

Series Theme: Easter Thoughts

Title: Two Perspectives

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Synopsis: There were several witnesses to Jesus' resurrection, both men and women. The women believed immediately what they saw, no doubts, no questions. They accepted this miracle with their hearts. The men also believed but many of them were doubtful for a time, had questions. They accepted this miracle more slowly, with their heads. Today there are still differences between how men and women react to what they experience. But the lesson to be learned is that all of us need both, love from our hearts and confirmation from our heads.

THE FIRST SCRIPTURE LESSON: Matthew 26:49-50, 55-56

THE SECOND SCRIPTURE LESSON: Matthew 27:54-56

THIRD SCRIPTURE LESSON: Luke 24:1-12

MEMORY VERSE: "He is risen from the dead, just as he said." Matthew 28:6b

Grace to you and peace from the One who is and who was and who is to come.

Pastor Doug:

There are a number of things we know about Easter. Jesus came back to life. This proves that all His good news was true. God really is loving. There really is a wonderful place for us in eternity. In this life God really hears our prayers. Then and now. So believers are filled with joy.

What does all this teach us about relationship with God?

God's love is complete. Our love also should be complete. A phrase that Jesus used is that we should love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength. The immediate reaction of the witnesses to the empty tomb gives us an insight about how to love God so completely.

Consider the biblical witnesses. Every gospel account agrees that some women, including Mary Magdalene, first discovered that Jesus' tomb was empty. Jesus actually appeared to Mary. Every gospel account agrees that Mary told the disciples that Jesus had risen.

Matthew leave out the disciples' immediate reaction and fast forwards to Jesus appearing to them in Galilee 40 days later. The other three gospels describe the disciples' immediate reaction. Was it joy?

According to Mark, the disciples did not believe Mary. Mark recounts that Jesus appeared not only to Mary but also to two other followers outside Jerusalem. These two also came back and told the disciples Jesus was alive. They didn't believe these followers either.

Finally Jesus appeared to the disciples and chastised them for being so slow to believe the eyewitnesses. Then He sent them out to continue His work.

Luke gives further detail. First the disciples do not believe Mary Magdalene. He recounts that Peter goes to the tomb and sees it is empty. He returns believing it is empty but unconvinced that it is so because Jesus had come back to life. Also Luke tells us more about the two out-of-town followers. One is names Cleopas. Jesus walks with them for at least an hour explaining that scripture proves the Messiah must be killed and rise again. Only when they stop to eat do they know it is Jesus. When they return to the other disciples, they won't believe Jesus rose.

Again Jesus appears to them all. But the disciples decide it must be a ghost of Jesus. It was easier for them to believe in ghosts than in resurrection. Only when He let them touch Him and then a piece of fish did they believe He was real. And only then did they really start praising God.

Finally, John adds a bit more. When Mary Magdalene returned to tell the disciples that the tomb was empty and Jesus had risen, two men, both Peter and John, ran to see the tomb. John adds the comment that he could outrun Peter. As with Luke's account, Peter is not convinced about Jesus by the empty grave. John says, once he saw the tomb was empty, he believed Jesus was alive. Later Jesus appears to the disciples and lets them see the wounds in His feet and hands. Only then are they filled with joy. John also tells us about Thomas, doubting Thomas. He was away when Jesus first appeared to the disciples. Jesus loved him so much that He returned when Thomas was there. Thomas insisted in putting his hand into the stomach wound one of the soldiers made to prove He was dead.

Notice the pattern here. These disciples soon traveled far and wide spreading the capital G Good News about Jesus as the Son of God Who died to save us from our sins. Thank goodness for them. But they all struggled to believe in Jesus' resurrection.

When we talk about loving God with all our minds, I think this is part of what we are saying. The idea that God intervened in history and sent His Son to live among us and die for us is a stretch for the mind. But if we don't accept Jesus with our minds, our faith and our joy and our commitment and our knowledge all suffer. It would be an oversimplification to say this is a guy thing, male minds want proof to the point that we don't believe or take advantage of all God's promises. But in the Bible examples, it was men who had the most trouble accepting the heard part of the resurrection. Let this be a lesson to all of us. The small g good news is that the men, once believing, did just what Jesus asked. Thank You, Jesus.

Interestingly, the women's initial reaction to Jesus' resurrection was different from the men's. This teaches us something about loving God as well. Pastor Joyce is now going to talk to you about that.

