

I. 2008 Easter What's Left in Your Tomb?      Gee Sprague, Lead Pastor      March 23, 2008

II. The Easter Confusion

A. My New Easter Joke:

- B. A man is driving along a highway and sees a rabbit jump out across the middle of the road. He swerves to avoid hitting it, but unfortunately the rabbit jumps right in front of the car.
- C. The driver is shaken and gets out to see what has become of the rabbit.
- D. To add to his remorse, the rabbit is the Easter Bunny, and he is DEAD. He driver feels so awful that he begins to cry.
- E. Paris Hilton is driving down the highway sees the man crying on the side of the road and pulls over. She steps out of the car and asks the man what's wrong.
- F. "I feel terrible!" he explains, I accidentally hit the Easter Bunny with my car and KILLED HIM."
- G. Paris says, "Don't worry," and runs to her car, pulls out a spray can, walks over to the limp, dead Easter Bunny, bends down, and sprays the contents onto him.
- H. The Easter Bunny jumps up, waves its paw at the two of them and hops off down the road. Ten feet away he stops, turns around and waves again, he hops down the road another 10 feet, turns and waves, hops another ten feet, turns and waves, and repeats this again and again and again and again, until he hops out of sight.
- I. The man is astonished. He runs over to Paris and demands, "What is in that can? What did you spray on the Easter Bunny?"
- J. Paris turns the can around so that the man can read the label. It says. (Before I tell you what it said, are you ready for this? Are you sure?) (You know you're gonna be sorry) (Last chance) OK, here it is, it says, "*Hair Spray: Restores life to dead hair, and adds permanent wave.*"
- K. I know that was corny, but let me make my point. For many people waking up today, that is about all the Easter Story means to them.
- L. There is this vague notion of a person coming back to life and a bunny and colored eggs showing up miraculously Easter morning.
- M. There is a wholesale clothing store that is running an ad that caught my attention.
1. It starts off with people dressing nicely in their new apparel and the voice over keeps saying something about Easter is all about family values.
  2. I was struck that they did use the word Easter in their marketing instead of just spring.
  3. It then made me think, for many the word Easter is synonymous with spring.
  4. At best we are reminded that after winter there is New Life that starts to appear, snow melts and azaleas and cherry trees bloom.

N. Actually some of the confusion can't be avoided.

1. When the second-century Christian missionaries began to take the story of Jesus into Europe they adapted to the culture in order to get the message across.
2. Encountering the Saxon tribes of Europe, with their pagan celebrations, they attempted to convert them to Christianity. They did so, however, in a clandestine manner.
3. The Saxons celebrated the return of spring with an annual celebration that commemorated their goddess of fertility and of springtime, *Eastre*.
4. These missionaries cleverly decided to spread the message of Jesus' resurrection among the pagan Saxon by allowing them to continue to celebrate their tribal feasts, with the message of the New Birth and New Life that comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

O. What is it that makes Easter more than just a seasonal celebration, more than just a family tradition?

### III. The Empty Tomb

A. *Luke 24:1-12 (NASB) But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared. {2} And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, {3} but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. {4} And it happened that while they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling apparel; {5} and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? {6} "He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, {7} saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." {8} And they remembered His words, {9} and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. {10} Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. {11} And these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them. {12} <But Peter arose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw^ the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at that which had happened.>*

B. For the first several generations of the Church, there was no symbol of the resurrection.

1. No Cross or Crucifix.
2. No marketing scheme to brand Christianity.
3. The Cross itself was a symbol of capital punishment.
4. It would almost be a grotesque and blasphemous act to wear a cross to symbolize your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior of the world, as Lord of your life.

C. What got their attention was the empty tomb.

1. Not very easily made into a piece of jewelry.
2. Not very catchy for a billboard or a promotional flyer.

D. The discovery of the empty tomb by Jesus' closest friends is the most important element to our faith.

E. Paul, one of the most prolific witnesses to the resurrected Jesus, writes: *1 Corinthians 15:12-26 (NASB) Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? {13} But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; {14} and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. {15} Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. {16} For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; {17} and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. {18} Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. {19} If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. {20} But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. {21} For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. {22} For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. {23} But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, {24} then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. {25} For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. {26} The last enemy that will be abolished is death*

F. Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire, Jim Cymbala p. 139: "They wanted a faith that was obviously alive, a faith based not just on the cross but also on the empty tomb. The cross, as poignant as it is, is understandable from a human perspective: an innocent man was murdered by crooked politicians and religious leaders. But the empty tomb--what can you say? Only a supernatural God could accomplish that."

### IV. God's Big Boom: The Empty Tomb

A. Tom Brokaw's new book, *Boom*, is a commentary on the people and events that formed and fashioned the 60s.

1. For those of us who were alive then, Rock and Roll became a way of life, the country was divided over Viet Nam and the Civil Rights Movement led in part by the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. , and the Country divided over whether we should Give Peace a Chance while often violence and death were used on both sides.
2. The assassinations of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, Martin Luther King on April 4, 1968, and Robert F. Kennedy in June of 1968 who was seeking the democratic nomination for president left our country grieving our loss of innocence and robbing hope for U.S. citizens.
3. Brokaw ends the book recounting the story of Apollo 8 making the first orbit of the moon which would lead to the first lunar landing in 1969.
4. On Christmas Eve, 1968, Frank Borman, Jim Lovell and Bill Anders divided up the Biblical account of Creation and as they made their loop around the moon, with an estimated billion people listening, they read: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.
5. Brokaw writes, "When the mission commander, Frank Borman, read the final passage—book of Genesis, chapter one verse ten—the long, deeply painful, and disorienting year of 1968 and all those who went through it had an opportunity to stop and contemplate their place in the vast universe of history. "And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering of the waterings he called Seas; and God saw that it was good."
6. After returning to earth James Lovell said that he and his crew were inundated with messages from around the world conveying in one way or another, "Thank you for saving 1968."

B. When life seems hopeless, when things look dark, humanity will look for a savior.

C. *Romans 10:8-10 (NASB) But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"-- that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, {9} that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; {10} for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.*

D. *(Band and Singers Get ready for Ain't No Grave.)*

E. Experiencing God Day-by-Day The Devotional and Journal, Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby P. 106 "The empty tomb promises that nothing, not even death itself, can defeat the purposes of your Lord.

F. Charles Bäck, who produces our publications and graphics made the comment to me as I prepared the message that isn't it ironic that all the inns were full at the time of Jesus' birth, at his death, he left an empty tomb.

G. Is there something in your life that needs resurrection?

H. Is there something in your life that has you entombed?

I. Do you need some resurrection power in your life?

J. You have a card in your program that is a picture of an empty tomb.

K. As we close today, you have the opportunity to ask Jesus Christ to take that tomb and to bring New Life, Resurrection power.

L. Maybe it is a need for healing: physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually.

1. A broken marriage, a lost loved one, a broken heart.
2. Maybe it is some personal shame from your past that still keeps you entombed.

3. Maybe it is an addiction that you would like to see broken.

M. We want to give you the opportunity to place it in the tomb and ask God for resurrection power to give you the faith to overcome whatever is keeping you buried.

N. At the front you will find several small areas of rocks, miniature tombs, where you can leave that which is dead in your life.

O. When Peter went to the tomb of Jesus, His body wasn't there, but the tomb wasn't totally empty. He did leave behind something.

P. {12} *<But Peter arose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw^ the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at that which had happened.>*

Q. After you lay your Resurrection Request in the grave, there is a small piece of linen for you to take as a reminder of the Resurrection Jesus.

V. Ain't No Grave!!!!!!