

Waiting for God and Raising the Dead

Matthew 27:57-66

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In Matthew 27, the skeptics mock Jesus on the cross. In Matthew 27:50, Jesus dies as we preached last week.

It's 2,000 years later. Christians say, "He's risen," and unbelievers still mock and scoff.

2 Peter 3:3, "scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing." Some of you may be scoffing even today, but if that's you, how do you explain this?

Before I came to Christ, I often felt lonely.

Now I never feel lonely for I am never alone.

I often felt depressed.

Now I always feel happy for I am blessed, hallelujah!

I used to be a loser.

But now I eat the Maker's diet. I practice the 10 keys to empowered living. I'm a success in life, hallelujah.

I drove a Volkswagen Bug.

Now I drive a 1992 baby blue Toyota pick-up.

How do explain that?

How can you argue with that?

How do you explain the cosmological, teleological, ontological, moral, and historical arguments for the existence of God?

How do you explain this?

You, sir, have a crutch. [Duncan hobbles toward the stage on crutches.] Be healed! [Peter smacks Duncan on the forehead. Peter throws aside one crutch. Duncan begins jumping up and down, holding the other crutch over his head.]

How do you explain the Shroud of Turin? Miracles of the Holy Grail?

How do you explain the amazing Bible code?

Shocking messages embedded in the very fabric of sacred writ. Every scientist knows a 20-5-16 geometric declension is prevalent within the basic algorithms of the universe. Apply it to scripture, and we decipher shocking revelations like this:

Acts 8:19-20,

Give (count 20),

Peter (count 5),

your (count 16),

money.

"Give Peter your money!"

The message is clear.

ey received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when
 mon saw that the Spirit was given through
 e laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered
 em money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power
 so, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands
 ay receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ But Peter said
 him, "May your silver perish with you,
 cause you thought you could obtain the gift
 God with money! ²¹ You have neither part
 r lot in this matter, for your heart is not right
 fore God. ²² Repent, therefore, of this
 ckedness of yours, and pray to the Lord

How do you explain that? Dr. P.J. Finkelstienbouwer of the Duluth Research Institute says that's utterly inexplicable by random chance.

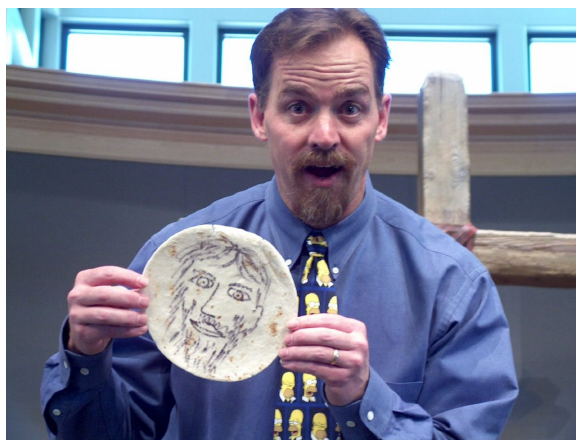
How do you explain this?



Oh, baby, do you know what this is? Proof! It's proof that dinosaurs walked with people. Found it in my backyard. How do you explain that? You can't explain that away. It's a dinosaur footprint next to a human footprint.

And how do you explain this?

Check this out, how do you argue with this?



Picture of Jesus. I found it on my tortilla at Q-doba... a picture of Jesus. (And to think you skeptics doubted the resurrection!)

Well, how do you explain this?

[Jesus Christ Superstar is played in the background while Aram, dressed as Jesus and waving a small American flag, rises from behind the stage, and stands above everyone.]



Aram [with a middle eastern accent]: I am risen!

Peter: Oh, Lord, thank you, but some doubt. How can we know it is You?

Aram: Who else would wear such groovy clothes while expressing such a patriotic sensibility?

Peter: Scoffing Scoffers... might say you look like Aram Haroutunian in a robe.

Aram: Peter, Peter... my nose is not that big, and also, Aram does not have a middle eastern accent, does he?

