable for the skeptic. Be gracious because it is just *a bit* on the unbelievable side!*) Is this all just about an amazing thing happening to Jesus? I mean, it's awesome, but...how does it connect to your life and mine?

A few questions come to mind:

- ✓ What does it mean for death to be overcome?
- ✓ Can we allow ourselves to be raised from all the “little deaths” in our lives, the dead-end experiences and the defeats?
- ✓ What does it mean for sin to be forgiven – and, as importantly – to have it's hold on our lives broken?
- ✓ What ELSE seems unbelievable/impossible but that God is able to pull off in our lives or in the world around us that requires the power to raise

the dead? Because nothing less than that is at our disposal in the risen Christ!

CONCLUSION (Wrap Up Statement) AND PRAYER

The God of the Bible affirms life over and over again.

The two men dressed in dazzling white at the tomb proclaimed an unbelievable message to the women there. It seems fitting to end the story of Jesus' life on earth with the verses spoken by a similarly dazzling figure to a young woman at the beginning of Jesus' life on earth:

The angel said to her, “³⁵ *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ...* ³⁷ *For nothing...[is] impossible with God.*”

It can all seem rather unbelievable...but the message from the Scriptures today around the world is, “Come...believe the unbelievable...and live! For, indeed, nothing is impossible with God!”

(*Invite a few moments of reflection time in silence. Then, prayer time...*)