

COMING BACK

MARK 14:50, JOHN 20:19-20

Mark 14:50, “Then they all forsook Him and fled.”

Now flip over to John 20:19, and in your mind fast-forward three days... “Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.” Now when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.”

It was like striking out with the bases loaded in the last at-bat of the final game of the World Series...

Or like losing the make-or-break contract you had worked on for months... Or like being rejected by a husband of thirty years for a younger woman... Or like filing bankruptcy on a dream you'd tried to turn into a business... *It was a devastating loss - a bitter defeat...*

In fact, one of the fellows was so distraught he walked off and killed himself... There were several hours when the other guys felt like doing the same...

Imagine, digesting a huge slice of humble pie...

Imagine, a bitter pill sliding down your throat...

Imagine, what it was like for Jesus' disciples to choke at the crucial moment and betray their Savior?

For 3½ years these men were the recipients of Jesus' mercies. They witnessed His wonders, and were privy to His teachings. These twelve men were the central focus of His attention. Jesus taught and tutored these guys. He took away their hopelessness and enlisted them as lieutenants in His kingdom.

Now, their Master was under attacked - assaulted by Satan. An angry mob from the temple had come to lynch Jesus - led by a betrayer from His own ranks.

Suddenly, Jesus was surrounded by a rabid pack of religious pit bulls - frothing with jealousy and prejudice.

The Jews were the Ku Klux Klan in priestly robes. Jesus was in danger. If ever there was a time for the disciples to take a stand this was it! If you had looked at anyone's wristwatch, it would've read, "crunch time."

But sadly, tragically, regrettably... none of the men who Jesus had taken under His wing, dared to help Jesus shoulder His burden in His hour of need. Yes, Peter did a little sword-swinging, but when Jesus didn't approve of his methods his loyalty went up in smoke.

Mark sums it up, "They all forsook Him and fled."

And trust me, this rejection was made worse by the boasts they all uttered earlier that same night.

John remembers it well. In the upper room, at dinner with Jesus, he with all the disciples, had declared their allegiance, "We believe that You came forth from God."

That's when Jesus told them (John 16:32), "the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone."

He knew their words were nothing but hollow boasts.

Of course no one's boast that night was as haughty, and self-confident, and determined as were the words that rolled from the lips of an impulsive Peter...

In Matthew 26:31 Jesus warned the disciples, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."

That's when Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble." Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." What ominous words...

I'm sure there are former athletes who can't enter a particular stadium without reliving a bitter defeat...

Or divorcees who can't see the photograph of their former spouse without their blood pressure severely spiking... or victims of a crime who recoil in terror to pass the site of their attack, or to see their attacker...

And I'm also sure that every time Peter heard the rooster crow he too relived the awful agony of having abandoned his Lord... *Peter probably hated roosters.*

It's interesting, Mark 14:50 tells us, "Then they all forsook Him and fled." But Mark adds a point that no other Gospel writer mentions, "Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him, and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked."

Most commentators believe this young man was Mark himself. The upper room where Jesus met with his disciples probably belonged to Mark's family.

That night a young Mark, may've followed Jesus and His disciples out to the Garden of Gethsemane.

And when Jesus was arrested, Mark tried to follow Him again. But this time he got too close to the mob, and a couple of soldiers grabbed him. When he shook himself loose he lost his light robe. Now naked as a jay-bird, he fled away into the shadows of the night.

In fact, those dark shadows were crowded that night with lots of guilty people who had abandoned Jesus...

Imagine, a young Mark shivering, and naked, and cold. But now He's afraid to come out in the open - and He was too ashamed to head back home...

Though we speculate this young man was Mark, I believe there's good reason God kept him nameless. For in a figurative sense this young man is *me... and you...* and all of us who have ever abandoned Jesus.

We tried to follow Him. We were clothed in our own thin cloak of piety and devotion. But when temptation and fear

caught hold of us, it exposed the inadequacy of our righteousness and the frailty of our faith.

