

MARCH 31, 2024 – TEN REASONS TO BELIEVE
Or as Paul wrote so well, "If the tomb is not empty, if there was no resurrection, well then our faith is useless, and our preaching is in vain as we are still dead in our sins." So, this is big.
I mean this is as big as it gets.
We need to get this one right.
So again, how can we come to believe in the empty tomb? How can we, as we celebrate today, Easter Sunday, cry out, the tomb is empty, He is risen, hallelujah, hallelujah, and really believe that?

Well, today we are going to go through 10 reasons why we can believe that the tomb is empty, He is risen, hallelujah, hallelujah.
So, let's go beginning with number 10.
Well, Jesus told us that this was going to happen. I mean more than a few times, beginning with his disciples. Remember Peter's confession, he had turned to his disciples, and he had asked, "Who do the people say the Son of Man is?"
And there were suggestions.
"Well, you know, some say you're John the Baptist, others say you're Elijah or one of the prophets."
But then he asked him a question and it was a good question. And in fact, one could make the case that this is the most important question that anybody could ever be asked. When he looked at Peter, and he said, "Okay, I get it. But who do you say that I am?"

Like I said, this could be the most important question anybody could ever be asked because how you answer that question pretty much determines how you're going to answer just about every other question.
Now, if you recall, getting back to Peter, when asked that question, he blurred it out, "Well, you're the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Which was a dangerous statement to make at the time. And Jesus immediately begins to show Peter and the others what that looks like.

"I must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly under the chief priest and the scribes, be put to death, and then be raised on the third day."
Which, as you might recall, didn't go over so well with the disciples. In fact, it was very upsetting. They just didn't get it. I mean, in time they would. But He is risen. Why? Because Jesus said that this would happen. And when Jesus says something's going to happen, guess what? It happens.

Number nine.

The Old Testament predicted it.
Psalm 16, "And therefore my heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices. My body also will rest secure because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead."

Now watch this. Here it is.
"Nor will you let your faithful one see decay."
Clearly, King David, as he is writing this Psalm, is prophesying that Jesus would not see decay.
We will see Peter later on in the book of Acts, refer to the Psalm as he is confronted by the high priest. He is risen. Why? Because it was foretold in the Hebrew scriptures.
Number eight, consider who the first people were that found the tomb empty. Women.
Now that might not seem like a big deal to you and me today, but you have to understand my friends, given the role of women in first century Judaism, it's like present day Afghanistan.
Women had no social status.
I mean so much so that a woman's testimony wasn't even admissible in the Jewish courts of law.
So, the fact that women are the first to discover and then witness to an empty tomb really adds credibility to the story. Because let me tell you, if they were making this up, if this was somehow some legend, it surely would've been Peter or John, which tells me that the Gospel writers are faithful to recounting the story.
He is risen. Why? Because the fact that women are the first on the scene is so socially awkward that the only plausible explanation is because that's what happened.

Number seven, after a horrible scourge, whips with metal pieces sewed to tear the flesh, nailed to cross for six hours and after he died, lanced with a spear, lot of blood. When they took Jesus off the cross, we know that Joseph of Arimathea made sure that he had a proper Jewish burial. That would have of course involved a **burial cloth**. And so, they wrapped him in this cloth, I'm sure that blood came through the cloth, laid him in the tomb. Here's my question. If you're stealing that body, why would you ever take the time and the effort to unwrap the burial cloth before you took Him out? I mean, that would not be an easy thing to do. And not only that but fold it up neatly with the head covering placed off separately in the corner. Tell me how that makes any sense. He is risen. Why? Because it doesn't make any sense.

Number seven, the guards fell asleep. Really? I love this one. The guards fell asleep. Oh really? Do you know that according to Roman law, if you're a soldier on duty and you fall asleep, that is a capital offense, punishable by death.
So, you think they're going to fall asleep?
And it's not like there was just one or two of them. I'm sure there are several of them, but let's just say for discussion's sake that they all fell asleep.
But then they claim that the disciples steal the body. How would they know that if they were sleeping?

Or are they somehow claiming that they woke up just at the right time to see the disciples walking off with the body?

He is risen. Why? Because we read at the end of the Gospel of Matthew that the religious leadership bribed those guards to make up this silly story and how these stories continue to circulate to this day. He is risen. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

The tomb is empty. He is risen. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. We are counting down the 10 ways you can believe this and be sure, we're at **number six**.

Consider the disciples, they're the prime suspects as to who stole the body, yet they maintained the tomb is empty, He is risen. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Now if that's not true, why would they have lied? I mean, think about it. What is the biggest reason people lie? I'm thinking the biggest reason people lie is to get out of trouble, right?