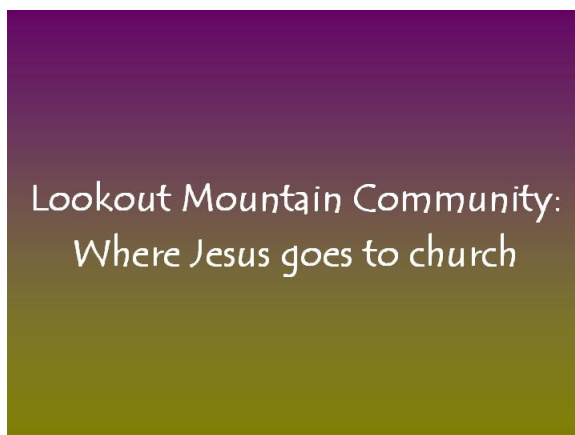
Peter: Why no. Your logic is unassailable. What would you say to us? Your people?

Aram: You're all super. And you would each be perfect if you would only give 10% of gross income to the general fund and approve pastoral staff pay increases,

Peter: You are wise!

Aram: One more thing, then I must go. All those controversial sermons you preached? I thought they were just perfect.

[Aram descends again as "Jesus Christ Superstar" is played again. A slide appears on the screens as Aram is leaving. Our new church logo.]



Now, all you scoffing scoffers... how are you gonna argue with that?

Now, if you think I'm making fun of Jesus, I'm not: I'm making fun of us. April fools.

Matthew 27:57-66,

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. Next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees

gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir ["kurios," Lord], we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

They sealed the tomb probably with mortar and a Roman imperial seal. They posted a guard which would've been 4 to 16 soldiers who would face death if they fell asleep. They sealed the tomb and posted a guard... why?

They actually think that we, the disciples of Christ would try to fake the resurrection. They actually think...

that we, disciples of the Truth, would lie.

that we, disciples of the Way, would practice deception.

that we, disciples of the Life, would resort to violence and force to advance our agenda.

That's what they think, and that's what they hope, for if and when we force and fake the resurrection, we affirm their conviction that Jesus is not the Messiah. And furthermore, that we really don't have faith in Him. We have faith in ourselves, just like everyone else.

Let's go back and unpack our text a bit. Verse 57, "When it was evening there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph who was also a disciple of Jesus." That's something of a miracle.

The last time we heard the word "rich" in the Gospel of Matthew was on the lips of Jesus as He said, "Truly I tell you it's easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom." His disciples say, "Who can be saved?" and Jesus says, "With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Joseph was rich, and the other Gospels reveal that he was a member of the council, as well as a friend of Nicodemus. He was probably a Pharisee on the Sanhedrin council. The last guy you'd expect to show up.

Remember the disciples of John come get his body; the disciples of Jesus, they're hiding, and Joseph of Arimathea shows up. Rich and religious.

Remember how Lewis pictured hell as rich and religious, a place where people get whatever they want but are incapable of wanting whatever they get... rich. A place where people are constantly occupied with the dreadful burden of self-importance, self advancement, self-righteousness... religious (not pure and undefiled religion like Dan preached about a little while ago, but human religion).

Lewis writes, "Only one is small enough to descend into hell," that tomb of a heart. Well, Joseph of Arimathea places the body of Jesus in his own tomb.

The Gospel of John tells us he was a disciple, but in secret for fear of the Jews.

Jesus said, "If you won't acknowledge me before men, I won't acknowledge you before my Father."

Joseph was a disciple, but just barely.

So Joseph (rich and religious) comes for Jesus when Jesus is dead.

If you're rich and religious—like me, like the American church—if you're rich and religious, it often helps to have Jesus dead, because Jesus can really mess up your finances and mess up your religion.

Well, Joseph picks up the dead body of Jesus—the broken body and shed blood—and where does He put Him? In his own tomb.

He puts the Seed in his own soil, his own dirt. He puts the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Word... he puts the Lion of Judah in his own tomb.

I told you once how my friend's brother and some drunk buddies hit a deer with their car, picked it up, and put the body in the car with them. A car full of drunk boys and a dead deer driving down the highway. They figured on turning that deer into a trophy and mounting it on their wall, but lo and behold that deer wasn't dead, only stunned. It rose in the car, and that's how the deer wrecked their car and wrecked their party.

