

Two Questions for This Easter Morning
April 1, 2018
North East United Methodist Church
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John 20: 1-18 (NIV) - *Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So, she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"*

So, Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally, the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Question #1 – “What should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?”

Let’s go back a couple days, before Easter, to Friday...Good Friday...



Hours before that moment of crucifixion...Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate, representative of Caesar, the law...what he said took place...Jesus stood there surrounded by soldiers waiting for Pilate’s command...

Jesus has been brought before him...the Jewish leaders shout...”*He stirs the people;*” “*He claims to be King;*” “*He tells people not to pay taxes to Caesar.*” Trumped up charges...lies...but strong words none-the-less – accusations that include words such as revolt, taxes, and Caesar...such accusations must be heard...

Pilate sees no guilt in this man, Jesus...it is obvious he is being framed...yet, the crowd is full of hatred...He asks...

Matthew 27:22b...”*What should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?*”



“What should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?”

Choices. Pilate had a choice to make. *“What should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?”*

We read in the scripture where Pilate vacillates between two voices...Max Lucado, in his book, And the Angels Were Silent, writes, *“He steps toward one, then stops, and steps toward the other. Four times he tries to free Jesus, and four times he is swayed otherwise. He tries to give the people Barabbas; but they want Jesus. He sends Jesus to the whipping post; they want him sent to Golgotha. He states he finds nothing against this man; they accuse Pilate of violating the law. Pilate, afraid of who Jesus might be, tries one final time to release him; the Jews accuse him of betraying Caesar. So many voices. The voice of compromise. The voice of expedience. The voice of politics. The voice of conscience. And the soft, firm voice of Christ. “The only power you have over me is the power given to you by God.”*

Choices. Pilate had a choice to make. *“What should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?”*

Pilate made a choice. He tried not to...We read...

Matthew 27:22-24 - *“What should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” And they all shouted, “Crucify Him!” “Why?” Pilate demanded. “What crime has he committed?” But the crowd only roared louder, “Crucify him!” Pilate saw that he wasn’t getting anywhere and that a riot was developing. So, he sent for a bowl of water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this man. The responsibility is yours.”*

And then Pilate turned him over to the Roman soldiers to crucify him.



Pilate thought he could avoid making a choice. He washed his hands of Jesus. He climbed the fence and sat down. **But in not making a choice, Pilate made a choice.**

That’s where many people are today...perhaps many who have filled sanctuaries across our nation this Easter morning...*“What should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?”*...

And many will leave...will go about their day...will go about their week...will go about their lives...having not made a decision about what they should do with Jesus...and in not making a choice, they make a choice...

C.S. Lewis writes, *“When the author walks onto the stage, the play is over. God is going to invade all right; but what is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else come crashing in? This time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side. That will not be the time for choosing; it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realized it before or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side.”*

Pilate missed his opportunity. History is filled with men and women that missed their opportunity. They missed their moment. By not making a choice, they made their choice.

Jesus said...

Matthew 10:32-33 - ***“If anyone acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will openly acknowledge that person before my Father in heaven. But if anyone denies me here on earth, I will deny that person before my Father in heaven.”***

Question #2 – “Which side of the cross are you on?”

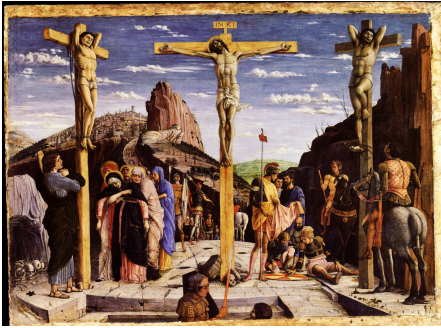
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Once skeptic and atheist, CS Lewis, came to the conclusion that the evidence for Jesus cannot be ignored...Lewis wrote, *“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic...or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make a choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”*

We must make a choice.

Nowhere is this better seen than a few hours later, that dark, Good Friday, on Mt. Calvary.



Jesus Christ is the one the axis of time revolves around. He is the one who is the divider of men and women. Even in his death we see humankind divided. He is crucified between two thieves. One mocks him. Makes fun of him. Rejects Jesus' claim as Messiah. As he hangs on the cross, staring death in the face, he fails to acknowledge his sin, his need and enters into eternal damnation. He stands as a representative of all mankind who refuse to come to Jesus and trust in Him as their Savior.

The thief on the other side of Jesus recognizes the direness of his situation and cries out to Jesus for forgiveness and help. Listen to the words of the repentant thief.

Luke 23: 40-42 - ***“Don’t you fear God even when you are dying? We deserve to die for our evil deeds, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong”...Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”***

What a different destiny this man now faced.

Luke 23: 43 - ***Jesus said to him, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”***



Church legend has it that the repentant thief was named Dismas and the unrepentant, angry thief was named Gestes. Dismas and Gestes are representative of us all, for we are all thieves...the Bible is clear...we have all fallen short of the glory of God...

