

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Run To the Tomb

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Over the course of 1500 years 40 human authors inspired by the Spirit of God, they were farmers and fishermen, they were poets and politicians, they were doctors and tax collectors and kings. They wrote 66 books in three languages on three continents that we call the Bible. It begins with a bang, a big bang. God says “let there be light.” Those four words are still creating galaxies at the outer edge of the universe. And it ends the way it begins, God says, “I am making all things new.” The end of human history as we know it is the beginning of eternity; it’s this dimension of reality beyond our four dimensions of space-time that the Bible calls heaven. It’s a place where there is no more sorrow or sickness or crying or pain. It’s a place where wrong is made right. It’s a place where God is with us and we are with God.

Now between Genesis and Revelation you’ve got the fall of man, the great flood, Israel’s exodus out of Egypt, you’ve got judges and kings, the rise and fall of nations. There are villains and heroes, tragedies and comedies but please hear me, of all the events recorded in this book there is one tipping point, there is one turning point, there is one defining moment, there is one in sighting incident that changes everything and it is an empty tomb. Everything that predates the resurrection points forward and everything that post dates the resurrection points backwards. It’s the day when heaven invades earth, when eternity invades time. It’s the day when life defeats death. So, I say, “Christ is risen.” and you say, “Christ is risen, indeed!”

Welcome to National Community Church! If you are guest either in the house or online it’s a joy and privilege to celebrate the resurrection together. This weekend we begin a new series called “The Doubters Club”. Now, you can meet me the last chapter of Luke’s gospel, we’ll get there in a minute but let me frame this series. Faith is not the absence of doubt anymore than courage is the absence of fear; in fact, you can’t have one without the other.

Now, I wish I could say, “No doubt” but I can’t. Why? Because I’m human. Listen, there’s a moment in the gospels where Jesus is on his way out of Jericho and he meets a man whose son is suffering with seizures. The father isn’t sure where to go, what to do. He says to Jesus, “Have mercy on us and help us if you can.” Jesus says, “All things are possible to him who believes.” Then the boy’s father say this and it’s so authentic, it’s so unassuming, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief.” That moment is a microcosm. That father speaks for all of us, does he not? All of us are a mixture of faith and doubt. Listen, as soon as I am omniscient I will let you know but I would not hold your breath. “I do believe; but help me overcome my unbelief.”

All of us are card carrying members of the doubters club and we are in good company. By definition the word ‘doubt’ means to feel uncertain about. And it comes in lots of sizes and

shapes. There are intellectual uncertainties; we're not sure what to think. There are theological uncertainties; we're not sure what to believe. There are circumstantial uncertainties; we're not sure what to do. Something happened and it doesn't make sense, it doesn't add up, it doesn't fit our world view and it creates this internal angst. Am I in the right room? And it's when bad things happen to good people. It's when we experience injustice. It's when we get a difficult diagnosis or when we go through a divorce or grieve the loss of a loved one. This is where those who love Jesus find themselves right after the crucifixion and that's where we pick up the story.

Their minds are racing, their hearts are breaking, their compass needle is spinning and that's where we start reading Luke 24:1 – 3 *“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they stood there PUZZLED, (some translations say perplexed) two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground.”*

Now, that word PUZZLED is ‘aporeo’ in the Greek. It means perplexity, anxiety, uncertainty. One translation says they didn't know what to think. Another translation says they were confused. A literal translation from the Greek would read, “I am in doubt.” They don't know what to think; they don't know what to do and neither – would – you! There is no precedent, there is no category for what is about to happen.

Verse 5, *“Then the men asked, “Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? (Good question) He is not here; he has RISEN!” “⁶Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day.” Then they remember his words.”*

I love this moment when their memories are jogged. Now, we have a tendency to remember what we should forget and forget what we should remember and that often is the difference between faith and doubt. I think faith is a function of God's faithfulness; doubt is forgetting what God said and what God has done. And so I think our prayer during this series is “may God jog your memory”. May you be reminded of what God has spoken to you and about you and for you?