Sometimes the Lion of Judah starts to rise, and we don't want Him to. We'd rather He just stayed dead, so we could just pretend He's alive, like a trophy mounted on our wall.

We want Him to appear to be alive 'cause then He's really useful, but when He really is alive, He can be very inconvenient.

So sometimes it's tempting to fake the resurrection, take the corpse, and pretend it's alive like in that movie, Weekend at Bernie's.

Wednesday at staff, Mike Klassen reminded me of that old movie. In Weekend at Bernie's, two young guys get invited to their boss' beach house for the weekend. When they arrive, they find that Bernie is dead.

Well, to make a long story short, they prop Bernie's corpse up in a chair and pretend he's alive in order to throw beach parties and use all of Bernie's stuff. Everyone comes to Bernie's parties, and no one notices he's dead. Later, they fake he's alive to save their tails from an assassin.

I don't have clips, but this is the poster.

[image: Weekend at Bernie's DVD cover]

We fake the resurrection to get God's stuff and save our tails. If He begins to rise, we're tempted to pretend He's dead, and if He seems to be dead (like in our passage today) we're tempted to pretend He's alive.

What I mean is we're all tempted to fake the resurrection. It's how we maintain control. Some do it knowingly...

This world is full of magicians, charlatans, and con men. Some do it unknowingly...

I mean, we tell ourselves, "We're not doing it to save our tail. We're doing it to save God's tail."

We think God needs help rising from the dead so we resort to legislation, power and force to storm the tomb, and we resort to deception to pretend He's alive, as if faith in the Truth was all about telling lies.

We do things like:

Twist scientific evidence

Pretend people are healed when they're not.

Pretend we're healed when we're not.

Pretend we're alive when we're dead.

We market Jesus like Coke, Levi's, and Cadillac's.

We turn Him into a system, formula, or law—knowledge of good and evil.

We nail Him to the “tree of knowledge” to get Him to submit, to make Him useful to us.

We crucify Him, kill Him, then we dress Him up in our image and parade Him around as “risen from the dead,” looking just like us.

Matthew 27:64, The Pharisees say, “Lord Pilate, order the tomb to be made secure until the third day lest His disciples go and steal Him away and tell the people he has risen from the dead, and the last fraud will be worse than the first.”

They think we'll try to force the tomb and fake the resurrection. It is in our interest to have Jesus rise, yet it's also in our interest to keep Jesus dead. It's in our interest to fake the resurrection...

like Weekend at Bernie's,

like at the start of the service.

Much of the world thinks the modern American Evangelical Church service is just like Weekend at Bernie's.

Weekend at Bernie's is a comedy.

When Jesus rises, we're tempted to keep Him in the tomb.

When Jesus is in the tomb, we're tempted to fake His resurrection. How do we do that?

1) I was wondering how long Jesus was dead in the tomb 'cause Matthew seems to make a big deal about the time.

We know His time in the tomb stretched over 3 days.

Jesus died at 3 in the afternoon.

The sky was dark for 3 hours.

Jonah was in the whale for 3 days.

Jesus was tempted 3 times.

Peter denied Jesus 3 times.

3 is a time of trial and testing.

Three days... and if Jesus rose around 7:00 a.m. on Sunday, He was dead for 40 hours starting at noon on Friday.

Like the number 3, the number 40 means a bunch in scripture.

Jesus was tempted 40 days in the wilderness.

Noah and the ark floated for 40 days through judgment.

Moses was exiled 40 years in the wilderness.

Then the Israelites wandered 40 years in the wilderness.

40 is like the number of this wilderness world of ours.

Moses was on the mountain 40 days with God while Israel waited for him to come down.

When the Israelites grew tired of waiting for Moses, do you remember what they did? They built an idol and played Weekend at Bernie's... party time. They made a dead thing and pretended that it was alive.

Do you remember what they made? A golden calf... I'd have thought they'd make like a lion or something, but they make a calf—something useful, a beast of burden.

Once God made Himself something useful to us, a lamby. But that Lamb turns into a Lion, rises from the dead... extremely difficult to control.

So, they made a golden calf, an idol, as they waited for Moses.

You know, Israel waited longer than 40 years for the Messiah, and in that time they constructed an idol... their image of the Messiah. So when the real Messiah arrived, they crucified the real Messiah for their idol Messiah.