We too tucked tail, and fled away. The nameless and naked young man in this story is actually me and you.

Have you ever felt defeated? This spring my oldest son is coaching T-ball. I'm helping him out. And though the season is more than half over, our team has yet to win a game. It's just T-ball mind you, but it's still depressing. Everybody's starting to get bummed. We're wondering if we'll ever be able to win a game.

Have you felt defeated *by life... or by temptation... or by Satan... or perhaps, by yourself?* You're your own worst enemy. You keep shooting yourself in the foot.

In soccer there's a term every defensemen hates to hear - they cringe at its mention... the term is "own goal." It's a goal accidentally scored by the defense. It's when a defender kicks the ball into his own goal...

And here's my question, have you ever kicked an "own goal?" *Do you keep defeating yourself through your own fear, or doubt, or lust, or lack of resolve?*

Jesus has millions of followers - and you and I are among them - but how often has our Lord stood alone and abandoned?... There've been times when you and I weren't willing to come out and stand next to Him.

We've hid in the shadows naked and nameless.

On the night before Jesus was crucified **all** His disciples forsook Jesus and ran away. The flock was scattered.

Everyone fled. No one stood at their post. It was an utter, bitter, embarrassing defeat - times twelve.

What happened to the twelve disciples between Thursday night and Sunday morning we're not sure.

Their whereabouts and activities vanish from the record. And since the disciples themselves wrote the Gospels it was probably a deliberate omission. *No soldier brags about what he did while he was AWOL.*

Only the activities of two disciples get highlighted. In Luke 22:62 we're told, "Peter went out and wept bitterly." And Matthew 27:5 tells us, Judas "threw down the silver pieces in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself." It's my assumption that what the other disciples did was somewhere in between...

The tears these grown men shed... the shame they suffered... the enormous guilt they endured...

But it's interesting, by Sunday evening, everyone but Judas came back... *back from despair - back from the edge of hopelessness - back from the graveyard of guilt - back from the shadows of condemnation...*

In those three days some of the disciples might've gone home... others gone fishing... a few might've gotten drunk... but everyone disappeared into hiding...

Yet somehow when we get to Sunday evening all the disciples, except Judas, were back. They reassembled in the upper room where they'd eaten the Last Supper with Jesus... Trust me, they were badly beaten. Their grit was gone. Their

courage had been shaken. Their faith had wilted and it was hanging on by a thread.

They were far from intact... they were just back.

And the question arises, *what was it that brought them back?* Certainly, part of it, were the rumblings of a resurrection. So and so had told so and so... who had heard it from so and so... who had talked to the women who were at the tomb... Their testimony had gotten back to these deflated and doubting disciples.

But at this point, the disciples were far from convinced by what they'd heard. For them it was still a rumor. They were no doubt curious. They hoped it was true, but could they really believe something so daring?

They saw Him die... How could He now be alive?

Mark 16:14 comments, "Afterward (Jesus) appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen." Faith was not the disciples' initial reaction. Early on they were hesitant, and suspicious, and skeptical...

But they still came back... It's interesting that though they initially doubted the truth of the resurrection the mere possibility of it was enough to bring them back...

And this happens every Easter in churches all over the world. *Non-Christians* and *nominal Christians* who usually would never think of coming to church, do so on Easter Sunday. The resurrection awakens hope...

The resurrected Savior has authority, and credibility, and drawing power. *Folks with a slim, meager devotion the rest of the year - who rarely stand for Jesus - who spend more time in the shadows than in the light* - still cast a hopeful eye to the resurrection at Easter time.

People who might struggle to believe in Jesus' resurrection with their heads, are still mysteriously drawn to it with their hearts. It has amazing attraction.

I read where in 2015, more Americans did a Google search on the word "*church*" the week leading up to Easter Sunday than any other week in the year.