Verse 9 & 10 *“When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. (And then we're introduced to who the kinda main players are here.) It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and the others with them who told this to the apostles.”* Now, come on, I kinda like this, women are the first witnesses to the resurrection. In fact, Mary Magdalene is known as the apostle to the apostles. But as they share the news, guess what, the apostles are members of the doubters club as well, okay.

And so verse 11 says, *“They did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. (Just on behalf of all the guys can I apologize to the ladies rather here? Not much has changed so I would just say a little sermon within a sermon; men believe the women, they're right. Okay, there ya go. God bless, we'll see ya next week. No, no, we'll keep going) “They did*

*not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.*¹² Peter, however, got up and (walked to the tomb) (no, come on, are you reading this? That's not what it says; it says they ran to the tomb." I love those last four words.

And so here's the big idea; when your circumstances don't make sense – run to the tomb. When it feels like your life is falling apart – run to the tomb. When you are wrestling with doubt, you've gotta run to the tomb. When all else fails you have to run to the tomb. The empty tomb is the answer to a thousand questions. The empty tomb is the answer to a thousand problems. And so, I'll say it again – Christ is risen!

On April 14, 1755 General Edward Braddock sailed up the Potomac River to a sleepy little town called Georgetown. That is where Braddock anchored his ship. If you like history this is also where he picked up a 23 year old recruit named George Washington who would serve as his aid to camp.

Now, if you drive West on Constitution Ave right where it turns into the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge, just a stone's throw from the Lincoln Memorial there is a no descript stone well with a small historical marker in fact I have a picture to show you. There is a manhole cover on top of it. There is a ladder inside of it. And 16 feet below the surface is a rock, its call Braddock's Rock and it's the place where General Edward Braddock anchored his ship on April 14, 1755. It ranks as the oldest landmark in the nation's capital and it predates America by several decades. It was the initial point for the earliest survey of the capital city. If you look at old maps its call the "Key of all keys". Why? Because it established the coordinate system for the entire city. Every principle meridian that divides east and west every baseline that divided north and south is measured from Braddock's Rock. Now hold that thought.

2,000 years ago Jesus of Nazareth was betrayed and arrested and ultimately crucified at a place call Golgotha which means 'the place of the skull.' In first century Judea death by crucifixion was not uncommon. Some archeologists estimate a thousand crucifixions per year around the time of Christ. That's three per day so the crucifixion of Jesus between two criminals is par for the course. Lots of people died on Roman crosses but please hear me, only one person predicted their death and pulled it off and his name is Jesus. He is the way, the truth and the light. He is the resurrection and the life. Now, when he died on that cross his body was placed in a tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea. You gotta love this – who borrows a tomb? Now, I'll tell ya. Someone who's only going to need it for three days, that's who borrows a tomb.

Now, it's a subplot in the story but it fulfills this ancient prophecy. There are more than 300 prophecies in the Old Testament that are intended to help us identify who the Messiah is and this one is rather curious. 700 years before the birth of Christ the Prophet Isaiah identifies the Messiah this way; Isaiah 53:9 "*He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.*" In other words he would have two graves. Well, who has two graves? I'll tell you who. Like every other person crucified by the Romans Jesus would have been assigned a grave with

the criminals which fulfills half of this prophecy. The other half is fulfilled when a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea offers his tomb. And so Jesus is placed in that tomb a rock is rolled in front of it. And according to Roman custom the tomb was not only sealed it was protected by the Roman guard. Why? Because there was this rumor that someone was going to try to steal the body. Now, of course that plan backfires. Why? Because the guards that were meant to prevent something from happening actually provide circumstantial evidence that it didn't that no one stole the body. In fact, it was a supernatural moment.

And so, it's dawn on the third day and the women go to the tomb and as they approach the tomb they notice that this rock is rolled away. Matthew's gospel records it this way, *"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. The guards shook and became like dead men. Then the angel spoke to the women, "Do not be afraid, I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said."*

All of that to say this – the empty tomb is our key of keys. That rock that was rolled away is how we measure time and eternity, life and death. This is where God asserts his authority, asserts his sovereignty. This is where heaven invades earth. We don't believe in happily ever after we believe in something so much bigger and better and longer and stronger. We believe in happily forever after. Why? Because the tomb is empty.