We've been waiting for Jesus a long time. I wonder if we crucify the real Jesus with our dream Jesus, our modern American Idol Jesus.

Philip Yancey writes about George Buttrick who used to be the chaplain at Harvard. Routinely, kids would come in his office and plop down and say, "I don't believe in God." Buttrick didn't seem surprised or worried. He'd just say, "Tell me about this God you don't believe in." They'd tell him, and he'd say, "Well, I don't believe in that God either."

Maybe sometimes when we panic and try to defend Jesus, we need to stop and ask, "Is it Jesus I'm defending?"

Satan would love to get you all worked up and stressed out defending a golden calf.

Do you know how you defend a lion? You don't! You just get out of it's way. The slaughtered Lamb is a Lion, and He is capable of His own defense.

So maybe sometimes when the world says,

"Look the fossil evidence doesn't work!" and

"You prayed, but he's not healed." and

"You're not exactly the picture of health, wealth, and vitality yourself."

"So it doesn't look like Jesus rose from the dead."

Maybe sometimes we need to just stop arguing, sit down, shut up, and stare at the tomb door. I think that's called ... **Faith**.

You know, Jesus really does heal people at times. Jesus may even put His face on a tortilla at Q-doba. There is great evidence for the resurrection. It's just my experience that God will purposefully limit the evidence to make room for faith to grow. Faith in Him. Faith... He makes it so you don't have to believe, but you can want to believe.

2) Well, it was about 40 hours that Jesus was dead, starting on the 6th day. We try to make God in our image, but on the 6th day God makes us in His image. Remember how Eve (who is a picture of us all—the strange woman), remember Eve was tempted on the 6th day?

She was tempted to make herself in God's image with the fruit from "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." She was tempted to save herself with herself, according to law. But now Eschatos Adam is nailed to the tree in front of His bride

The fruit of the tree is

body broken and blood shed.

The Good is not a list;

the Good is a Person.
 We don't steal the fruit,
 He offers it to us by grace.
 We're not saved by a system;
 we're saved by that Person.
 We're not saved by law,
 but love, and He is love.
 We're not saved by ourselves;
 we're save by our Groom.
 We're not saved by knowledge;
 we're saved by communion with Him.
 We're not saved by a what;
 we're saved by a Who.

Idols are “what’s.” They are things we control, that we build to work for us. People want boxes for God. They want the preacher to tell ‘em *what* they have to know and *what* they have to do, rather than *Who* they need to trust.

Folks don't like preachers asking questions. They want preachers building boxes, boxes to hold the Lion. Well, Jesus spent a lot of time raising questions and smashing boxes, a lot of time smashing our idols so we'd call out to Him.

I know it's hard, but when we don't have the answers and the tomb door is shut, and the world screams, “Why, why, why?” maybe we ought not fake the answer. Maybe we oughta just sit down and say, “I don't know.” Yet keep our eyes on the tomb door ‘cause the Answer is a Person. The Person is the Lion, and the rumor is, He can walk through any door... not even that box can hold Him. So keep your eye on the tomb door. I think that's called... **Hope.**

3) Well, Jesus was in that tomb about 40 hours beginning on the 6th day and stretching through the 7th.

When Moses went up on the mountain for those 40 days, he was given the law (a zillion laws) and then right before he came down to the people who had built the golden calf, God says, “Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. I sanctify you.”

After God expounds all the laws, He says, “Above all every 7th day, you sit down and do nothin’ ‘cause I sanctify you.” That means, “I make you good.”

Jesus died at 3 p.m. on Friday with just enough time to stick Him in the tomb before nightfall. The Sabbath began at nightfall.

There's a reason Jesus died on Friday.

It's so that His people would be forced to die to themselves on the Sabbath.

So they could do no work.

So they couldn't force it, and they couldn't fake it..

All they could do is sit outside the tomb and stare at the door and remember,

 “I, the Lord, sanctify you.
 I raise the dead. I save you. I sanctify you,”

says the Lord.

It's interesting that the Pharisees met with Pilate on the Sabbath and called him "Lord." 1,500 years, and they still hadn't read the sign. Desperate to sanctify themselves according to the law, they break every law in the book and murder the Messiah. Their idol was themselves: Something dead they pretended was alive. To save their idol, they murdered the Messiah.