There's something about the resurrection of Jesus that keeps us coming back. *I imagine it's the obvious...*

Though racked with problems and dysfunction, the modern world we live in provides the illusion that it has the answer to everything. Science is now the Savior, *until we're forced to face death*. Here's where the boasts of science finally go silent. It has no answer.

Larry King, of talk show fame, is 83 years old and apparently obsessed with death. He takes four human growth hormone pills every day in an attempt to delay the inevitable. When he does die, he's arranged for his body to be frozen, until doctors can come up with a cure for what killed him. He admits that cry-o-genics is *nuts*, but he says "*at least it gives me a shred of hope.*" And we all need hope. Life is impossible without hope.

The famed atheist, Christopher Hitchens, was once challenged to read the words of Jesus in John 11:25-26. "*I am*

the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”

At the time Hitchens was suffering from cancer. Someone asked him what he thought of those words. In a moment of candor, Hitchens commented, “I’ll admit that they are not without appeal to a dying man.”

This is why Jesus’ resurrection remains mankind’s greatest hope. He stared death in the face. Jesus did what no one else has done - He conquered death. And He promises eternal life to everyone who trusts in Him.

No one with any credibility doubted His resurrection when it happened. For centuries since, men of all persuasions, and intellects, and races, and ethnicities have found hope in Jesus’ signature miracle. His resurrection is *the best answer to our biggest problem*.

Even 2000 years later, people don’t gather together to sing, “The stock market is risen. It has risen indeed.” Or “The dollar has risen. It has risen indeed.” Or “New home sales have risen. They have risen indeed.” No!

For centuries, in times of distress, and hardship, and crisis, people have found comfort in the refrain, “Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.” For if He has conquered death; then there is no problem Jesus can’t handle.

And it was this hope that brought the disciples back that Sunday afternoon. Just the thought that Jesus was alive provided His disciples the renewed hope that they lacked. If this were true, everything could be different.

Today we live in a predominantly secular and pluralistic culture - yet people are still mesmerized by, and attracted to, the message of Jesus' resurrection.

And it brings them back. Despite our embarrassing failures, and our devastating defeats, and our spiritual lapses we come back. *Not intact... but we come back!*

Maybe you're not a strong believer - you're just a wisher - a hoper. You're here today out of respect, or intrigue, or curiosity. If that's the case, then you're really not unlike the disciples in the upper room.

They were doubters... but they came back.

Yet it wasn't just the possibility of a resurrection that encouraged the scattered disciples to reassemble...

If you didn't know Jesus, and all you'd heard is that the person you abandoned, and cursed, and rejected, and denied, and left to die had now returned from the dead... **Hey, you might not want to come back!**

You might be worried that Jesus had risen from the dead to exact some revenge? He's come back to get even with all the deserters and traitors... namely you!

You might think that, if you didn't know Jesus - *but the disciples knew Him.* They had marveled time and time again at Jesus' readiness and willingness to take back the people others were so willing to discard...

There was a woman caught in adultery...

A swindling tax collector...

A wild-eyed demoniac who the townsfolk had banished to the caves outside the city...

There were dirty lepers no one else would touch...

A prostitute who was inhabited by seven demons...

A Roman soldier who cried out for His help...

An out-of-control son and a exasperated father...

And not a one of them did Jesus turn away. He took them all back. *Without a receipt... without the original packaging... even if the goods were damaged... or if the shoes had been worn off the carpet...* The disciples knew Jesus was always willing to take you back!

I'm sure the disciples reasoned... If Jesus had done the unthinkable, and truly conquered death - if He really was alive... there was hope for their forgiveness.

That's why all day long that Sunday defeated disciples staggered back to the upper room... Rumors of a resurrection drew them out of their hiding places... Hopes of a restoration brought them back together.

Don't misunderstand not everyone who gathered that day in the upper room believed in the resurrection - *not yet*. But they met the pre-requisite... they still hoped.

This was the difference between the eleven disciples and Judas. They all denied and betrayed their Lord. They all failed. They all succumbed to their fears. They were all were confused. They all felt miserable.