The question isn't whether or not we are a thief or a murderer...we are...we steal other people's joy...we murder with our words and gossip...we enjoy our financial wealth as millions around our earth starve and suffer...

The question isn't whether or not we are a thief or a murderer...the question is which side of the cross are we on? What are we doing each day with this Jesus, the One who is called the Messiah?

Every day we face choices...everyday our decision to follow Christ is tested...every day we make decisions that clearly show the depth of our commitment to Christ...every day we find ourselves taking the place of one of the two thieves on Jesus' right and Jesus' left...Which side of the cross will we take today? This moment? Next week? At the business meeting? While we balance our checkbook? When someone hurts us? When we walk in on friends gossiping about another? When strangers, with piercings and a speckled past walk into our church? When we see the next "toy" we would like to have come out on the market? When we log on to the internet? When everyone else is doing it?

Atheist Lee Strobel, investigative reporter for the Chicago Tribune, set out to disprove Christ and His Resurrection...in the end he became a Christian and stated, *"After a personal investigation that spanned more than six hundred days and countless hours, my own verdict in the case for Christ was clear."* Strobel believed. Strobel made a choice...Strobel writes, *"If Jesus is who he claims to be (and remember, no leader of any other major religion has ever pretended to be God), as my Creator he rightfully deserves my allegiance, obedience, and worship."* And that is everyday...not just Easter...not just Christmas...not just Sundays...every day...

The final proof for Strobel, for Lewis, for so many throughout history...was the resurrection...the stone was rolled away...



The resurrection.

What you believe when it comes to the resurrection determines which side of the cross you are on – it is the center, the foundation, the crux of our faith –

Experts are in agreement that Jesus could not have survived the rigors of his beating and crucifixion – Roman executioners were grimly efficient, knowing that they themselves

would face death if any of their victims were to come down from the cross alive – there is no doubt that Jesus died from his wounds.

John 20 tells us that on that morning the women came the tomb was empty – Jesus rose from the dead - Both Jews and Christians alike would have know where the tomb Jesus was laid was – the Roman soldiers or the Jewish leaders certainly would not have taken the body in the night – this would have given credence to the claim that He had risen – and if they did take the body, once Christians began to speak of resurrection of Christ wouldn't they have produced that body of Jesus to show the world that the Christians were fools.

His followers could have taken the body but would they have suddenly become bold when they were scared before – would they have died the deaths of martyrs – being torn apart, boiled alive, and crucified upside down for a lie.

What would cause skeptics like Paul and James to suddenly be converted and willing to die for their faith – historical sources tell us that within weeks after the crucifixion, thousands of Jews began abandoning key social practices that had critical sociological and religious importance for centuries – they believed they risked damnation If wrong. – How could the church emerge in the face of brutal Roman persecution – then there are the hundreds of eyewitness accounts of seeing Jesus after his death, after he rose from the dead – many of them documented so close to the actual date they could not possibly be products of legend.

The stone was rolled away...



...*"the grave could not hold the King"*...

As Joshua challenged the people of Israel, in Joshua 24, ***"...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve."***

Which side of the cross are you on?

First, **Recognize**... You, as am I, are in sin...its not hard...we may feel we're not bad people...look around the world...at the news...we're good people, caring, giving...but

compared to a Holy God we fall terribly short...Could we even go 24 hours without a selfish thought, gossip, a lie, the main motivator our own personal pleasure? The Bible tells us that these sins, as tiny as we may feel they are, separate us from a holy and morally pure God.

Secondly, **Believe**...Believe that there is something more to this Jesus...more than a good teacher...more than a historical oddity...the claims He made are unique...the impact He made on the world miraculous...the change He makes in people's lives...Wow! Believe...Jesus was the Son of God. And believe, as Peter writes,

I Peter 3:18 - ***"Christ also suffered when he died for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners that he might bring us safely home to God."***

Thirdly, **Repent**. Paul writes...

Romans 10:9 - ***"For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved."***

Lastly, **Follow**...Ask Jesus To Be Leader in your Life. And after such confession, we must live it...we must follow our leader...obeying His commandments...to say "no, Lord" is a contradiction in terms...He is not our Lord if we are able to tell Him "no"...

What will you do this Easter...what will you do in the days to come with this Jesus, the One they call the Messiah? Which side of the cross are you on?

This Easter know that the stone is rolled away, the tomb is empty, our Savior is risen...



Choose this day what you will do with this Jesus, the One they call the Messiah...Choose this day which side of the cross you will hang your life...Choose this day whom you will serve...

This day may we join the ranks of the repentant thief, Dismas, our hearts crying out to Jesus, our voices shouting "thank you" to the One who gave His life for us...the One who loves us...the One who has conquered the grave...