It's the Sabbath.
Read the sign.
"I, the Lord, sanctify you."

Easter is the 8th day. I'm not sure I understand this, but it's like the eternal Sabbath beyond the days of our time (the series of sevens) It's from beyond this age (aion). It's from beyond this time, yet in this time, Easter is beginning to rise in our hearts by faith. That is we're being sanctified by grace through faith from the inside out, now.

Through faith and hope, it's Easter in our hearts even though all around us it looks like Jesus is still in the tomb. It looks like the Sabbath that Saturday 2,000 years ago. When we come to church and worship, we celebrate the Sabbath. Remembering God said, "It is I, the Lord, that sanctify you."

Technically I'm saved, but I'm *being* sanctified in space and time. Christ is *being* formed within me. I have His Spirit but my body, my flesh is still in that tomb.

So even though I'm never alone,
I do feel lonely.
Even though I'm thoroughly blessed,
I do feel depressed.
Even though I want to do right,
evil lies close at hand
(in the words of Paul).
"Oh, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death."
I'm tempted to think it's me.
That I'm *saved* by grace,
but then must *sanctify* myself.

So I'm tempted to hide my tomb,
hide my sorrow,
hide my body of death.
It's tempting to wrap myself in fig leaves.

Church can easily become nothing but a fig leaf outlet mall. That is, an acting school for faking the resurrection.

So we come to church terrified, acting a part, and secretly thinking, "What if they find out..."
I can't stop the drinking.
I can't stop the lustful thoughts.

I can't stop the homosexual fantasies.
 I can't stop my anger and my despair.
 I can't love my wife.
 I can't love God.
 I can't make myself good.
 What if they find out?"

Well, we've found out 'cause we can't either. That's why we're here. The purpose of the law and the purpose of the Sabbath is to remind us we're dead. We're dead. And we cannot raise the dead. We need God to do it.

All I can do is sit facing my own tomb and remember, "It is I, the Lord, that sanctifies you." All I can do is have faith in grace and even that is grace. It is His life rising in me.

See, I can't raise the dead.

I can't raise Jesus in me,
 and I can't raise Jesus in you.

People think the pastor's job is to fake the resurrection and to help others fake the resurrection.

So people come with doubts, struggles, questions, and problems. They explain 'em to me and say, "What do I do?"

And sometimes all I can say is,

I don't know. You could try prayer. You could try counseling, and a small group. You could read this book or that book. You could try the Maker's diet. You could try the 10 keys for empowered living, and the success in life curriculum. You could try all that. But, aah.... to tell you the truth, it looks to me like Jesus is dead, and there's a big old honkin' stone rolled over the entrance to the tomb.

All I can do is bear witness to the fact that we've encountered this problem before and found that what is "impossible for men is possible for God." Yet this situation is impossible for *you*. So I guess all *you* can do is sit down and stare at that tomb door.

Is He worth that much to you? Is He worth waiting for? Is He worth that much faith, hope, and love?

Tell you what, I'll sit here with ya. We'll get the whole church to just sit here with you. Just Shabat and help you stare at the tomb door. That's what church is for, and pastors are for, and counselors are for, and prayer teams are for, and small groups are for.

You know, it's a great relief to finally admit to yourself you can't raise the dead. I don't have to fix people, just love people. I can't fix people. I can't raise the dead, and if I think I have to I'll be too scared to go sit with 'em.

I'll never go hold Kavitha,
 if I think I have to fix Kavitha.
 I'll never go sit with my friend as she remembers the corpse in the box,
 if I think it's up to me to redeem that.
 I'll never bear witness to the Gospel,
 I'll never preach again,
 if I think it's up to me to save souls and raise the dead.

If I think I have to raise the dead,
 I'll never go sit with the dead
 and tell them about the One who does.

See, I can't raise the dead. I'm just supposed to bear witness to the One who does.
 And if I think I'm supposed to raise the dead so that I do try to raise the dead, I bear
 witness against the One who does, 'cause I fake it and force it, and 'cause I testify out of fear.
 When we testify to Jesus out of anxiety and fear, we testify that we're not sure He'll rise
 from the dead and that God needs our help to "get 'er done."