But all the disciples, except Judas, gave hope a chance. Hope faded and flickered, but it stayed alive.

Judas though hung himself because he lost hope.

Once, a man climbed to the roof of the apartment high-rise where he lived. From there he leaped to his death. Friends

and family all tried to make sense of his actions, but it was the building's janitor that offered the best explanation... The old janitor was quoted, "When a man has lost God there ain't nothing to do but jump."

Hope in Jesus' *resurrection* and hope in their own *restoration* is what brought the disciples back. It's been said, "The most profane word in the English language is 'hopeless.' When you say a situation or person is hopeless, you're slamming the door in God's face."

The disciples were like the Little Leaguer. A bystander asked him the score of the game. The little guy answered, "We're losing 18-0." The man said, "I'll bet you're discouraged?" The kid answered, "Why would I be discouraged we haven't even batted yet?"

The disciples were in a deep, dark hole. Spiritually speaking they were behind 18-0. Their failure, and guilt tried to shut the door, *but hope brought them back...*

Mark 16 tells us when the angels greeted the women at the empty tomb, and announced that Jesus had risen, they gave them special instructions. The angels told them, "But go and tell His disciples - and Peter..."

Isn't it interesting that Jesus was already thinking about His discouraged, deflated disciples... He wanted them to know He had risen... *and especially Peter...*

No one's hopes had been more dashed than Peter's. They all sinned and fell short, but Peter's boast had set himself up for a harder fall. Max Lucado comments on this passage, "Even the angels wanted this distraught disciple to know that

it wasn't over. They instructed the women, "*Be sure to tell Peter he gets to bat again.*"

It reminds me of the missionary who lived near the race track. Gamblers would walk from the town to the track right by his apartment. One day, from his balcony he noticed a disheveled fellow on the sidewalk below.

This missionary had just received a \$100 bill from a financial supporter in the states. He figured the man on the sidewalk needed the money more than him, so he put it in an envelope, and wrote on the front an encouraging message... two words, "*Don't Despair.*"

The next day the bum knocked on the missionary's door, and handed him \$600. He was surprised, "*What's this?*" The fellow answered, "*Don't Despair paid 5 to 1.*"

Well, if you don't despair... if you don't allow your sin, and guilt, and failure to cause you to give up. If you come back to the risen Savior He'll reward you with blessings that don't just pay 5 to 1 - but times a million.

Were the disciples discouraged? You know they were... Did they have doubts? They were riddled with doubt... Were they fearful? Their locked doors testified to their terror... Did the disciples feel like a failure? In their minds they were failures with a capital "F."

Did they feel *embarrassed, condemned, ashamed, guilty?* Yes, but despite it all hope brought them back.

All day long disciples wandered into the upper room. They locked doors behind them, they bolted windows, they spoke

in hushed voices - lest their whereabouts be detected and they get reported to the authorities...

And there were no more bold statements of belief, or daring acts of courage - not yet. Sermons and stands would come later - at first all they did was *come back*...

Yet because they acted on the hope they had left and walked out of the shadows... a miracle occurred!

John 20:19 records it, “when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’” Obviously, the resurrected Christ was no longer subject to the material restrictions and physical limitations that confine a normal human.

If I try to walk through a wall I’ll flatten my nose - yet Jesus did it with no repercussions. You could say, **Jesus was the first person to utilize a keyless entry!**

Our Lord didn’t need keys, or door knobs, or hinges, or push plates to enter a room. Neither doors, no walls, can keep Jesus from people who are hoping in Him.

This passage in John 20 is so pregnant with meaning for you and me... The disciples have come back! Their faith is far from intact, they’re just back...

And they’re surrounded by walls... walls of fear.

They’re afraid of the Jews... afraid for their own safety and future... afraid of repeating their mistakes...