Pastor Joyce:

Pastor Doug described how difficult it was for Jesus' disciples to believe that Jesus did what he said he would do – that he would be arrested, tried, and killed, but that he would rise from the dead after three days. None of them understood his teaching about this end of the life on earth. But they were able to finally understand what had happened – what Jesus had predicted would happen – actually did happen.

As we know Jesus surrounded himself with men – men he personally called to be his disciples, to teach them and have them help with his ministry. Jesus was counting on them to carry on his message of God's love after he left them. Having a group of learners following a teacher was not a new idea at that time. That's one way that learning was passed on. But those who had the opportunity to become followers of a teacher were men only; women at that time were not allowed the social privileges women have today. Women stayed home and took care of the home and raised children. Men had much more freedom of movement to go to the marketplace, to talk, to discuss, and even debate with the other men.

Yet even with all these restrictions on their movement, scripture records several interactions that Jesus had with women.

There was the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-30), the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), the woman who was healed from a bleeding disease by just touching the hem of his cloak (Mark 5:24-34). He even healed Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-15).

Did you notice that in all of these instances, the women were not named? That shows to some degree how insignificant women were in the social and cultural world of that day. That, however, does not mean they were unnoticed. The exchanges Jesus had with the women were so memorable that the men who wrote our scriptures remembered them and wrote them down.

The women Jesus healed or interacted with in some positive way never questioned who Jesus was; they never asked for proof of his divinity. Instead they accepted that Jesus was a miracle worker, a man sent from God, to do the will of God. It can be said, then, that these particular women accepted Jesus in faith – faith that comes from accepting Jesus in their hearts. It think it can be said that women more easily “lead with their hearts” than men. Characteristics such as compassion, sympathy, kindness, and caring tend to be seen more as feminine characteristics than masculine. This has been used to sell a lot of books about the differences between men and women – “Men are from Mars and women are from Venus” comes to mind.

In the second scripture passage read this morning we are again reminded of the love and compassion women showed to Jesus. Women were gathered at the foot of Jesus’ cross – some of whom are named and others not. Always Jesus’ mother Mary and Mary Magdalene, but others may not even have been known to the gospel writers. These were women who had travelled from Galilee in the north – a distance of around 75 miles – likely following Jesus, buying and cooking food for him, caring for him, wanting to learn more, just like Jesus’ disciples.

They did not run away when Jesus was arrested. They were probably not in the danger that the disciples faced since women were probably not even noticed. They defied the Roman soldiers by staying at the foot of the cross since those soldier would likely have preferred everyone to stay back and let them do their job. They supported on another in their grief.

Three days later it was women again who were the first to go to Jesus’ tomb. It was standard practice to add spices around a corpse, and that is what the women planned to do. But instead of carrying out their funeral tasks, they saw an angel who told them Jesus was not there but had been raised from the dead. They did not question the truth of what the angel told them. They believed – completely – immediately – from their hearts. Then they wanted to tell everyone the good news.

Faith – belief – is more a matter of the heart than the head. Women may have an easier time of accepting the promises of God through Jesus than men. Or maybe that is just a sexist stereotype that continues to have meaning. But the truth of the matter is that we children of God need both heart faith and head understanding. One without the other makes for an incomplete knowledge of God. It’s a little bit like faith and works.

We need to believe – the heart – and then we need to do something about that belief – works. This is where the head – understanding – becomes really important. That’s the doing part.

Pastor Doug reminded us that even though Jesus’ disciples first reacted in ways that did not show their faith, that faith was there. Maybe it took a little longer for them to realize that Jesus needed them to carry on the faith – **“Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** (Matthew 28:19) These are the final words Matthew records – a directive from Jesus to his disciples.

These disciples followed Jesus’ instructions. They showed their faith through the work they did. They caught the attention of those in authority. They had faith to follow in Jesus’ footsteps. They now had a faith to die for – and many of them did. We don’t know exactly what happened to the women who remained at the foot of the cross, worshipping Jesus. We do know that it did not take long before women were dying for their faith – likely because they were actively doing many of the same things the disciples were called to do. What role models for us all. Let us pray.

Holy and loving God, on this Easter morning, we come to You with thanksgiving and with joy. You have given us a day to celebrate. No longer are our sacrifices necessary – Jesus paid the ultimate price. Because of Jesus we have free and immediate access to You and Your love. What a glorious day it is! Thank You for Your love. Amen.