Have you tried to witness to someone while terrified you'll screw up or terrified they won't get it
 straight?

You're testifying that Jesus is the savior,
 And with your fear, you're testifying that He's not.

You're testifying the He rises from the dead,
 And with your anxiety, you're testifying that He may not.
 But if you entrust that person's salvation to Jesus, and then just witness to the One you love,
 sharing your faith becomes fun, and you start to sound like you've actually met the savior, and
 you love Him.

Satan wants the church to panic:

"The gays are taking over Hollywood."
 "The institution of marriage is being threatened with extinction."

"The church is losing the cultural war, so we better panic, legislate, and militate."
 Satan wants the Church to panic on the Sabbath and storm the tomb, 'cause
 the more we legislate and militate,
 the more we try to force and fake the resurrection,
 the more we pretend we have it all figured out, and we can make your life work with our
 system, programs, a laws, and religion, the more we testify,
 "Jesus needs our help to rise form the dead."
 In other words, "He's really not the savior... we are."

Satan wants us to spread
 faith with anxiety,
 hope with fear,

love with legislation,
 grace with regulation, and
 mercy with intolerance.

He wants us to defend
 the Way with deception,
 the Truth with lies,
 the Life with death.

He wants us to panic, storm the tomb, and fake the resurrection so people think
 the Way *is* deception,
 the Truth *is* lies, and
 the Life *is* death.

He wants us to bear witness against the savior!
 Well, how do you bear witness *to* the savior?

Matthew 27:61,

But Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained there, sitting in front of the tomb.

They just sat there staring at the tomb. I think that's called... **Faith, Hope, and Love.**

They just sat there staring at the tomb. They had no where else to go. Jesus was their life. All their faith, hope, and love was for Him. They were the strange women. They are the Bride. They are the church, and they testify to Jesus, like first fruits of His new creation (James 1:18) The Holy Grail, ready to be filled with the substance of God.

Legend says Joseph of Arimathea took the Holy Grail to Great Britain, and that it was a cup. But they are the Grail, not just Mary Magdalene, but the Church, the Bride... empty and waiting in faith, hope, and love... empty and being filled with faith, hope, and love. They testify.

Lots of folks think they know me and could testify to me—teachers, bosses, employees—they could testify with diplomas, degrees, and credentials.

Well, I think my favorite testimony is an old blue shirt.

Late one night about 14 years ago, I found it lying in the grass just inside the back gate at our home in California. I always came home that way from work at the church.

Susan was still awake, so I said, "What's my favorite old blue shirt doing lying in the grass?"

She said, "Oh, I really wanted to tell you. Elizabeth really missed you today." [She was two at the time.] Susan continued, "Elizabeth asked me, 'When is Daddy gonna be home?' and I told her, 'Not for a long time.' She said, 'Well, I wait for Daddy.' I said, 'Honey, it'll be a long time.' and she said, 'Well, I wait for Daddy.' And then, Peter, I watched her. She went to the dirty clothes pile, and pulled out your dirty old blue shirt. She carried it out to the back gate and just waited. She'd stare through the cracks in the fence, then sit down and stare at the gate. Look through the cracks in the fence, lie on her back holding your shirt, then stare at the gate and do it all over again."

If you think waiting is easy, you probably don't understand waiting. It takes everything you've got.

Ask a woman waiting to give birth.

Ask a man waiting to die.

Ask the world waiting for a new creation.

Ask the Mary's sitting in front of that sealed tomb.

Ask Elizabeth staring at the back gate, holding a dirty old blue shirt.

Susan said, "Peter, I told her, 'Daddy won't be back until really late.' I asked her if she'd like to come in for dinner and a snack. She said, 'No, I wait for Daddy.' Well, I finally took some food out to her. She stayed there about four hours sitting in front of that closed gate. She stayed there 'til it got dark, and I made her come in."

That's my favorite testimony... faith, hope, and love. She didn't get what she wanted that night when the gate stayed closed. But as she slept, and I kissed her on the cheek, I did. The Father did. Faith, hope, and love.