They were worried, and fearful, and guilt-ridden. No one in that room could look each other in the eye. The shame was as thick as a wall. The disciples were barricaded in - not just

behind literal doors and walls - they were trapped behind spiritual walls as well.

Yet here's what you don't want to miss... Jesus appears to His disciples in their midst, despite the thick walls and locked doors. No one has ever manufactured a wall or a door that can keep Jesus away from a person who *comes back to Him* and *hopes in Him*.

I love the line in verse 19, “when the doors were shut where the disciples had assembled...” The door of death couldn't hold Jesus in, and the door of failure couldn't keep Jesus out. The risen Lord appeared to men who had locked themselves behind shut doors.

This was not a group brimming with faith - praying to heaven with their doors open. Rather, Jesus appeared to fearful, frightened, naked and nameless disciples.

But apparently none of that mattered. Jesus would fix them. All that mattered was they were back.

And you've got to love the first words that fall from Jesus' lips when He speaks... “Peace be with you.”

Oh boy, if it had been me appearing to the disciples, I would've opened up with a few “I told you so's” - or a couple of “how could you's” - or several “you should've listened to me's.” I might've just looked Peter square in the eye and said, “Cocka-doodle-do.” *But not Jesus!*

The first statement out of Jesus' mouth to His shamefaced disciples is “Peace be with you.” In other words, “Guys, it's okay. I've forgiven you already. We're cool. Let's start over. Everything is going to be alright.”

And can you imagine how the disciples felt when Jesus delivered His greeting? They went from feeling lower than a snake's belly to being on top of the world.

When Jesus said **"Peace be with you,"** suddenly the disciples were engulfed in a tidal wave of relief, and pardon, and contentment, and peace, and love...

And that's when Jesus goes to work rebuilding their shattered faith. John tells us what He did immediately, **"Now when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side."** *He proved to them He was real.*

He went to work dispelling their doubts, freeing them from fear, energizing them for the battles to come.

It took just 50 days to turn the disciples from wimps into witnesses. Read the first few chapters of the book of Acts and you'll find the same men who were *hiding behind shut doors* in John 20, *boldly walking through open doors* in Acts 2! Cowards became courageous.

Author John Stott once observed, **"Perhaps the transformation of the disciples of Jesus is the greatest evidence of all for the resurrection."** I would agree.

Jesus answered their questions, removed their doubts, assuaged their fears, filled them with power... and He did it all in a few weeks. It didn't take long...

And He can do the same with us! Jesus specializes in restoration! No one comes to Jesus all put together - with their faith completely intact. *We're all rebuilds.*

Despite your sins and failures, in a relatively short time, Jesus can still restore you and revive your life.

The issue this morning is not that you've failed the Lord. We've all failed Jesus at some point.

We're all shaky, and shifty, and weak-kneed, and ill-tempered, and guilt-ridden. But if Jesus had mercy enough to forgive the disciples who forsook Him at crunch time... He has mercy enough to restore us.

The issue is not do you have it all together... *It's not are you intact... the issue, is have you come back?*

Have you come out of the shadows? Come out from hiding... Come out from wherever you've been...

Jesus didn't even asked them where they'd been or what they'd done. He was just happy they were back.

Actually, He already knew where they'd been and their behavior, and had decided to forgive them anyway. Jesus says to them, **"Peace be with you..."**

All Jesus asked of them was for them to come back - to be loved by Him, forgiven by Him, restored by Him...

As with the disciples, Jesus is willing to walk through walls to get to you - and bring you peace. Even if those walls are your own fears, and guilt, and doubts.

Let me close this morning with the last line of verse 20, **"Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord."** And you will be too! Jesus is alive. He's here.

He's been waiting on you to come back.

He's not worried about the shape you're in. He can fix you and make you fit in no time. He's just glad you're back. *And He wants to reveal Himself to you!*

If you open your heart to Him today He'll bring you a peace you've never known. You'll leave today like the disciples on that first Easter Sunday evening, glad that you came back, and happy you've seen the Lord.