Why would you create a lie that you know is going to get you into more trouble?

Which is exactly what happened.

A lie that would lead to the death of many of these disciples because they were martyred for the faith.

He is risen. Why? Because you don't die for a lie.

Number five, after Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to over 500 people at one time.

Was this somehow some group hallucination?

He appears in the upper room; he appears again to Thomas. He appeared to Paul, he appeared to James, causing him to put quill to papyrus and write one of the greatest books in all of the New Testament.

The book of James. It's only five pages. It's worth a read. It could change your life.

He is risen. Why? Because he appeared to multiple people in the flesh for 40 days after he ascended through His Father.

Number four, Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday causing them to change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday.

Can you imagine? The Sabbath has always been on Saturday, and it seen as a fundamental principle of Judaism.

It's in the law. Keep the Sabbath holy.

Now, "Now we're going to do it on Sunday.

" Really? He is risen. Why? What else could cause such a seismic change in the way they worship?

Number three, the tomb is empty. He is risen.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

This reality gave birth to two sacraments that we continue to celebrate in the church today.

Number one, what we call Holy Communion.

It has become the centerpiece of the our Worship.

Now, why do we do this?

Well, number one, to commemorate the last supper, but we also do it to honor His death and resurrection. Now also another sacrament that came out of this is baptism.

Because as we go under the waters of baptism, we symbolize our death with Him. But as we come out of the waters, we symbolize our promise, resurrection with Him.

And over the last 2000 years, these sacraments have been a font of grace pouring out into countless people who profess Jesus.

He is risen. Why?

Because Jesus continues to pour out His grace through the sacraments of His church.

Number two, consider Paul, formerly known as Saul, public enemy number one.

On a mission to crush this strange cult called Christianity. Well, in the very early days it was called Followers of the Way, but something happened to Paul, something happened on the road to Damascus and boom. I mean suddenly he goes from trying to crush this dangerous cult to becoming its greatest champion.

And he carried that message to the whole known world. How does this happen?

I mean, you have to understand, Paul was no fool.

Paul was a real scholar of his day. But after encountering what? A resurrected Jesus, he does a complete 180, gives his entire life to carry the message. Now, when I say gave his life, I'm talking literally because he died as a martyr.

Somewhere around 65 or 66 AD, under the emperor Nero. He is risen. Why? Because how else can you explain how God would take the biggest persecutor of his faith and make him its biggest cheerleader?

Number one, the many, many historical accounts outside of scripture of the resurrection, whether that be Flavius Josephus or Cornelius Tacitus, or the Roman historian of Lucian Samosata, I mean, there is more historical evidence that a man named Jesus of Nazareth, walked this planet, lived and died at the hands of Pilate than there is the fact that Caesar Augustus even lived. It's an indisputable fact.

Nobody disputes that. In fact, nobody disputes that the tomb was in fact empty. I mean, they dispute how it happened. They differ on that, but nobody, I mean, think about it, if the Jewish authorities could have produced a body, they would have, and put it on public display to kill this myth of resurrection, nip it in the bud, day one. But they couldn't do it.

They couldn't do it.

And from these eyewitness accounts, a small fire of Christianity was lit. And that fire has spread throughout this whole world. He is risen. Why? How else can you explain how this small group of uneducated fishermen and tax collectors could take that small flame and light this whole world on fire, the tomb is empty.

He is risen. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.
How can we come to believe that?
Jesus says, "If you love me, you'll keep my commandments and I'll ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to be with you always to teach you all things, the Spirit of truth."
This is the promise of the Holy Spirit, a promise that He made to his disciples and my friends, it is a promise He continues to make to you today.
Paul talks all about this in Galatians.

He said, "Everything that I know, everything that I've ever learned about Jesus has been through His Holy Spirit." And whether that was Paul, or whether that was James, or whether that was Thomas, they all had one thing in common, a personal encounter with Jesus.
And you, would you like to have a personal encounter with Jesus today?
Seek and you will find.
Knock and the door will be opened for you.
It's not like he's hiding from you.
In fact, I imagine he's been waiting on you for quite some time. Oh, come Lord Jesus, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindling us the fire of your love.
Ask Jesus into your heart today.

Yes, you, ask Jesus into your heart today and then pay very close attention to your life. And when he puts his finger on your heart, it's going to be so personal. So one-on-one, you will never be able to deny him again and you will be able to shout with confidence and truly believe the tomb is empty.
He is risen. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Happy Easter.
Be well! Be blessed!

-Rev. Katie Dailey, in process