In the morning, I'd walk through Elizabeth's bedroom door, and come Sunday morning Jesus would walk through the door of that tomb. He would appear first to Mary and Mary... the Church.

Well, I'm just saying you can't raise the dead, Mary. But with faith, hope, and love, you bear witness to the one who does.

You can't raise the dead, Joseph. However, you can place the body of the slaughtered Lamb in your own tomb.

And so on the night that that Lamb was betrayed, He took bread and He broke it saying, "This is my body given for you. Take and eat." And in the same way, after supper, He took the cup and He said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you. Do it in remembrance of me."

So we invite you to come to the table, tear off a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup. Black cups are wine. Purple cups are juice. And as you come forward, maybe you could just do this silently in your own heart, or out loud, however you feel like it. Just say, "God, here's my tomb. I'm an open grave before You. And now I place Your body in my tomb. Rise in me, Lord Jesus." Amen.

You are worthy to be praised, Lord Jesus, on Friday. You're worthy to be praised on Sunday. And You're worthy to be praised on Saturday from outside the tomb door as we sit on a hill. Our ears have heard of You, and well, the eyes of our heart maybe have seen. Some have had visions, but Lord, You know that one day our eyes will see in a way that we could not even begin to imagine now. Eyes of a new body. But, God, we pray that You would help us through Your Spirit as we sit on this hill outside this tomb door.

Would you just picture that now. Pictures are worth a thousand words. They encapsulate deep things we can't verbalize, so if you would just picture this. Picture the tomb, but the stone's

not over the door. It's your tomb. Maybe as I was preaching you were thinking of your tomb. Maybe it's a sin that you just can't seem to beat. Maybe it's a fear that you just can't overcome. It's the power of death, and it fills you with terror because you know that one day you have to face that tomb. The world tries to deny it, but you see it. It's there. Just picture that tomb. But now, picture this, to the right of the tomb you see, lying in the dust, a body. It's beaten. It's bloodied. It's dead. Walk up to it. Do you see the face? It's Jesus. He's everything you've hoped for. Everything you've longed for, and He's dead. Do you know what to do, Joseph? Pick Him up. If you're small, drag Him, but put Him in that tomb, your tomb. Just put Him in. Say God, "I surrender my tomb to Jesus." Now close the door. Angels can help you roll the rock over the entrance to the tomb. Now just go back and sit down. Stare at the door. As you're staring at the door on the side of the mountain, you'll notice there are some other people around you... Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, Mary, Christ's mother, people chained in stocks and prison cells in places like China and Afghanistan, a host of saints down through the ages of whom this world is not worthy who look forward to a city whose builder is God, whose foundation is not made with human hands. You look around and you notice that you're sitting on ashes, and then you notice an old man. He's really, really old. His name is Job. He sits on the ashes a long time, and he doesn't know why, but looks at you with a sparkle in his eye and he says, "I know. I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last He will stand upon this earth, and then when my body has been thus destroyed, from my new body, I will see God. I see Him!" Well, my friend, that's Easter rising in your heart. Believe the Gospel, and you can worship Him even on that mountain side in faith, hope, and love. It's the testimony that He desires. So let's do it. I know that my Redeemer lives.

[The worship band plays...]

"My Redeemer Lives"

I know He rescued my soul
His blood covered my sin
I believe
I believe
My shame He's taken away
My pain is healed in His name
I believe
I believe
I'll raise a banner 'cause
My Lord has conquered the grave

My Redeemer lives
My Redeemer lives
My Redeemer lives
My Redeemer lives
(back to top)

You lift my burden
I rise with You
I'm dancing on this mountaintop
To see Your Kingdom come

My Redeemer lives
My Redeemer lives
My Redeemer lives
My Redeemer lives

In two weeks, we'll be back in the Gospel of Matthew. It's also Easter Sunday, and this is the next verse,

Now after the Sabbath toward the dawn of the first day of the week Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

You know the text that we read today, it's a great April fool's day text because it's like a joke. You remember that last week in Matthew, all the tombs were opened and the dead came out. So what do Pilate and those guys do? They try to seal the tomb. You know, "We're havin' problems with the tombs, we're gonna seal 'em, and we're gonna post a guard."