Christianity is not a moral code. And yes we practice something called the Sermon on the Mount and we love our enemies, we bless those who curse us, we turn the other cheek, we go the extra mile but this is not behavior modification. Listen, Jesus didn't come to make bad people good, he came to bring dead people to life and I might add abundant life. Christianity is not just a religion it's a relationship with a risen Savior.

I serve a risen Savior, He's in the world today
I know that He is living, whatever men may say
I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer
And just the time I need Him He's always near

And so I close with two questions. 2000 years ago the world woke up to an empty tomb. The sinless Son of God who had been crucified on the cross conquered the grave on the third day. And when Jesus walked out of that tomb all bets are off, all things are possible. And so here are the two questions...

- 1) Do you believe it?
- 2) Are you living like it?

Romans 10: 9 & 10 – *"If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved."*

You cannot prove or disprove the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's a tenant of faith either way and we'll talk a lot more about that in the course of this series. But I'm telling you this; it makes all the difference in the world. It is the locus of our confidence. It is the foundation of our faith. It

is the Genesis and Revelation of our hope. And so have you ever made a profession of faith? Have you ever surrendered your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ? You can do that right here, right now. It's as simple as A B C.

Listen, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, we're all in this thing together. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. See confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and you shall be saved. I believe that Jesus is who he said he was. I believe that he is the sinless Son of God, that he died a death on the cross in my place, that he rose on that third day and that he is seated at the right hand of the Father.

And so if you want to make that decision today, listen, we want to come along side you and help you begin that journey. Listen, whether you are watching online or are here in person I think you will see a little QR code. Click on that QR code and we want to help you, send you some resources help you take that next step or [NCC.re/followJesus](https://ncc.re/followJesus).

And then I want to extend an invitation, we have a wonderful Alpha course if you have questions. Listen we think the most important decision ought to be the most informed decisions. And so an open invitation – ncc.re/alpha.

Do you believe it?
Are you living like it?

Two years ago Craig Groeschel wrote a book called *The Christian Atheist*. Now, that sounds like an oxymoron, right. Well, it's someone who believes in God but lives like he doesn't exist. Craig asks this question, "If you were put on trial for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict?" The resurrection is not something that we celebrate one day a year with Easter bunnies and Easter bonnets. It's something that we celebrate every day in every way. Why? Because the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead dwells in us.

Two thousand years ago if you were placing bets on the Roman Empire or this thing called Christianity I'm guessing you would place your bets on the Roman Empire. Right? I mean Rome ruled the world. Jesus had a handful of followers, they were unschooled and they weren't exactly first round draft picks, okay. And so, here we are two thousand years later and you may eat and occasional Caesars salad but you can't even name seven Caesars. The Roman Empire is long gone but two billion people call themselves Christians. One-third of the world's population identify with this person named Jesus of Nazareth. I mean what's that about, how does that happen? Listen, I think the best explanation is an empty tomb.

Do you believe it?
Are you living like it?

So, I challenge you with this, I commission you with this – run to the tomb and if it's empty start living like it.

Let's pray. Father, would you help us. May the reality of your resurrection right now invade our hearts and our minds in a new way? God, I pray that you would activate our faith. That Lord we

would believe you for the impossible because of what happened on the third day. We thank you for what you accomplished on the cross. Our sin is nailed to that cross but you are not and the tomb is empty. We know you are at the right hand of the Father and you are making intercession for us right now. And so if God is for us who can be against us? He who began a good work will carry it to completion. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. His goodness and mercy are following me all the days of my life. God is preparing good works in advance. His mercies are new every morning and so God we stand on your promises, we stand on your word. We celebrate who you are and what you have accomplished for each one of us. So, Lord, I pray that maybe, just maybe we would sing a little louder, that we would declare with a little bit more conviction, that we would not just sing these words but that we would believe them with every fiber of our being. So, Lord, thank you for the empty tomb. Give us a revelation, in Jesus name, Amen.