

Easter 2024

Vindicated

Mark 16:1-8 (with 1 Corinthians 15:19-28)

I would like to travel back in time with you this morning, roughly 2,000 years. Obviously, that brings us to the time of Jesus, but specifically, to that first Holy Week. Imagine seeing the events unfold before your eyes and witnessing them firsthand and not from quickly reading through a few chapters in a book.

I am just going to assume you are on Team Jesus, even 2,000 years ago. But I am also not going to assume you have the knowledge of a Christian living in 2024. Remember the events are unfolding right before your very eyes. Who is Jesus to you? Be honest. Is he the leader you were hoping for or not?

Palm Sunday. Jesus seems different. He has always talked about going to Jerusalem. Now he is there. Large crowd. Stones ready to cry out if the people were silenced. Enemies surrounded, outnumbered.

There you are. Proud. That is YOUR Jesus!

Monday Jesus clears the temple; Tuesday you walk by a withered tree Jesus cursed the day before. Wednesday is a slow day. Thursday a new meal.

Is he still your Jesus?

Friday was the trial. We presume innocent until proven guilty. But is that really what happens that day? How about with YOUR Jesus? Liars can't even lie together. Stories and lies contradict themselves. Yet, this trial, this brutality continues. No longer does YOUR Jesus look like your Jesus. Isaiah said this: **Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness.**

Can you even *tell* if that is YOUR Jesus anymore? Is he STILL YOUR Jesus?!

Hop back into your time travel machine. The date is March 31, 2024. I don't know what your past week was like. But I am a pretty good guesser, and I could guess that your entire life leading up to this very moment was full of ups and downs. New job (UP); loss of job (DOWN). New child (UP); loss of family member (DOWN). "Thank you, Jesus" (for the ups). "Where were you, Jesus" (for the downs). "He is MY Jesus!" (for the ups). "No, I don't know that man!" (for the downs).

Two thousand years ago is no different than today. Same emotions; same spiritual journeys; same strengths and weaknesses.

I have been thinking about that question for over a week now. "Is Jesus the Jesus you want?" I know people have asked that question many times. It strikes our hearts because it makes us rethink things a little. But it is a question which the world asks; which WE ask from time to time. Is he the Jesus we were hoping for? Is he the Jesus we want?

Is he?

But as I was thinking about that question these last few weeks, that question led me to a different question. Here was my thought journey...when we ask that question (Is Jesus the Jesus I wanted?), what does that question imply? Doesn't it imply that I am the one in charge? Think about it. Whether you lived 2,000 years ago or today, we have the same type of journey. During the ups of life – we say THANK YOU Jesus! During the downs of life – do we still say Thank you? Or, do we turn on Jesus? Do we doubt Jesus, his power, his wisdom, even his love? During those times, does he stop being the Jesus you wanted? And therefore, can you just cast him aside as the Jesus you were NOT looking for?

As I mentioned that question led me to a different question. I went from "Is Jesus the Jesus I wanted?" to "Am I the type of follower Jesus wants?" Let that question sink in. That hits harder, doesn't it? Maybe we were thinking WE were in charge, but in reality, it is Jesus who has the last say. Are WE the type of followers Jesus wants? Are we the type of followers Jesus is looking for? Well, what does he want? He wants faithfulness in his followers, not picking and choosing what parts of the Bible to believe or prioritizing other areas of life over worship. He wants his followers to love God and love our neighbor, not putting ourselves over him or our neighbors. He wants generosity, not greed and selfishness. He wants...do I really need to continue?

So, there we are...heading back in time 2,000 years. The trial is happening. Jesus did nothing wrong. Why the trial?! Because I am not the follower who listens always to Jesus. Because I have not been faithful or loving or generous. Instead, I have prioritized anything over God, loved myself more than others and Jesus, and have been greedy and selfish. That is my sin on trial. That is your sin on trial. That is Jesus, the one who did nothing wrong...standing in our place on trial. Is that YOUR Jesus? Look whose place he is taking. Your place and mine!

We heard all that already. It happened on Good Friday. Think about even the testimony of Jesus' enemies. A Centurion said it; even the demons said it – Surly he is the Son of God! The Son of God died. WHY?! Because he is yours and my Jesus.

By the grace of God, we make our way to the tomb. Still 2,000 years ago. Hoping; waiting; watching, yet also bringing spices because...who really could rise back to life?! What do you see? A stone rolled away; men in white singing his praises that he is not here but is alive JUST AS HE SAID. THAT Jesus who we don't always follow faithfully; THAT Jesus who we don't always listen to and obey; THAT Jesus is walking around again.

I know we like vindication stories. We like seeing movies like *Back to the Future* where Biff the bully now works for the man he bullied. We like hearing about those who were wrongly accused, not only win but get the settlement in their favor. We like those stories because we like to know and hope something like that could happen to us. Vindication.

Jesus had the ultimate vindication! His enemies seemed to win. He was dead. There was nothing Jesus could do. Palm Sunday praisers became Good Friday cursers. Jesus was innocent yet he was killed. But Easter morning gives Jesus complete vindication! Jesus wins! Enemies lose. Devil destroyed.

But that same Jesus is still walking around. What about us? He was completely vindicated by God the Father when he came back to life. What does that mean for all of us who doubted, who brought spices, who hid in the locked room, who cursed Jesus and questioned Jesus during the lows and downs of life? What does Jesus' supreme vindication mean for me, a less than faithful follower?

Well, what does that Jesus do to flex that vindication? We hear stories like this: **When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ²Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" ⁴But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. ⁶"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"**

What do you hear in the Easter story from that vindicated Savior? The same message he preached to his followers, unfaithful like me, throughout his ministry – do not be afraid! Notice he doesn't go to his enemies to gloat over that victory or show off that vindication. He goes to his people. He finds his people. He gives a message of comfort to his people. "Do not be afraid!" His vindication means OUR vindication. He went in search of Mary to simply say her name. He walked through the locked doors to face those frightened disciples with that message – do not be afraid. He told Thomas to touch his scars and believe. Vindicated – yes. Still full of love – YES! The same Jesus. Only this time, his enemies can only continue to tell lies. Vindicated, victorious! Loving, seeking you out, forgiving you.

Travel in your time machine again. It is once again 2024. Have we always been faithful to Jesus? No. Have we always loved him or obeyed him? No. Yet because Jesus was vindicated through his resurrection, we too are vindicated! We get what he won. We are now innocent. We are now forgiven. We are now heirs to heaven.

We came here today for a specific purpose. We celebrate Easter. We CELEBRATE! Because that Jesus is YOUR Jesus! Happy Easter. Amen.