Well, you see, this is the Gospel. This is the Easter message. I know it looks pretty hopeless. I know it looks pretty dire. I know that you've watched a lot of people get put in those tombs, but the Lion of Judah will not stay in the tomb! You cannot secure the entrance in a way that He cannot get out. I mean, He's the Way, the Truth, the Life. He's the Light, He's the Love of God poured out. He's the Word through whom all things exist in whom and by whom all things were created and are maintained, and He won't stay dead. He always wins. And so believe the Gospel, even on Saturday, and you can dance in front of the tomb. That's the testimony Your Father desires... faith, hope, and love. He's worth it. In Jesus' name, amen.

If you'd like prayer, we have a prayer ministry team down front. They'd love to just sit outside the tomb with you.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Matthew 19:23-26 (ESV)

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.

Matthew 27:57-58 (ESV)

And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Isaiah 53:9 (ESV)

And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Mark 15:42-43 (ESV)

After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about

seventy-five pounds in weight.

John 19:38-39 (ESV)

And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away.

Matthew 27:59-60 (ESV)

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:4 (ESV)

Next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.” So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

Matthew 27:62-66 (ESV)

Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights. . . . And the LORD said to Moses, “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. And he gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God. When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” So Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”

Exodus 24:18, 31:12-32:4 (ESV)

Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted,

“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts.

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

Hebrews 4:6-11 (ESV)

Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

2 Corinthians 1:7-9 (ESV)

A mocking smile touched Myddin’s lips. “Do you not see it yet? This was never my battle! It was between the Prince of Darkness and the Lord of Light, between the Enemy and Jesus. I had no part in it.” ~ “No part in it? If not for you, she would have triumphed long ago!” ~ “No.” Myrddin shook his head slowly. That is what I believed,

too. For a long time I have carried that burden in my heart and soul, but it was a lie! Yes, that too was a lie.” ~ “I do not understand,” I said firmly. ~ “It was never my battle,” the Emrys explained gently. “My own pride, my vanity, my puffed-up importance kept me from seeing that.” Myrddin gave a bitter laugh and raised a hand to his eyes. “I was blind before, but now I see quite clearly: my Lord is all-sufficient to his own defense. He did not need my help. It is he who saves and protects, not me, never Myrddin.” ~ He paused, as if reflecting, then added, “I tell you, it is the Enemy’s delight to make us think otherwise. But it was only when I knew my own weakness, when I came alone and unprotected to this place, with no other plan or purpose but to stand against Morgian—only then was my Lord free to act.” ~ “But you did it. You faced her.” ~ “I did nothing!”

Steven Lawhead, Arthur

But Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained there, sitting in front of the tomb.

Matthew 27:61 (ISV)

Plenty of other wives had come, the lecturer said. We were the fools. We had been abandoned. Our womenfolk were in bed with other men—at that very moment. He described what was happening between them with all the obscenity at his command. And where were our children? Out in the streets, atheists every one! They had no wish to see their fathers. How stupid we were! ~ In the special block I listened to the speaker, day after day: Christianity is dead. Christianity is dead. Christianity is dead. And in time I came to believe what they had told us for all those months. Christianity was dead. The Bible foretells a time of great apostasy, and I believed that it had arrived. ~ Then I thought of Mary Magdalene, and perhaps this thought, more than any other, helped to save me from the soul-killing poison of the last and worst stage of brainwashing. I remembered how she was faithful to Christ even when He cried on the Cross, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” And when He was a corpse in the tomb, she wept nearby and waited until He arose. So when I believed at last that Christianity was dead, I said, “Even so, I will believe in it, and I will weep at its tomb until it arises again, as it surely will.”

Richard Wurmbrand, In God’s Underground

Dostoyevsky, the greatest Russian writer, wrote: “I believe there is nothing lovelier, deeper, more sympathetic and more perfect than Jesus. I say to myself with jealous love that not only is there no one else like him, but there could be no one. I would say even more. If anyone could prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, and if the truth did really exclude Christ, I should prefer to stay with Christ and not with truth. There is in the world only one figure of absolute beauty: Christ.

Richard Wurmbrand, The Overcomers

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.

John 14:6 (RSV)

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear omen to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine.

Philippians 1:27-30 (RSV)

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

Matthew 28:1 (ESV)